

Checklist for Identifying and Evaluating Form-Based Codes

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Identifying Form-Based Codes

A well-crafted form-based code is the most effective form of development regulation for shaping pedestrian-scaled, mixed use and fine-grained urbanism. How does one determine if a development regulation is a form-based code and a well-crafted one? Form-based codes generally receive affirmative answers to all of the following questions:

Is it a Form-Based Code?

- Is the code's focus primarily on regulating urban form and less on land use?
- Is the code regulatory rather than advisory?
- Does the code emphasize standards and parameters for form with predictable physical outcomes (build-to lines, frontage type requirements, etc.) rather than relying on numerical parameters (FAR, density, etc.) whose outcomes are impossible to predict?
- Does the code require private buildings to shape public space through the use of building form standards with specific requirements for building placement?
- Does the code promote and/or conserve an interconnected street network and pedestrian-scaled blocks?
- Are regulations and standards keyed to specific locations on a regulating plan?
- Are the diagrams in the code unambiguous, clearly labeled, and accurate in their presentation of spatial configurations?

Evaluating Form-Based Codes

The next lists of questions reflect best practices of form-based coding. Effective form-based codes usually receive affirmative answers to these questions:

Is the code enforceable?

- Does the code implement a plan that reflects specific community intentions?
- Are the procedures for code administration clearly described?
- Is the form-based code effectively coordinated with other applicable policies and regulations that control development on the same property?
- Is the code designed, intended, and programmed to be regularly updated?

Is the code easy to use?

- Is the overall format and structure of the code readily discernable so that users can easily find what is pertinent to their interest?
- Can users readily understand and execute the physical form intended by the code?
- Are the intentions of each regulation clearly described and apparent even to planning staff and citizens who did not participate in its preparation?
- Are technical terms used in the code defined in a clear and understandable manner?
- Does the code format lend itself to convenient public distribution and use?

Will the code produce functional and vital urbanism?

- Will the code shape the public realm to invite pedestrian use and social interaction?
- Will the code produce walkable, identifiable neighborhoods that provide for daily needs?
- Is the code based on a sufficiently detailed physical plan and/or other clear community vision that directs development and aids implementation?
- Are parking requirements compatible with pedestrian-scaled urbanism?