

# REGIONAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL PLANNING



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## THE FRONTIER OF FORM-BASED CODES

**By Alan Mammoser,  
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### Introduction:

Form-based codes let planners return to fundamental concerns about the design of towns and cities, with a primary emphasis on physical form. These codes avoid making separation of land uses the dominant function of regulation as is the case with standard zoning. Instead they provide effective tools to regulate higher intensities and greater mixes of uses in attractive urban forms. Form-based codes are proving indispensable for communities that want a broad application of walkable urbanism, to make new auto-dependent areas the exception rather than the norm.



*Miami 21, Your City, Your Plan*  
illustrations, showing build-out  
of under developed area guided  
by their form based code. Source:  
City of Miami FL

Form-based codes begin with exploration of a place, to discover its time-tested aspects, those beloved buildings, blocks and neighborhoods which remain continually useful, hold up well and get even better over time. Each new code requires a careful survey to identify inherently efficient and sustainable aspects of a place, which the code then seeks to perpetuate or expand. Planners consider the local and regional variations in building and design traditions to accommodate the best designs for each part of a community.

A “regulating plan” (actually a map) is created to shape different parts of each community. The regulating plan shows streets – their function and location – in relationship to buildings and open spaces. Clear illustrations show the building envelope, height, and placement. Architectural standards are often included. The use of land is still regulated, but use is one among several determinants of city form instead of the primary one. Meanwhile,

street cross-sections show lane widths, on-street parking, sidewalks, and amenities like street trees.

Until recently, most form-based codes implemented urban design plans for relatively small areas, ranging from individual development sites, to entire neighborhoods, a downtown or even a new town. They are inserted into a town, city or county code, often with special form-based zoning districts.

A new trend is citywide codes, the most prominent being the recently adopted Miami 21 for the city of Miami FL, with Denver CO being the latest large-city example. Form-based codes are also being tested further up the scale as key tools in regional planning to control suburban sprawl by implementing community plans and resource conservation plans on the urban fringe and in rural areas. These codes can shape an attractive landscape at various points along the urban to rural continuum. Recent examples are summarized below.

## Planning New Villages for the Treasure Coast

A promising experiment is underway in St. Lucie County, Florida, a rural citrus-growing area of the state’s northeast coast. A form-based code now covers 28 square miles in an unincorporated area on the edge of Fort Pierce, the county seat. This code implements the “Towns, Villages, and Countryside Plan” plan (TVC) of the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, an effort which was four years in the making, with the code becoming effective in 2008.

The TVC plan seeks to permanently preserve 60 to 75 percent of the rural landscape, even anticipating a gradual conversion of grapefruit groves battered by diseases into specialty crops for local markets. It combines





this concern with a water management system that restores agricultural ditches into naturalized stream flows that slows drainage into coastal waters while creating a navigable recreational asset.

The new form-based code was drafted to fit into the county's unified development code. It provides specific tools to implement the plan's vision, to create new villages and towns for a growing population, set in the midst of preserved countryside.

Key to the St. Lucie County approach are new

"floating zones" that provide clear standards for each new town or village and guarantee protection of surrounding farmland. The exact locations of new towns are not specifically designated on the county's future land use map; they may emerge in various possible locales according to market forces. But their physical form is clearly defined in the code.

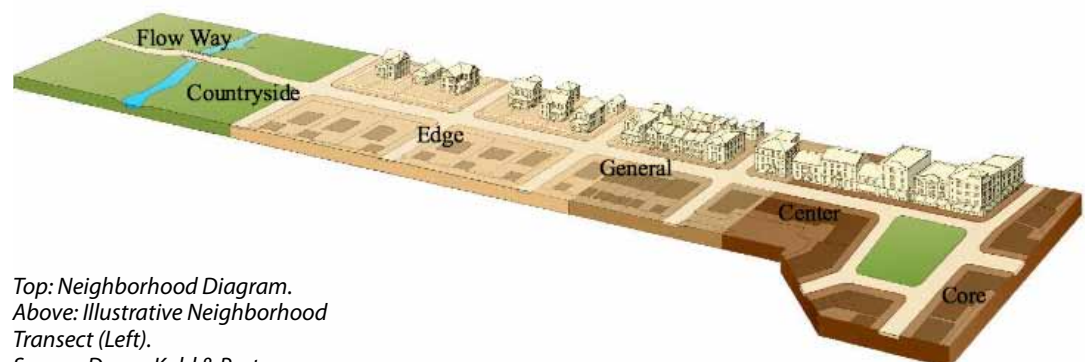
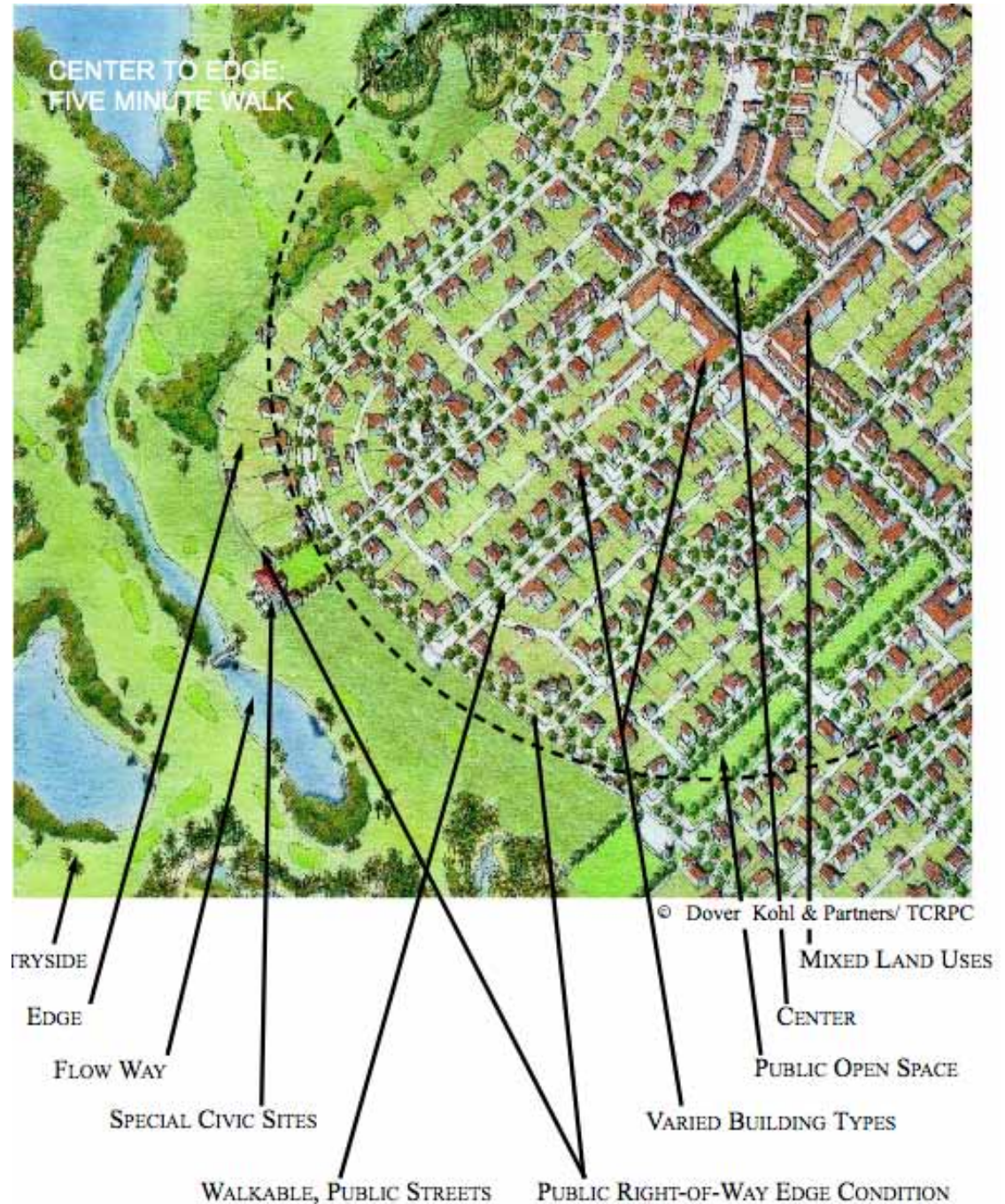
Rezoning is required for any property owner who wishes to develop a new town or village. Prospective developers will draft an individual regulating plan for each new town. Each plan must allocate the entire area into urban and

*(Illustration above) Towns, Villages and the Countryside: A New Pattern of Settlement for North St. Lucie County, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, St. Lucie, FL*



(Summary) Neighborhoods form the basic building block for all new Towns and Villages. The components of a Neighborhood are arranged to be compatible in scale and character with existing adjacent uses. Neighborhoods shall exhibit the following characteristics:

1. **Neighborhood Size.** The neighborhood size shall be scaled upon a five-minute walk radius
2. **The Transect.** A Neighborhood shall contain a mix of uses including residential, retail, office, civic and recreation spaces that support the daily needs of its residents within walking distance.
3. **Variety of Housing Types.**
4. **Civic Uses.** Each Neighborhood shall contain at least one Civic building.
5. **Walkable Blocks.** Blocks shall be scaled to accommodate a variety of building types and encourage pedestrian traffic.
6. **Proper Building Placement.** Building types of like scale, massing, and uses shall face one another on a given street.
7. **Street Network.** Neighborhoods shall have an interconnected network of public streets designed to balance the needs of all users.
8. **Mix of Uses.** Every neighborhood should support residential uses, a civic site, and at least one Local Store.
9. **Countryside.** A significant amount of Open Space is designated for the Countryside to preserve and restore native habitats; provide for sustained agriculture; and help mitigate the ecological impacts of new development.



Top: Neighborhood Diagram.  
Above: Illustrative Neighborhood  
Transect (Left).  
Source: Dover, Kohl & Partners





*(Right) In the conventional pattern of development at the top the uses are strictly separated, roads don't connect except through a major arterial. In the bottom section with new patterns of development (New Urbanism) uses coexist and form multi-income, multi-use neighborhoods. All roads connect. Courtesy Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company*

rural transect zones and show the entire interconnected street network and proposed building types for all lots. Illustrations in the code provide 11 pre-approved street and lot types; developers can propose variations at the time of rezoning. Strict standards govern maximum block sizes, to create an appropriately scaled street network.

This approach contrasts with a form-based

code for a smaller area, where the regulating plan is contained in the city or county code. In St. Lucie County, developers draft a regulating plan for their property, then submit it for county approval through rezoning. Remaining agricultural areas are relieved of the pressure of urban land values through the transfer of development rights into the proposed town and village locations. Agricultural conservation easements will

secure these transfers, explicitly allowing farming ranging from large-scale citrus groves all the way to niche produce farming.

The code requires a new surface water management system, allowing regional scale handling of stormwater, a navigable riverine system to repair the damage of the older, straight drainage canals that have been polluting coastal waters. This regional water management system will allow new villages to dispense with the anti-urban retention basins that are usually scattered throughout new subdivisions. The County Commissioners will authorize rezoning for each new town or village; county staff will administer the code after the initial rezoning.

Since the Great Recession has stalled urban development throughout Florida, it is too early to gauge the success of St. Lucie County's particular approach. However, it is now clear that form-based techniques that were refined for urban infill can also play an important role at and beyond the urban fringe.

## More Codes for Rural Florida

The influence of the Treasure Coast TVC plan is felt across the state on the Gulf Side, where Sarasota and Lee counties have produced further innovations. Sarasota County has adopted a form-based code with future land use map for unincorporated areas, simultaneously designating new village center areas and "redevelopment corridors", which would have transportation projects follow land use policy. Proposals must receive rezoning to a new PMI zoning district. A charette-based planning process is required.

Lee County planners advanced upon the St. Lucie County approach by avoiding "floating zones", instead putting the regulating plans for new village areas within the code itself. It's a big step, overcoming the need for rezoning that might discourage prospective

developers. And Lee County planners were able to select locations for new villages based on legitimate planning factors. The county's varied topography, unlike the flat, undifferentiated citrus grove landscape of St. Lucie County, allowed them to identify prospective development sites, placing a designated village area on the property of each major landowner. These locations are designated in the comprehensive plan.

The plan, known as Density Reduction/ Groundwater Resource Plan (DR/GR), covers 150 square miles in a rural sector southeast of Fort Myers. The accompanying Land Development Code borrows much of its graphics and dimensions from the Sarasota County code. But unlike more affluent Sarasota County, Lee County gives up re-zoning power, placing fewer requirements on developers.

Still, the elements of a well-crafted form-based code are found in Lee County, beginning with a two-week charette that engaged all stakeholders. The new code combines regional conservation goals with clear portrayals of the built environment to the lot and block level. A TDR program is designed to channel development into the new villages, while the code's clear renderings show new villages as mixed-use centers with fine gradations of density from core to edge, built at sufficient density to support transit service within a growing network of rural area villages. The DR/ GR combines this with large-scale ecosystem integrity and retention of lands for ecologically responsible farming.

## An Early Form-Based Regional Code Takes Shapes in Georgia

While the recent county-led coding in Florida remains largely on paper, unlikely to be tested until the housing market revives, a remarkable new community in Georgia begins to take shape. Serenbe, a village now rising about 25 miles south of downtown Atlanta, shows



the promise that form-based codes hold for large semi-rural areas on the fringe of a metropolitan region.

The new community comes about through a community-led planning effort going back to the early 2000s, when Steve and Marie Nygren and other local landowners formed the Chattahoochee Hill Country Alliance (CHCA). In 5 years, the citizen-led group produced the CHC Community Plan, to cluster new development into villages and hamlets. The plan, if fully implemented, will preserve up to 80% of the 40,000-acre hill country area as open space.

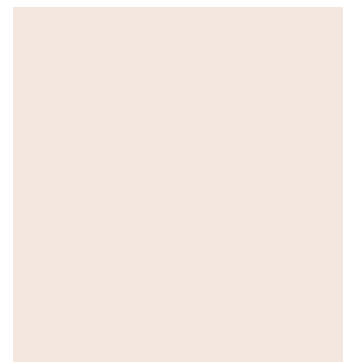
This plan, created through participatory process with strong community backing, was incorporated into Fulton County's comprehensive land use plan for the area, as well as the county's overlay district ordinance for the hill country. The CHC Plan identifies 3 locations for intensively built villages, while envisioning smaller "hamlets" at key intersections throughout the area. The overlay ordinance (passed in 2002), then creates special districts for these. A voluntary TDR program, giving one development right per acre in the sending areas, is intended to direct development into the target areas.

The plan is threatened by the county's weak

base zoning for the area, which allows as-of-right one (1) d.u./acre on agricultural land. The voluntary TDR program would need a lower density base zoning for small to medium landowners to see profit in the TDR; they might just as well sell to developers ready to build at the county's sprawling density. However, with the plan and overlay ordinance in place, larger landowners (1000 or more acres) have enough land already to build the envisioned villages and hamlets without need of the TDR program.

The 1000-acre Serenbe village includes three hamlets or clusters of homes, shops and restaurants, and working farmland within the village area. Two of the hamlets, with a population of approximately 170 residents, are largely complete. They line a serpentine road following the gentle roll of the landscape, in contemporary and locally inspired vernacular styles, offering single-family, townhouse and live-work arrangements. Buildings come close to the roadway, conserving an encircling pattern of woodlands and fields connected by hiking and horse paths. Small organic farms supply local restaurants and a farm market.

*Top Left: Serenbe Village rural intersection. Top: A contextual residence. Above: One of many trails.*





# A Regional Networking for Municipal Design Review

**By John Hedrick**  
**Chaddick Institute, DePaul University**

*An urban view of the Chicago metropolitan area (iStockphoto photo)*

Recent developments affecting urban design review heighten the need for inter-governmental communication. In metropolitan Chicago, the formation of the Municipal Design Review Network provides a new forum for collaboration among professionals to improve the decision-making capacity of local governments. The success of this Network suggests that it is a model for other areas countrywide.

**MDRN**

*The Municipal Design Review Network (MDRN) provides a venue for Chicago metropolitan area communities with design review boards or staff to share information regarding best practices for urban design. Elected officials, commission members, planners and designers are now meeting regularly to discuss current issues affecting local appearance and architectural review.*



## Regional Background

The use of discretionary review in individual suburbs has nevertheless varied with the local history and culture. Well-established towns were ambitious in using design review to complement historic preservation. Outlying communities – and smaller villages faced with rapid growth – were beginning to embrace new methods, as the accompanying chart illustrates (see lower right column).

Each of the three most common methods for design review in the Chicago region present challenges for shared inter-governmental communication.

Under the architecture review commission method, a separate board comprised of architects, or a mix of design professionals and citizens, is delegated authority for design decisions. In the Chicago metropolitan area, such entities are sometimes called “Appearance Commissions.”

Some communities use a more traditional plan commission structure to deal with urban design aspects. And some have a separate committee or subgroup of their planning board to do so. This structure allows the plan commission to apply conditions that reflect aesthetic considerations while sidestepping legal concerns associated with creating a separate entity.

A growing number of communities assign responsibilities for design review to the staff director of the municipal development department. This form has been called “administrative” design review. Consequently, greater reliance is placed upon designated staff and measurable standards.

With hundreds of separate governmental units in the Chicago metropolitan area, local character and interests vary widely. Ideally, any design review method should emphasize consistency to help assure fairness in the approval of new development on both a local and intergovernmental basis.

Architectural design review has traditionally been viewed as a local community matter and potential competitive distinction. However, the ebb and flow of real estate development has magnified these interests and challenges.

## Formation of the Network

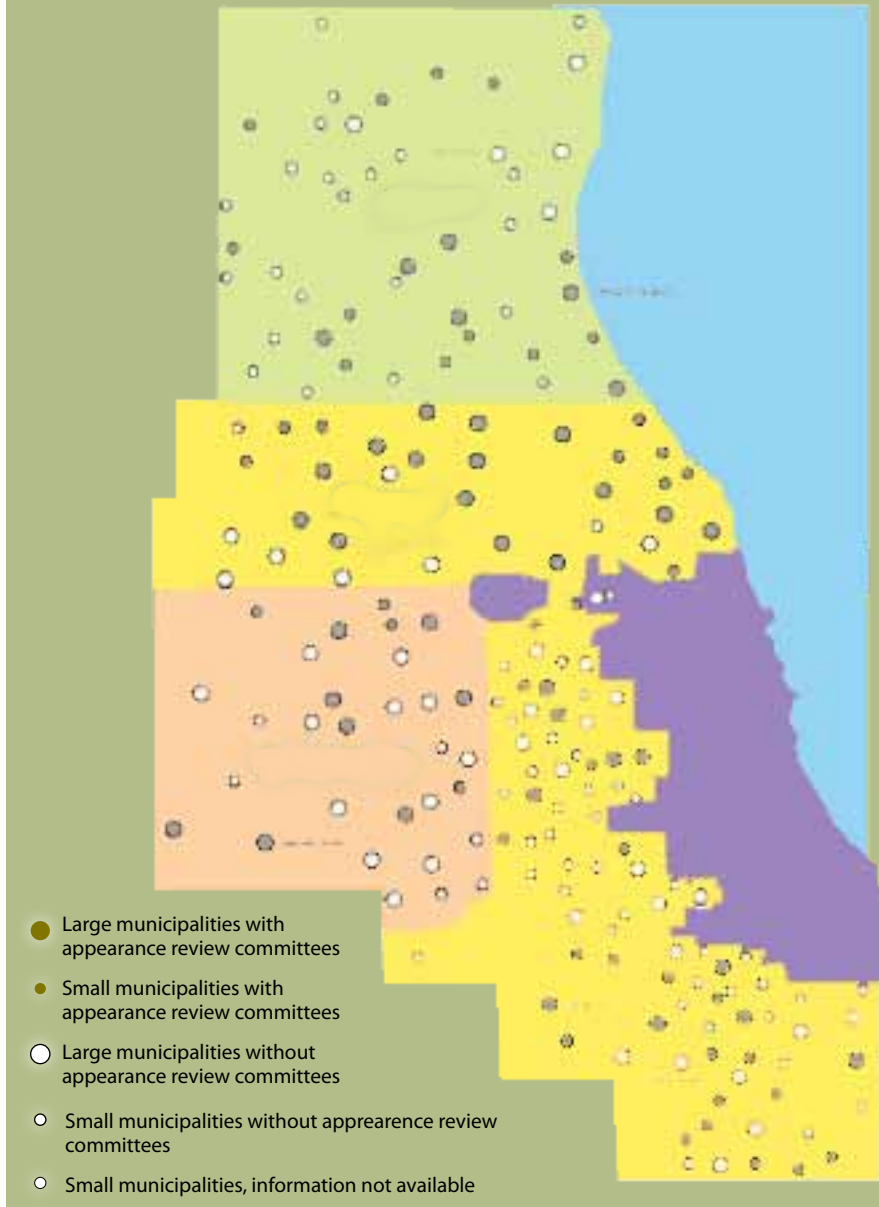
Three factors – rapid suburban development, urban design aspirations, and new legal issues – provided the impetus for formation of the Network. Considering these issues:

As a pertinent example of suburban growth, the Village of Glenview had been recognized not only for its tradition of quality development since its early formation of an “Appearance Commission, but also for dramatic growth with in-fill of adjacent greenfields -- and the redevelopment of a former airbase into a mixed-use development. In a relatively short period of years, such villages had experienced virtually all aspects of (sub)urban planning and design.

Another prominent example is Millennium Park, one of the most popular tourist destinations in downtown Chicago. Many visitors immediately recognize the innovative design features that have made this park so attractive and why it has stimulated so much redevelopment along the South Michigan Avenue corridor. Successful design in the urban core seemed to raise awareness in the surrounding suburban counties. Yet the economic pressures felt by communities due to rampant growth created a strong demand to improve design review processes.

A significant combination of legal actions helped focus the regulatory issues. In 2007, the Illinois Legislature amended the Illinois Municipal Code to expressly authorize design review commissions (Public Act 95-0475 ). This result of efforts by interested northern suburbs alleviated some perceived legal concerns about the underpinnings for design review, and prompted new interest in the options. Ironically, separate litigation of related landmarking

## Municipal Use of Appearance Review Committees in Chicago Metropolitan Area



study of aesthetic regulations in Illinois, co-sponsored by DePaul University's Chaddick Institute, which served as a starting point.

From the beginning, participants in forming the Network worked with Chaddick Institute advisors, law firms and other professional organizations (including the APA –Chicago Metro Section) to bring together those individuals who focused on the architecture and design aspects of municipal development and regulation. The guiding concept was to complement and supplement other professional associations and programs by providing updates for this multi-*disciplinary audience*.

The Chaddick Institute, located at DePaul University in Chicago, has a mission to provide planners and developers a forum to share expertise on difficult land-use issues through workshops and policy studies. The Institute served as a resource for the advisors who set out to create our specialized Network.

Over 50 community representatives came to an initial meeting hosted by the Village of Glenview where design professionals gathered to discuss and share their interests and common concerns. From participation in these initial events, individual municipal staff members emerged to form an "Advisory Committee."

The Committee has become the "heart and soul" of what is now known as the Municipal Design Review Network (MDRN). The MDRN Advisory Committee members collaborate with the Chaddick Institute in assessing plans and topics for future meetings. The members have also volunteered their professional skills and experience to present topics and facilitate discussions.

issues may have spurred additional interest for the growth of the network

Amid these cross-currents, a few individuals came together to provide the leadership to organize the Network.

As Chair of the Glenview Appearance Commission and founder of an affiliate of the Scenic America organization, I initiated the efforts. Previously I had organized a statewide





## Ongoing Events

As the “sponsor” of the Network, the Chaddick Institute currently provides meeting facilities and administrative support. It helps develop an annual schedule of events divided between downtown and suburban locations. These events include:

- Spring symposiums on the DePaul campus allowing for informal, in-depth discussion of design theories. This past year’s seminar, “Cultural Issues for Community Design”, featured a DePaul professor leading a discussion about the history and meaning of community aesthetics in the suburbs. Attendees explored the many facets of this design value through sharing municipal staff and board experiences in breakout groups.
- Summer on-site events featuring the local architecture and downtown redevelopment projects. The most recent summer on-site event in Glen Ellyn, featured local consultants and municipal staff discussing the design and public process issues involved in downtown planning. Approximately 60 representatives from over 25 municipalities participated in the meeting and the subsequent discussion. The event culminated with a guided walking tour and informal luncheon meeting
- Fall programming concluding with technical workshops – often co-sponsored with the local APA chapter – to feature regional experts on current issues. The last fall workshop at DePaul’s suburban campus focused on practical guidance for negotiating the review process, with a briefing on recent legal developments affecting design issues. Attorneys and planners from leading Chicago firms presented a range of regulatory topics.





The Chaddick Institute has also developed and is maintaining an on-line library of design guidelines for the Network, to provide a new resource for professionals. This allows elected officials and their staff to locate and compare the differing approaches employed by communities. The Institute and Network intend to use this vehicle to compile further surveys, assess best practices, and develop model guidelines.

As noted previously, recent legal issues have been a factor in shaping the Network. In July, 2009, an Illinois Appellate Court issued a decision that created confusion and concern in both the historic preservation and architectural design communities—because of the broad Commission composition issues (*Hanna v. City of Chicago*). The Appellate Court found the requirement that the Landmark Commission members have “special interest, knowledge, or experience” could be excessively vague and ambiguous. This City of Chicago case is being reheard and further appeals are anticipated. In any event, the Network may prove to be a greater resource in addressing such specialized issues.

With recent economic and potential legal challenges, many communities are currently reassessing their municipal governance processes for design review. Chaddick advisors to the Network have developed a prototype

presentation for municipal Boards who may be reviewing their commitments to design review in light of pressing economic interests. Recently, for example, local commission members and staff liaisons who have participated in Network meetings have helped shape the plans for “benchmarking” initiatives for their full councils and boards.

## Future Possibilities

What lies ahead for the Network? Many strategic possibilities beckon such as further collaboration with regional/organization partners. A more formal membership and governance structure may be needed as participation expands. More analytical assessment of best practices and evaluation methods may need to be developed. The Network also will strive to attract a more demographically diverse mix of professionals. As the network expands, new geographic/peer Committees and connections through “COGs” could prove helpful.

The experience of the participating municipalities demonstrates how communities in other regions of the country can benefit from their own municipal design networks. The village Boards and staff shared their experience to form the Network and are now learning from others’ experience. Almost 100 separate municipalities have been connected through the Network, and approximately 200 individual government officials, staff and professionals have participated in various activities.

Given the many variations of plan commissions and architectural review boards, it is critical that there be extensive communication with the local legislative bodies and among various design review entities. Improved design review processes promote local economic development, avoid unnecessary border disputes and enhance the quality of the surrounding areas. Our experiences at “MDRN” hopefully show how inter-governmental communication can be professionally rewarding for all involved.





## References

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Schwieterman, Joseph P. and Martin E. Toth. Shaping Contemporary Suburbia. Chicago: Index Publishing Corporation, 2001.

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## About the Author

John Hedrick, an attorney and consultant, works with DePaul's Chaddick Institute as a Senior Advisor. He has been involved in land use issues in Illinois for over thirty years, while specializing in advertising, corporate and regulatory matters. He has also served in leadership positions for various non-profit organizations and municipal commissions.

## Acknowledgements

Joseph Schwieterman, Director of the Chaddick Institute, PhD, and author of several books contributed editorial review for this article.



SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL



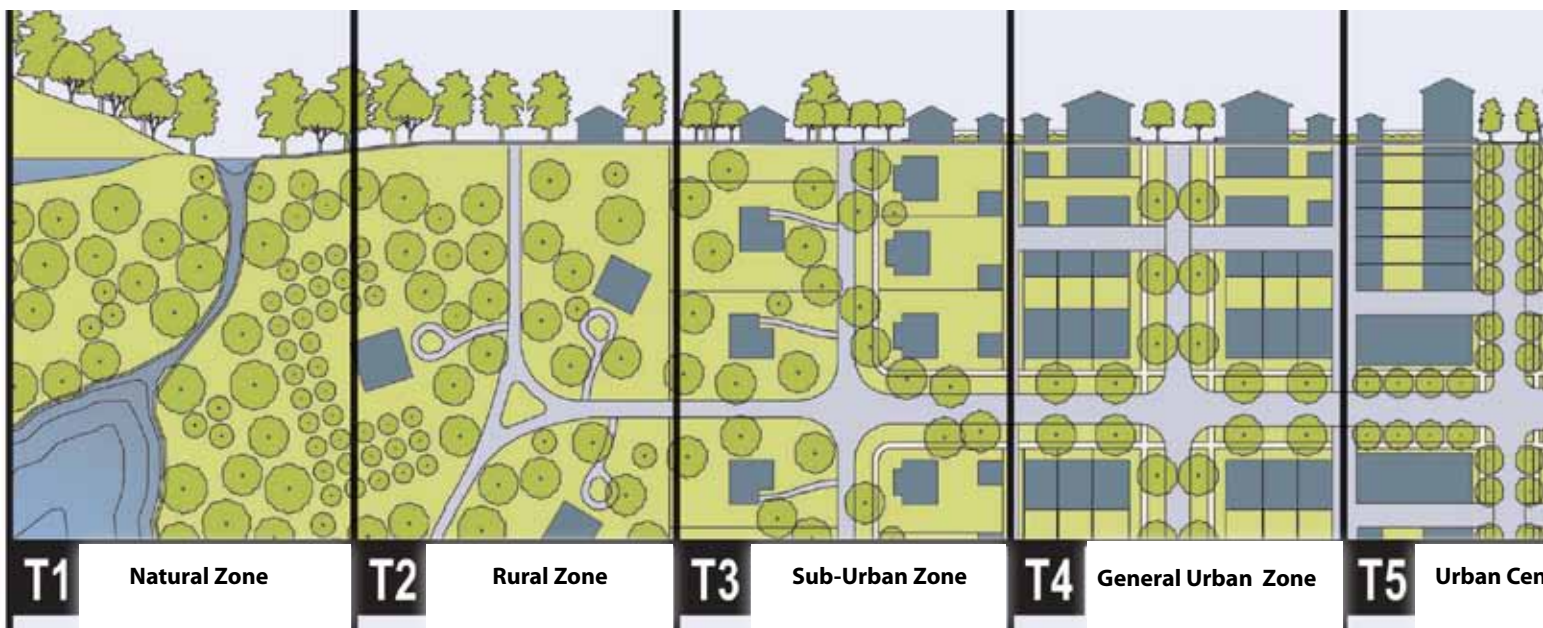
*Illustrative graphics this page: Plainfield, IL residential and public right-of-way design guidelines.*

## A Form-Based Code Handbook in the Sacramento Region

By Ron Thomas, AICP  
University of Georgia

Greg Chew,  
Sacramento Area Council of Governments

The Sacramento Council of Governments has jumped into the deep end of the pool by fostering a form-based code guideline with their regional local government members. Their website recognizes that form-based codes are a relatively new method to regulate the development of buildings and streets and that can provide an approach to be more consistent with what the community desires and regional planning goals.





SACOG conducted a study to evaluate the feasibility of developing a model form-based code (FBC) to help local governments address their specific land use and urban design issues. This study concluded with a report in 2006 titled *Removing Obstacles to Blueprint Implementation: Scoping Services for Model Form-Based Code or Alternative Strategy*. It concluded that a form-based code approach could be a valuable tool for creating better communities in the Sacramento area consistent with the SACOG adopted Blueprint Regional Plan.

The Preferred Blueprint Scenario regional plan is based on seven Growth Principles:

- Transportation Choices by designing development to encourage walking, bicycling, taking transit, or carpooling.
- Mixed-Use Developments that feature a variety of residential, commercial, employment, and/or civic uses near each other creating active, vital neighborhoods.
- Compact Development that utilizes land more efficiently and promotes a variety of transportation modes.
- Housing Choice and Diversity to provide a range of housing types – single family, apartments, condominiums, etc. – to accommodate the needs of different

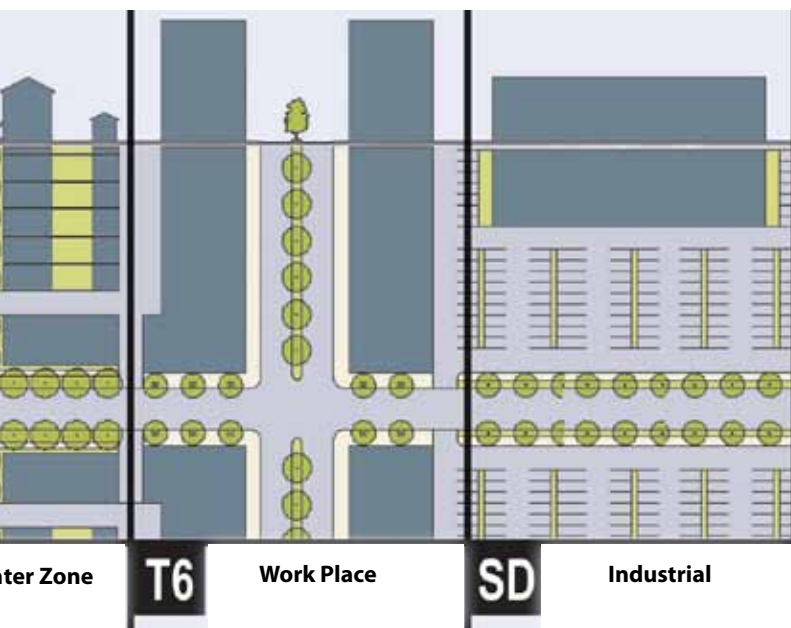
households and incomes.

- Use of Existing Assets to fully utilize existing urban land and infrastructure.
- Quality Design to create pleasant and inviting public spaces and transportation facilities that create a sense of community.
- Natural Resources Conservation that includes public open space, protection of environmentally sensitive areas, and retention of resource lands.

Because the successful implementation of the Blueprint Growth Principles will rely in part on land development regulations that are more attuned to the human interface, a form-based code is a potentially valuable tool for shaping community character consistent with these principles.

SACOG has been clear with its regional members in pointing out that form-based codes differ from conventional zoning in several ways including:

1. FBC is the result of a public design process, which creates a clear and articulated vision for a defined district or neighborhood. A form-based code is developed as an outcome of this public design process to help implement the Blueprint vision.



← **SECTION VIEW**

← **PLAN VIEW**

#### **The Urban/Rural Transect**

Adapted from the established biological zones transect The Urban/Rural Transect organizes the built Environment into six "zones" or "Transects," according to the Intensity of development. The transects range from rural to highly urban, and development standards are tailored to each of these unique zones. Image adapted from the Miami 21 draft form-based code with Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company with permission Center for Applied Transect Studies.

2. FBC pays greater attention to the design of the public realm and the importance that streetscape design
3. FBC informs the design of individual buildings as they define public spaces and contribute to creating a special sense of place.
4. FBC integrate street standards with the desired physical character of the surrounding development.

To some extent, all of the seven Blueprint Growth Principles must rely upon thoughtful design solutions to be successful. For example, providing transportation choices involves more than just furnishing sidewalks and bike lanes. It requires locating different uses and destinations closer together, carefully designing streetscapes, and integrating private and public development to create a safe and inviting public realm. This careful attention to detail represents the overall strength of a well-executed form-based code. Additionally, some other notable advantages of the form-based code approach include:

1. Encouraging active public participation in creating the regulating plan and related design elements. This public participation and consensus building at the beginning increases public understanding of the plan and its desired results, thereby reducing misunderstanding and conflict during implementation.
2. Focusing on what the community wants and not what it dislikes. A form-based code offers an alternative regulatory approach for successfully reaching planning objectives embodied in the Blueprint Growth Principles and local general plans by shifting the focus to the desired physical character of development. For example, the public's desire for pedestrian-friendly environments is often related to the design and physical relationships of buildings and public spaces. An FBC provides a means to get to the heart of these types of community concerns

and plan for them. This attention to what is desired makes it much easier for developers, citizens, and decision-makers to be "on the same page" when individual development projects are proposed. With form-based codes, the community can offer its preferences on a variety of issues that relate to the community's physical appearance: architectural design, street design, building orientation, how to address different housing needs, and how to manage growth in general.

3. Providing information that is easier to use than conventional zoning codes because it is shorter, is more concise, and emphasizes illustrations over text. Therefore, form-based codes are more engaging and comprehensible to non-professionals.
4. Tailoring the requirements to fit a specific place or neighborhood by reflecting its vernacular architecture and overall character.

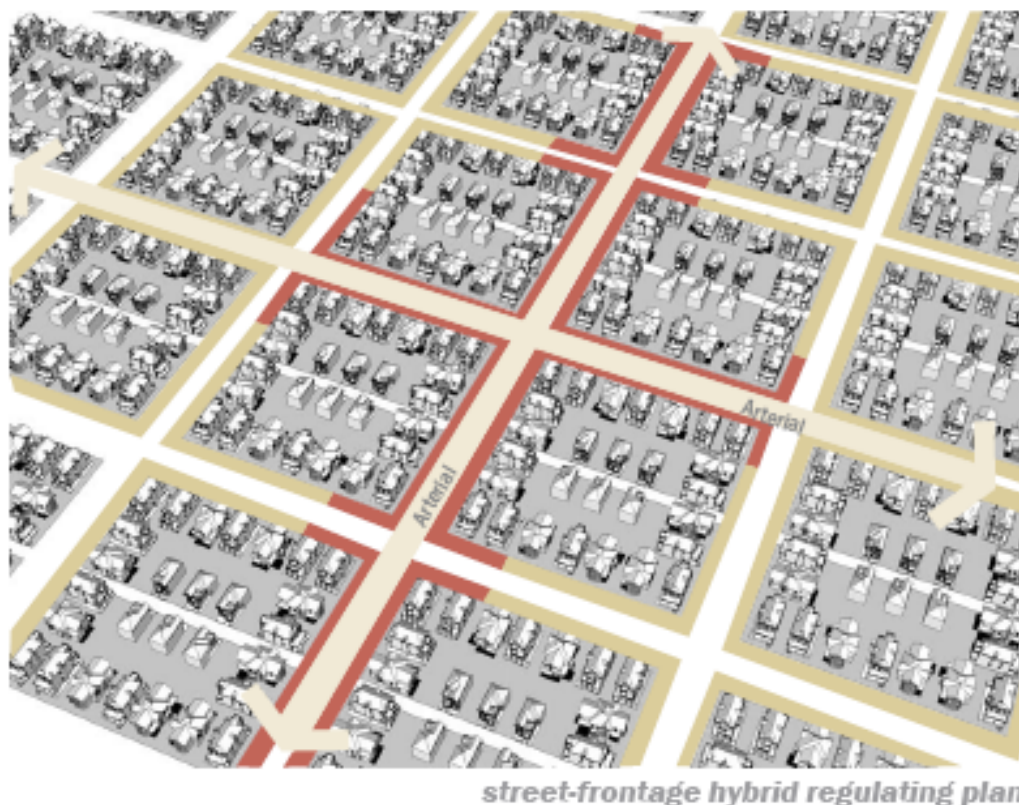
## Applying a form-based code

A form-based code may be applied in a wide variety of circumstances ranging from specific development sites to an entire city. Examples include downtown master plans, neighborhood revitalization plans, specific plan development standards, and transit-oriented developments. It is particularly useful in planning areas where the physical character of public spaces and buildings is critical to achieving community planning goals.

The regional agency has positioned its form-based code recommendation by pointing out that conventional zoning codes are subject to interpretation and have resulted in differences between community vision and physical development. A benefit SACOG suggests is that conventional codes often are more text intensive and FBC are an alternative by using visual illustrations and extensive public involvement. For these







reasons the agency, which is also the certified Metropolitan Planning Organization for a six-county area, SACOG recommends their municipal members moved toward applying FBC in their local plans and regulations.

## Analysis of existing conditions- land use and architecture

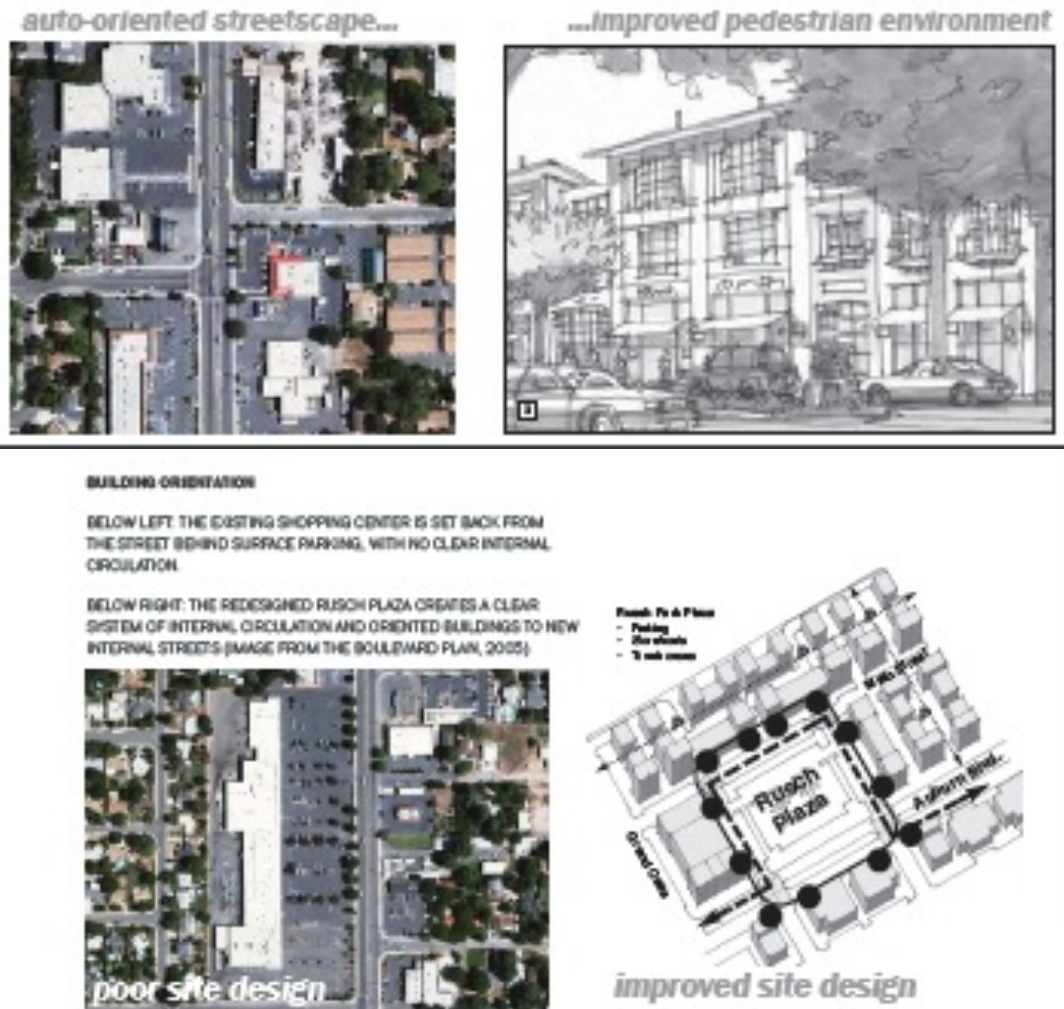
To assist cities and counties in the Sacramento region that may want to develop form based codes, SACOG produced a SACOG Form-Based Codes Handbook that is publicly available for download ([http://www.sacog.org/projects/attachments/form-based-codes/Form-Based%20Code%20Handbook\\_FNL\\_Aug08.pdf](http://www.sacog.org/projects/attachments/form-based-codes/Form-Based%20Code%20Handbook_FNL_Aug08.pdf)). The Handbook provides background information on what a form-based code is, when to use it, and, most importantly, a practical guide on how to create one. Four case

studies from around the region are illustrated to give the reader some guidance on the steps and considerations that need to be made when creating a form based codes. The case studies are not form-based codes, but serve as different community prototypes with alternative approaches to developing a form-based code.

SACOG makes to clear case for considering and applying form-based codes primary of which is that their approach incorporates extensive public participation. The recurring benefits of their approach to FBC include:

- FOCUS On What The Community Wants
- RESULTS Easier To Understand
- MATCHES Individual Community Character
- PROVIDES More Predictable Results

The Form-Based Code approach focuses on the three dimensional form and shape



of development as compared to the traditional categorical uses of the site as with conventional zoning. Form-Based Codes emphasize the design of buildings and the public streetscape. With Form-Based Codes the Public Realm becomes the focus of site-specific zoning. FBC uses illustrations to support the text of the regulation on site design and building form, which is one of the things that helps them be so much more accessible to the public.

## Mix and distribution of housing

The SACOG FBC Guidelines provides clear, illustrative guidance for the region's municipalities in several essential planning and design categories including:

- Land Use
- Public Realm And Street Character
- Site Design And Circulation
- Building Form

- Architectural Detailing

The SACOG FBC Guidelines provides the bridge between the regional Blueprint and local planning with guidance on Land Use considerations that are a foundation of the smart growth principles set forth in the Blueprint such as:

- Different Land Uses Within Walking Distance
- Highest Densities Near Transit
- Active Ground Floor Uses
- At the public realm and streetscape levels the Guideline offers detailed and illustrated standards such as:
  - Fine Grained Streetscape
  - Pleasant Sidewalks
  - Active Ground Floor Uses
  - Streetscape Amenities

Site Design & Circulation, formative elements of the public realm and streetscape, are addressed with guidance for designing several aspects of





the overall charter of place including:

- Pedestrian Connections
- Direct Access To Building Entrances From The Street
- Surface Parking To The Rear Or Side
- Allow Density Over Time

While careful not to be restrictive and intrusive control guidelines of provided for the design of individual Building Form in relation to two important influences on the public realm:

- Proper Building Scale to Street
- Transitions between Difference Uses

Architecture design is further addressed with design guidelines illustrating approaches to achieving a consistent result from regional land use down to the character on individual buildings:

- Interesting Building Features
- Windows Facing The Street
- Respect Existing Community Character

The guidelines are still new, and while no municipality has adopted the code as a whole, a number have begun to apply components. Sacramento County has adopted the North Highlands Specific Plan, which uses many form based codes elements. The city of Citrus Heights has done something similar with its Auburn Blvd Corridor Plan and the Sunrise Marketplace Vision Project. The city of Winters adopted a Downtown Master Plan Design Program with form-based code elements.

SACOG's consultant team (David Evans Associates, SERA Architects, and Parsons Brinckerhoff) gave a background report about form-based codes to the SACOG Planners Committee on June 25, 2008. Their presentation may be downloaded, as well as the Handbook, ([http://www.sacog.org/projects/attachments/form-based-codes/SACOG\\_2008\\_Presentation\\_intro.pdf](http://www.sacog.org/projects/attachments/form-based-codes/SACOG_2008_Presentation_intro.pdf)).

# The Need for Form-Based Thoughtfulness

**By Don Elliott,  
Senior Consultant,  
Clarion Associates, Denver**

**S**everal years ago I ran onto a great quote: “There is nothing more dangerous than a good idea if it’s the only one you have.” It concisely summarizes one of the risks inherent in innovation – that as new ideas appear they sometimes create a bandwagon effect. Everyone wants to be a part of the new wave of thinking, and that single-mindedness can lead us to apply the new approach to problems that it was not intended to solve. Or it can lead us to abandon other tools that work well simply because they are not new. While form-based zoning controls are indeed an innovation that can produce better cities with less brain damage for both builders and city staff in some situations, the idea has become so popular that it runs the risk of being applied where it should not. Caution is order for three reasons.

1. Not every place is a “Place”. While it may be possible to discern what building types are appropriate in many areas of the city, there are other places where no inherent “form” is apparent. Those

often include large acreages in non-prime locations, low density industrial areas, and environmentally difficult redevelopment sites. In other words, areas where there is little or no surrounding “context” where an existing fabric can be discerned, and where a large range of future forms are possible. Kevin Lynch’s focus on paths, edges, nodes, landmarks, and districts as the key elements of city-building is still valuable -- and a good reminder that not all areas of the city (or region) need to receive equal attention. While government could decide on a preferred form and menu of building types for each of its non-prime locations, it is not clear that it should. Cities (and regions) need to breadth, and in some areas the best strategy may be to leave options open.

2. Good form is not the only planning goal. Good form-based zoning can promote many of the goals that America’s metropolitan regions need to emphasize – including density, walkability, neighborhood stability, and transit-oriented development patterns. But other planning goals may pull in different



directions. Changes in floodplain and stormwater regulation may demand less “urban” patterns in some areas. Promoting affordable housing may require that developers be given more density or height than they “should” get under form-based controls for the area. Economic development opportunities may lead the city to allow a large new employer where that firm wants to locate – in spite of form-based rules saying that it “belongs” somewhere else. Transit budgets may not support the expansion of service needed to support the density of mixed use development that form-based zoning calls for. America’s cities are challenged every day by the need to balance these and other planning goals, and balancing regional planning goals is even more difficult. Sometimes the environment doesn’t win; sometimes economic development doesn’t win; sometimes form doesn’t win.

3. Not every good idea can be “scaled up”. Just as transit-oriented development or walkshed-based planning have optimal sizes, many zoning tools have a scale at which they work well – and other scales at which they do not. You can design a TOD based on two-mile walking distances, but people may not be willing to walk that far to the train.
4. You can require retail uses on every ground floor of your downtown area, but if the market won’t support them many of those ground floors may be vacant. Some ideas cannot be “scaled-up” to apply across entire neighborhood or city or region.

One goal of form-based zoning is to better reinforce the positive “fabric” of neighborhoods – and it shows great promise in that area. But fabric is local. Unless you live in a very small town, there is no such thing as a citywide “fabric” – each neighborhood has its own. Denver, Colorado, recently completed a successful five year effort to

replace its dysfunctional Euclidean zoning code with a citywide form-based code – but stretching form-based concepts over the city’s 100 square miles of developed area took some effort. The menus of zone districts and the building types allowed in each zone had to be repeatedly expanded in order to accommodate the very diverse patterns of buildings and development that has evolved over the past 150 years. A regional effort would have been even more difficult. At what point does the effort of stretching the concept of form-based controls to accommodate an entire city or region undermine the point of form-based zoning? Make no mistake, however.

Form-based zoning is here to

stay, and strong regional planning agencies will continue to explore the potential of form-based controls to promote regional planning goals. As this process unfolds, it is important that cities and regions keep three questions in mind.

1. What elements of form-based controls are appropriate to apply at a citywide or regional level?
2. What areas (or types of areas) would benefit from form-based controls, and why?
3. What level of control will capture the benefits of form-based controls without becoming overly complex or expensive to design and administer?

Everyone wants to be a part of the new wave of thinking, and that single-mindedness can lead us to apply the new approach to problems that it was not intended to solve.

## FROM THE CHAIR

**T**his is an exciting time for the APA Regional and Intergovernmental Planning Division, with a lot of challenges as well as great opportunities ahead over the coming months.

It was good to see many of you at the APA National Conference in New Orleans last April. We had a good turnout for our annual meeting, where we had a chance to talk with Sally Hardy, Executive Director of the Regional Studies Association (based in Great Britain) about opportunities to collaborate with this organization. In addition, Karen Walz put together an outstanding conference session, sponsored by our division, that talked about the roles played by non-governmental organizations in regional visioning efforts in Dallas, Atlanta, Washington DC, and Seattle. A copy of this presentation is available on our website, and the Urban Land Institute is currently preparing a report that discusses these NGO-based visioning efforts.

Our Division Board elections were also held last spring. Congratulations to Rocky Piro, Karen Walz, Alex Bond, and Debbie Lawlor, all of whom were re-elected to Board positions along with me. Debbie Lawlor has subsequently decided to leave her position on the Division Board in order to devote more time to her elected position as AICP Board Representative, and our Board has appointed Richard Hall, Director of Planning for the State of Maryland, as her replacement. We have also appointed Sharon Rooney, Chief Planner for the Cape Cod Commission, as our new Director of Communications. She will be responsible for a new monthly Division "e-newsletter," which will help us to keep our membership informed on Division activities and other news and announcements that are relevant to our members. Kevin Byrnes decided not to run for re-election

to the position of Secretary – Treasurer, and he was replaced by Jeff Walker, Executive Director for the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission in Virginia. Thanks to Richard, Sharon, and Jeff for joining our Board!

I would also like to thank both Debbie and Kevin for the excellent job that they did for our Division over the past two years, and at the same time I'd like to thank Karen, Rocky, Karen and Alex for agreeing to serve for another two years. And thanks also to Lee Schoenecker, Past Board Chair, Ryan Harris, our Division webmaster, and Ron Thomas, Newsletter Editor extraordinaire, for their outstanding work.

Going forward, the Regional and Intergovernmental Planning Division will continue to focus its efforts on the "Best Practices in Regional Planning" Initiative that we launched a couple of years ago. We are continuing to pursue funding to produce an APA Planning Advisory Service report on Best Practices, and we are also working on training workshops and webinars that will allow us to share our best practices research with our members in a timely manner. Alex Bond recently led our first Division-sponsored webinar on "The Organizational Structure of MPOs," based on a recent research report that he and his colleagues at the University of South Florida Center for Urban Transportation Research have conducted for the Federal Highway Administration. Over 200 people watched the webcast, and 24 received CM credits. In addition, we have talked to several other academic experts from major universities across the country who are conducting research in regional planning, and have offered to share their results with us. Thanks to all of our Division members who are helping us with this exciting initiative!

### Congratulations to New FAICP Members

We would like to congratulate two members of the APA Regional and Intergovernmental Planning Division, Rocky Piro and Richard Bickel, who were among 37 AICP members inducted to the 2010 Class of the AICP College of Fellows at the National Planning Conference in New Orleans.

Fellows of AICP are honored in recognition of the achievements of the planner as an individual, elevating the Fellow before the public and the profession as a model planner who has made significant contributions to planning and society. Fellowship is granted to planners who have been members of AICP and have achieved excellence in professional practice, teaching and mentoring, research, public and community service, and leadership. Those chosen become members of the College of Fellows. The College of Fellows is concerned with mentoring and future advancement of the profession of planning. As outstanding professionals in the field of planning, Fellows of AICP will address student organizations, state APA conferences, and professional development programs.

### Rocky E. Piro, FAICP Seattle, Washington

Rocky Piro is a leader and innovator in collaborative regional-local planning in the Seattle area. He oversees the Puget Sound Regional Council's unique and highly successful Plan Review program. He was responsible for developing some of the nation's most groundbreaking regional planning policies, which fully integrate environmental sustainability, growth management, health, and clean transportation. As the City of Shoreline Planning Commission chair, Rocky provided direction for transforming

future development to be more compact and urban in character. As the Regional and Intergovernmental Planning Division's first vice president, he has been a leader in broadening the division's outreach and programs.

### Richard G. Bickel, FAICP Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Richard Bickel's long and diverse career includes leadership positions in community, county, and regional planning in the Philadelphia region, including planning agencies and a transit authority. His accomplishments range from local and regional plans to preparation of implementation tools, research reports, and outreach activities. One of his most notable accomplishments was serving as the principal drafter of Pennsylvania's 2004 Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID) Act to encourage transit-oriented development plans and projects. He has also maintained a continuous record of involvement and leadership in planning-related professional associations in Pennsylvania and, nationally, achieving recognition by both peers and organizations.

As always, we welcome your ideas for how to make the Regional and Intergovernmental Planning Division more effective in meeting your needs. Feel free to contact me at [ble@sandag.org](mailto:ble@sandag.org) with your ideas.

Best Regards



**Bob Leiter, FAICP**  
Board Chair, APA Regional and Intergovernmental Planning Division



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**T**his is an issue on zoning related topics I would never have expected to do when I began as newsletter editor less than five years ago. Regional planning, zoning AND design - no way!

While it has been hard-wired into the (job security) fiber of every regional planner that zoning and its local planning foundation is the prerogative of local governments (I have even heard mayors refer to their sovereign authority) and not an activity for regional agencies, there have been recent shifts that are re-jiggering some of that old wiring. Why?

Reasons, I think, can be found in the mounting public voices over the last decade in its frustration with choking congestion, palpable degradation of environmental qualities and wholesale loss of valued cultural and historic resources. Elected officials and public agencies are expected to do something to solve these problems. At the same time, the lack of funds continues to limit public resources.

But even with ample resources, these are problems that not even the larger city governments can solve alone. They are at their core regional and require cooperative regional solutions.

Over the last decade regional agencies have been pushed to the public forefront to address these issues and elected leaders such as Mayor Richard Daley in Chicago, Mayor Joe Riley in Charleston, SC, and former Mayor Shirley Franklin in Atlanta, for example, have acted as regional leaders to bring local governments together to seek new solutions to these mounting problems.

At the same time, and over several decades, many in the professional planning and design communities have stressed that solutions must be real, three dimensional and clearly perceptible as place-making. Since planning's national launch with Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago over a century ago to Kevin Lynch, Lawrence Halprin and of course Jane Jacobs, the quality of place has been the end goal of planning and urban design, not just colored maps and static plans. (See Peter Katz's recent August 10 Planetizen article - "Beyond the Priesthood")

These voices have championed substituting one "D" word for another. We should be thinking about "Design" as smart growth and sustainable concepts and not "Density." Colleague Neal Peirce, has long observed that two things the American public can't abide are 1. Sprawl and 2. Density. But, the market has shown that Americans know good design when they experience it, and they like it.

In recent years credit goes to the new urbanists in their skillful articulation of a place-based visions from creative efforts such as Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Company, Peter Calthorp & John Fregonese, Ray

Gindroz at UDA, Dover Kohl & Partners, and Glad-  
ding Jackson. Their connection to local govern-  
ments was catalyzed when former Milwaukee Mayor  
John Norquist became the President & CEO of the  
Congress of the New Urbanism.

So here we are today with ever-increasing initia-  
tives of major cities and small towns alike develop-  
ing and implementing place-making plans and their  
accompanying form-based codes and design guide-  
lines. The conclusion for planners can only be taken  
as one positive sign that planning is being taken as a  
serious civic activity. Places want to be "Places" and  
change the development pattern trends that have  
produced our land-consuming, time-consuming,  
and resource-consuming urban form for the last 60  
years.

Our Regional & Intergovernmental Newsletter  
sees this nescient direction cautiously entering the  
domain of public and civic regional activities.

Form-based coders already have their own na-  
tional association, with the Form Based Code Insti-  
tute from where we have an overview article from  
thier Program Director, Alan Mamoser. Following  
Alan's broad-brush look at form based codes, John  
Hedrick provides a regional look at a civic network-  
ing, coordinating approach offered by the Chaddick  
Insitutie at DePaul Univiersity in Chicago. Next your  
editor jumped in to sketch a case example from the  
leading-edge regional activities of SACOG (Saca-  
mento region) and thier form based code regional  
guidlines. Finally, Don Elliott provides a cautionary  
note as these new activities are "street" tested and  
evaluated over time. (Note, Don's Clarion colleague,  
Chris Duerksen has produced a number of APA's  
guides to the place of design in the planning lexicon  
and tool kit.)

So regions, take a look at the future to find a way  
your regional organizations and agencies can be-  
come place-makers.

Stay involved with this division as we cover other  
emerging regional interests such as food security  
and broadband technology - including sessions at  
the 2011 national conference.

Ron Thomas, AICP  
Regional & Intergovernmental Division, Editor

(Note my move from Chicago to join the new plan-  
ning program at the College of Environment and De-  
sign at the University of Georgia in Athens)