

Innovative Zoning Techniques

Form-Based Zoning

The Green Valley Institute exists to help the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor communities and citizens sustain their environment and quality of life while growing their economics.

We are a non-regulatory organization dedicated to:

- Improving the knowledge base from which land use and natural resource decisions are made,
- Building local capacity to protect and manage natural resources as our region grows.

The GVI was created through a formal partnership of the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor and the University of Connecticut's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Massachusetts' Cooperative Extension System and other partners.



QUINEBAUG-SHETUCKET HERITAGE CORRIDOR, INC.
Preserving the Last Green Valley



University of Connecticut
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Innovative Zoning Techniques were identified as one of the top three areas of interest in the Green Valley Institute's most recent needs assessment survey. Communities in the Quinebaug Shetucket Heritage Corridor are interested in finding new ways to address community growth. Innovative zoning techniques can provide new solutions for focusing growth, protecting natural resources and retaining rural character.

Form-Based Zoning which focuses on "...shaping the form of the built environment rather than on uses," is one of the most innovative zoning techniques being used today.



It has not been used extensively in New England but is being used extensively in higher growth areas of the country such

as California and the south. Following the destruction of Hurricane Katrina many communities in the south are turning to form-based zoning as a redevelopment tool. These communities will have more control over their character in the future by using this innovative zoning technique.¹

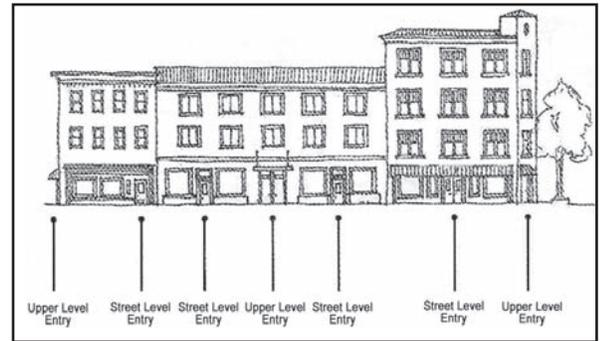
Many communities have found that traditional land use regulations encourage a separate-use, automobile dependent pattern of settlement that is no longer working for much of society today. Form-based zoning was developed in response to conventional zoning's inability to define and create character, and walkable, mixed use communities.²



Before
The Basin Street Landing Project, Petaluma CA



These before and after images of Petaluma, CA are an example of what form-based zoning can look like when implemented. This type of new development would fit in well with the character of many New England town centers today.



Temple Terrace (Florida) Code

Form-based codes focus on "...building exteriors, the placement of buildings on lots, the nature of streets and public spaces..."³ These codes consider land use but it is secondary to design. Certain undesirable uses may be prohibited without prescribing which specific uses are allowed. "Form-based coding is a land development regulatory tool that places primary emphasis on the physical form of the built environment with the end goal of producing a specific type of 'place'."⁴ Graphics are an essential component of form-based codes which are supplemented with drawings to clarify regulatory requirements.

Form-based codes are very place specific and usually regulate at the neighborhood scale or smaller. These codes are especially useful in urban centers but can also be used in existing or new village centers. They may be integrated into existing zoning ordinances and may be mandatory or implemented as an optional overlay zone (see GVI fact sheet #6). "Incentives such as faster permitting and higher density are often offered to make pedestrian-oriented, mixed use development enticing to developers."⁵



Saratoga Springs c 1925
courtesy Walker Evans

Saratoga Springs, NY. (population 36,000) has three form-based districts in its core urban center. The remaining town area is regulated by a traditional zoning ordinance. The city adopted a form-based code in 2003



Saratoga Springs today

after years of trying other ways to preserve and add onto the historic fabric of its downtown.⁶ The form-based districts are designed to preserve and create mixed-use, pedestrian character streets and neighborhoods that relate to nearby natural areas and neighborhood centers.⁷

Saratoga's three form-based districts are Urban Neighborhood, Neighborhood Center and Urban Core. The Urban Neighborhood District, illustrated below, has a primarily residential character with both attached and detached low-rise buildings.



Saratoga Urban Neighborhood District

The Neighborhood Center promotes a wider mix of residential and non-residential uses and building types. The Urban Core incorporates the downtown area which has the densest business, cultural and entertainment concentration in the city and the region.⁸ The ordinance's key mandates are that buildings be built close to the



street, they must occupy most of the frontage and be at least 2 stories but less than 70 feet

tall.⁹ In Saratoga, form-based zoning has resulted in new development that is consistent with the historic character of the city.



Saratoga Urban Core District

A recent critique of form-based codes identifies advantages such as

"better results on the ground, stronger connections between plans and regulations, effective illustration of building rules, and greater consistency of the built environment with stated community desires." The same article however, notes that form-based codes will not supplant conventional zoning because they are so place specific and that these codes can be complicated.¹⁰ Form-based coding is still a new regulatory technique and there may be issues to work through.

Form-based codes are another tool communities in the QSHC can use to maintain the New England character of villages, downtowns and new town centers. Form-based zoning may provide the best innovative tools and regulatory techniques available to address these goals.

Footnotes

- 1 Langdon, P. (2006). The Not-So-Secret Code. Planning, Vol. 72, No. 1.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 <http://www.farmersbranch.info/Planning/codes7FAQs.html>
- 5 Langdon (2006).
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Zoning Ordinance of The City of Saratoga Springs N.Y., 2005. Available at: <http://www.saratoga-springs.org/sszoorll.pdf>
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Langdon (2006).
- 10 Weitz, J. (2005). Form-Based Codes: A Supportive but Critical Perspective. Practicing Planner, Vol. 3, No. 3.

Additional Information:

Green Valley Institute: www.theLastGreenValley.org/GVI

Form-based Code Institute <http://formbasedcodes.org/index.html>

SmartCode – model ordinance <http://placemakers.com>.

National Association of Realtors <http://www.realtor.org/SG3.nsf/Pages/summer04sm?OpenDocument>



A publication of the Green Valley Institute. Please contact us at 860-774-9600 to schedule a workshop on this topic.