



Form Based Codes & How They Work?

A talk with

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Place 5

Let's talk about a form of zoning in the context of business. In the case of brick-and-mortar businesses, commerce environments are shaped by local development regulations—whether we realize it or not.

This is the topic of Form-Based Codes.

Why FBCs matter *to this group*

Everyone in this room is focused on working with mid-size companies—businesses that are big enough to be strategic, but sensitive to costs, branding, and location decisions.

One thing your companies all have in common is where they locate and how that place matters to your growth, recruitment, and branding.

What Are Form-Based Zoning Codes

The most simple, but unsatisfying explanation is they can be anything a community wants!

Typically Form Based Codes are a departure from overly complex and prescriptive traditional zoning regulations.

Let me explain...

Traditional zoning focuses on a land-parcel's use, and how those uses are separated from other uses. Instead of asking, 'What use is allowed here?', Form Based Codes start by asking,

“What should this place *look* and *feel* like?”

In a nutshell, Form Based Code focuses more on *creating places people want to be* rather than separating land uses. Typically this means walkable, sociable mixed use places in commercial corridors but in some instances it is applied to an entire city!





How do they work?

Form-Based Codes focus on how buildings look, how they relate to each other, the street, and how they create a “brand” for a city, or a portion of a city. They do that by describing the desired ideal environment. This can include things like:

- Building placement and visibility
- Setbacks which promote walkability, street activity, safety
- Building proportions (height, width)
- Street amenities and shared public spaces like parks and plazas
- Encourage more diverse environments with many kinds of businesses
- Creating an overall ‘feel’ of a district ... or you could say brand

One reason people like Form Based Codes is that they're easier to visualize. Instead of pages and pages of planning and legal text, they often include:

- Diagrams and illustrations
- Photos of successful desirable places
- Clear standards that show what's expected

That means residents, business owners, and developers can all look at the same document and understand what the goal is—without needing a planning degree.



Why is this important to small & mid-market businesses?

Small and mid-market businesses depend on their environment as part of their own branding.

They don't have unlimited funds to advertise, brand and rebrand to grow their customer base. They also don't have unlimited funds to recruit and keep good employees.

So, they use their location and its environs as a selling/recruiting tool. Is it a place customers want to be? Is it in a setting employees want to be?

Whether you're in marketing, real estate, consulting, finance, or economic development understanding Form Based Code allows businesses to:

- Choose locations that support growth
- Identify districts with long-term value
- Attract & grow a loyal customer base
- Attract & retain quality employees
- Attract many diverse yet compatible businesses & activities
- Align a company's physical environment with its culture & brand
- Reduce regulatory barriers in developing new places of business

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Why engagement matters...

Form Based Codes are meant to be more flexible and easier to navigate. When done well, they help align development with community vision.

But even Form Based Codes can be written to be too rigid, or disconnected from how businesses actually operate. That's why conversations like this—with groups like yours—are important.

So I hope you'll look into Form Based Code a little deeper.

We need your input!

I'd love to hear your perspectives and answer your questions.



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Thank you for your time and questions.

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