



# *Is a Form-based Code Right for Your City?*

*Making*

*Charlevoix More*

*Sustainable*



# Why zoning doesn't always work



**WARNING: This game may be hazardous to your health!!**

- Rules aren't always clear
- Pressure to make a decision
- Politics
- Legal fallout
- NIMBYs

# Problems with traditional zoning



- Not user friendly/complex
- Not flexible
- Based on minimums, not always what is desired
- Isolates different uses
- Does not ensure good design
- That's not what I thought it would look like

# Zoning can produce mediocrity

- Traditional zoning requirements do not guarantee innovative, safe, and creative development
- So we get more of what most of us agree we don't like or developments that all look the same



# A new approach: Form-based codes

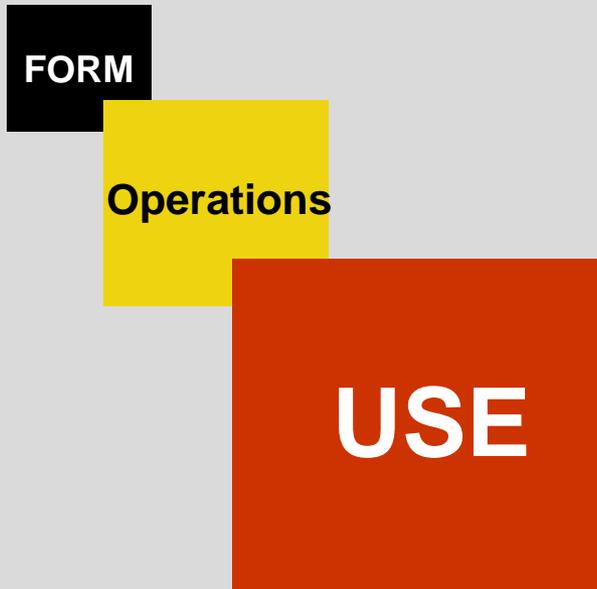
*“A method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form.*

*Form-based codes create a **predictable public realm** by primarily **controlling physical form** with a **lesser focus on land use** through city or county regulations”.*

Form-based Code Institute

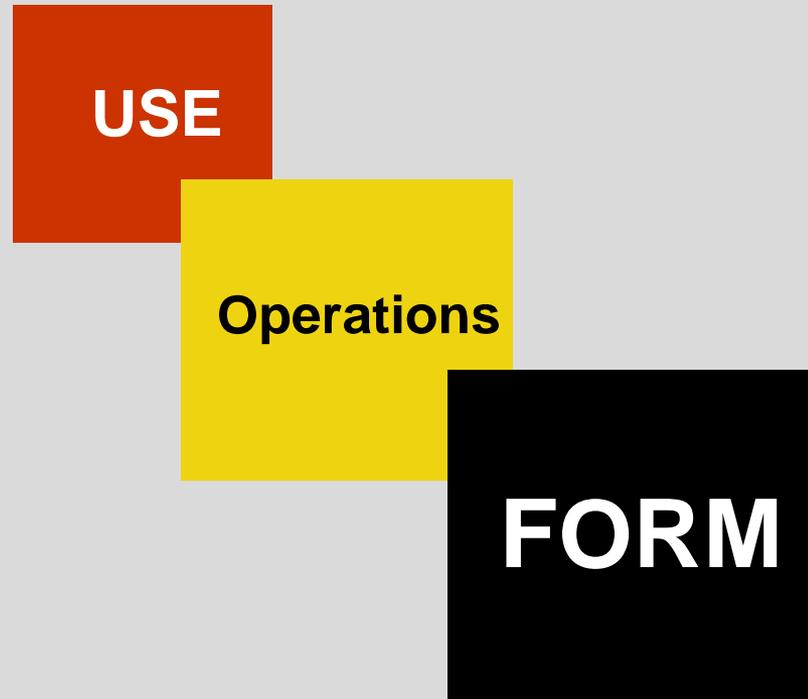
# Key differences

## Traditional Zoning



Focused on use

## Form-based Codes



More focus on design & form

# Form-based code benefits

- Results in a predictable development pattern
- Can be used to implement a community's vision
- Controls the character and function of the public realm
- Can support historic preservation and complementary infill

**Vision Plan and Specific Opportunities**

In tandem with the Illustrative Vision Plan, Calthorpe Associates created several building massing studies to analyze the physical conditions before and after the proposed new development. The four massing studies show the relationship between the proposed building, the street, and the Downtown as a whole.

Huron Street serves as a major gateway street to Downtown. Currently, the street is overwhelmed by a large curb-to-curb radius and many large surface parking lots. The Vision Plan attempts to bring the human-scale back into focus by encouraging pedestrian-friendly, high-density development. The development addresses the street and provides open space amenities as well as introducing traffic calming measures like pedestrian bulb-outs, on-street parking, and landscaped medians.

Existing South Main and William Streets have expansive surface parking lots and long, unbroken blocks that regrade the pedestrian environment. The Vision Plan illustrates one way to reinforce the pedestrian environment by adding new buildings to surface parking lots and orienting those new buildings to street.

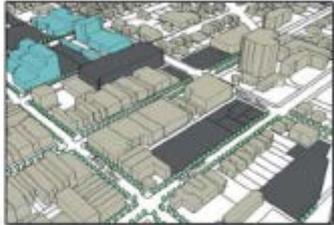


Fig. 42. Liberty Street / Ashley Street - Current Conditions



Fig. 43. Liberty Street / Ashley Street - Illustrative Vision

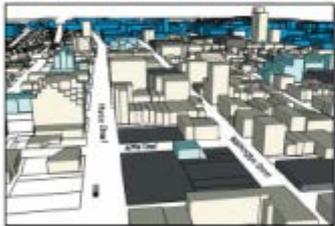


Fig. 44. Huron Street - Current Conditions



Fig. 45. Huron Street - Illustrative Vision

Calthorpe Associates

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# Form-based code benefits

- Shifts emphasis from zoning compliance to development quality
- Works for both redevelopment and new development
- Can speed development review
- Results in more urban environments



# Form-based codes

Can be used to:

- **Maintain** existing character, historical quality
- **Improve** character and function of a district or neighborhood
- **Transform** a community's image



# Where have FBCs been applied?

- **Greenfield Sites.** Part of a development agreement; private sector driven and enforced through covenants. Some may not be true Form-based Codes
- **Existing Neighborhoods.** Infill that is based on current typology and block patterns
- **Redevelopment Districts.** Most challenging application of a FBC since the street pattern is set and ownership may be complex



# What do they control?

- Uses
- Building Envelope
- Building Form and Character
- Streets and Public Spaces



# How They Are Implemented?

- **Mandatory Codes.** Most ambitious way to apply a Form-Based Code
- **Optional Codes.** Also known as parallel codes; can be used to address political realities
- **Floating Zone Codes.** Can be implemented through a PUD and include instructions and standards for developers to follow when they prepare a regulating plan



# What A FBC Includes

- **Regulating Plan.** Designates areas where different uses and standards apply based on an urban design strategy
- **Building, Public Space, and Street Standards.** Specifications for building form, character, and location, signs, sidewalks, streets, and street furniture
- **Administration.** The review and approval process and addressing departures from code requirements
- **Definitions.** Clear and precise use of terms

# What A FBC Includes

- **Regulating Plan.**
  - Designates areas where different standards apply based on an urban design plan
  - Looks much like a traditional zoning map and may be district based
  - Can also be based on street frontage



# What A FBC Includes

- Building, Public Space, and Street Standards.
- Specifications for lot configuration, building form and location, sidewalks, streets, and street furniture.

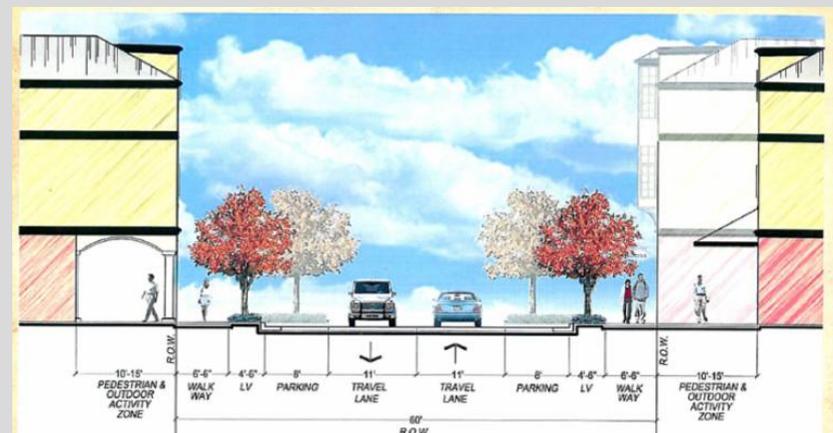
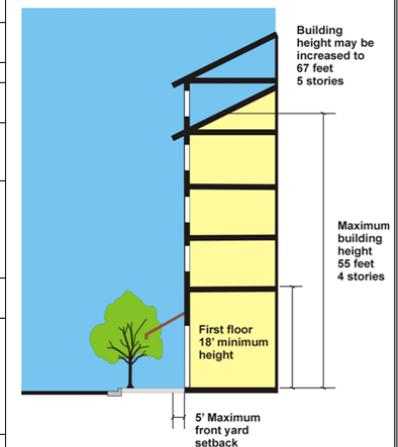
Article 7 | Overlay and Special Purpose Districts  
 Sec. 7.10 | Crescent District Form-Based Code

## Sec. 7.10 Crescent District Form-Based Code

### 7.10.5 Density/Intensity and Dimensional Standards

#### RMU-4, Residential Mixed Use/live-work

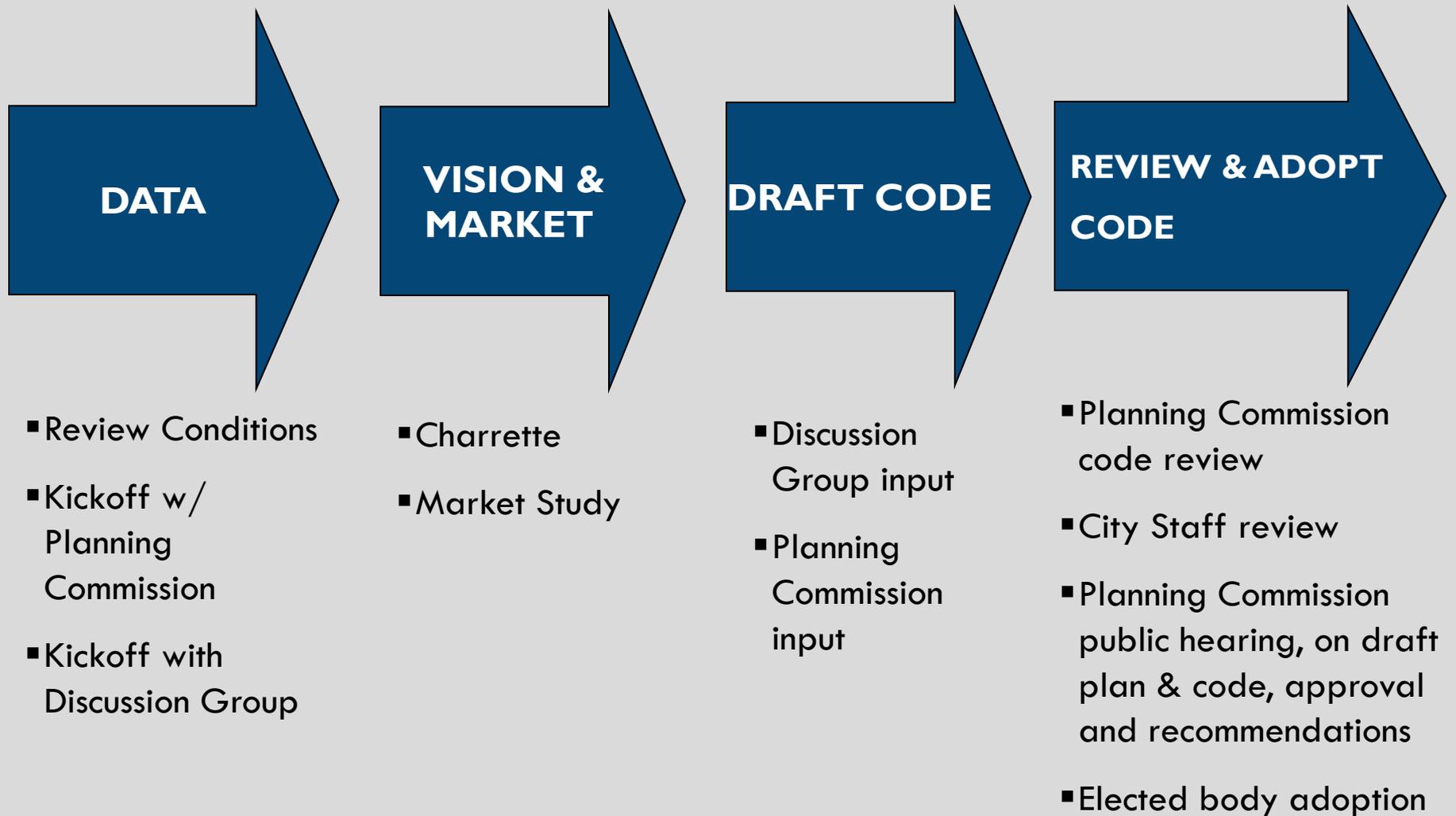
<b>Lot Area</b>	No minimum lot area.
<b>Lot Width</b>	No minimum.
<b>Density</b>	Maximum 22 dwelling units per acre
<b>Front Yard</b>	Minimum 0-foot front yard setback. Maximum 5-foot front yard setback.
<b>Building Frontage</b>	Building façade shall occupy a minimum of 80% of the frontage length between the min. and max. setback.
<b>Side Yard</b>	A zero side setback may be permitted where a fire wall is provided along the side lot line. Where a fire wall is not provided, buildings shall be spaced a minimum of 10 feet.
<b>Rear Yard</b>	Minimum 25-foot rear yard setback.
<b>Building Height</b>	Minimum 2 stories, 28-foot building height. The first story shall be a minimum of 18 feet in height measured from floor to floor. Maximum 4 stories/55-foot building height. Building height may be increase to 5 stories and 67 feet if criteria of section 1.1 are met.
<b>Parking</b>	Parking shall be permitted in the side or rear yards. Parking shall not be permitted in the front yard



# What A FBC Includes

- Administration
  - Promote a review process that is staff-driven
  - Establish a multi-disciplinary team
  - Clearly define departures that can be done by staff
  - Identify exceptions that require planning commission or BZA review and approval
- Address non-conforming uses
- Establish FBC trigger points

# The adoption process



# Lessons learned

- Evolve the code through experience
- Kick the Tires: Engage the development community & key agency staff to ground truth the code before it becomes too real
- Architects use design terms
- Need public sector investment: Support for streetscape & parking



# Lessons learned

- Education: Make sure everyone understands what a Form-based Code can do and cannot
- Political will: Engage community leadership and the public in the process and make sure there is support for the code
- Process: Include key government departments and agencies at the outset
- Inclusiveness: Don't forget energy providers, cable companies, etc.
- Realize when enough is enough: The code is supposed to make things simple

# Lessons learned

- Be careful about incentives: **Avoid use based incentives due to market forces**
- Don't overlook parking: **Amount, sharing & timing of parking is critical**
- Urban setting is best fit
- Don't stifle creativity: **"Historic" architecture is not the only option, allow innovative architecture where appropriate**
- Clarify application: **When does it apply? Need to be clear what triggers FBC compliance for existing development**



Gaslight Village E. Grand Rapids

# Thank You!

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