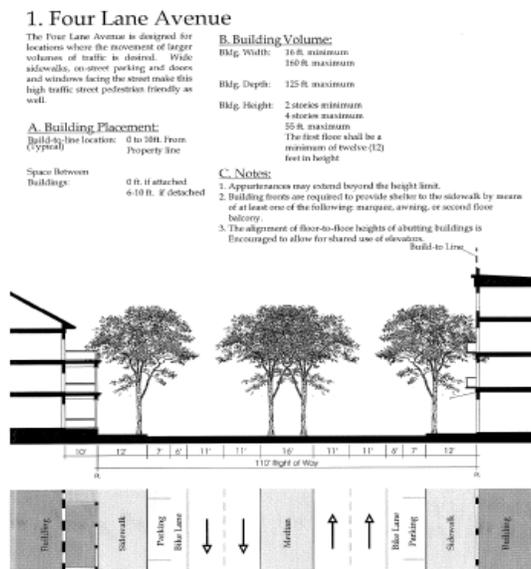## Form-Based Codes

Form based codes are still rather untried in the State of Delaware and its associated localities, but in the First State, with all of its history, these types of codes could help to maintain the quality and pride of existing communites as redevelopment, infill, and new development occur in our neighborhoods.

A 1999 study by the Urban Land Institute of four new pedestrian-friendly communities determined that homebuyers were willing to pay a $20,000 premium for these homes compared to similar houses in surrounding areas.[1] A mix of housing types, interspersed to create vibrant communities, has the potential to boost resale values in these walkable areas. Studies have shown that people do want to live in communities rather than developments. Considering the benefits, it is not surprising that compact, mixed-use development is the model that most of the nation is using to revitalize economies and accommodate their continuing growth in a sustainable manner. However, to reap the benefits of mixed-use, regulations must be designed to accommodate this livable, walkable urban form.

"The density and location of compact development [can] also allow for a more economical extension of public services and utilities than is possible under more dispersed

trend development… and the relatively higher densities of compact development also enable natural features and agricultural areas to be preserved and protected from development."[2] Since infrastructure costs are decreased in compact developed areas, the units themselves may also be more affordable due to the decreased need for impact fees and necessary special taxing units. The design and connectivity that support transit and walkability tend to be mixed-use and associated with densities of at least seven units per acre.

As part of a Form-Based Code effort, mixed-use buildings need to be encouraged in order to locate required services near those that they serve, but existing zoning categories encourage separation of uses and prevent implementation of effective New Urban techniques. Implementation of a Form-based Code is one of the most common ways of addressing this difficulty, even with the high density of successful projects. "A form-based code 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'."[3] In places that use this type of code, the use of

1. Four Lane Avenue

The Four Lane Avenue is designed for locations where the movement of larger volumes of traffic is desired. Wide sidewalks, on-street parking and doors and windows facing the street make this high traffic street pedestrian friendly as well.

A. Building Placement:
Build-to-line location: 0 to 3ft. From
(typical) Property line

Space Between
Buildings: 0 ft. if attached
6-10 ft. if detached

B. Building Volume:
Bldg. Width: 16 ft. minimum
160 ft. maximum

Bldg. Depth: 125 ft. maximum

Bldg. Height: 2 stories minimum
4 stories maximum
55 ft. maximum
The first floor shall be a
minimum of twelve (12)
feet in height

C. Notes:
1. Appurtenances may extend beyond the height limit.
2. Building fronts are required to provide shelter to the sidewalk by means of at least one of the following: marquee, awning, or second floor balcony.
3. The alignment of floor-to-floor heights of abutting buildings is Encouraged to allow for shared use of elevators.

[1] Eppli, Mark J. and Charles C. Tu. 1999. *Valuing The New Urbanism, The Impact of the New Urbanism on Prices of Single- Family Homes*. Washington, D.C: Urban Land Institute.

[2] Mix, Troy. 2003. *Exploring the Benefits of Compact Development*. Dover, DE: Office of State Planning Coordination.

[3] City of Farmers Branch. *Codes Project: Frequently Asked Questions*. Online. Available from: www.farmersbranch.info/Planning/codes7FAQs.html

adjacent buildings is less important than the compatibility and interrelated nature of those uses. Today's technology has allowed many uses, once thought to be disturbing to neighborhoods, to be placed within mixed-use or residential communities without negative impact to the surrounding residents.

By increasing mobility and transportation options, this type of code results in more efficient use of land, even in already developed communities. The included graphic from Hercules, Calif., shows an example of the type of code that might be created.[1] The intent is to have transitioned but clear differences that provide a visual understanding of the changes that occur as your drive or walk: a decrease in speed represented by narrowed streets and the addition of on-street bike paths, transition to more residential sections by the increase to traditional setback limits, etc.

 Application of a Form-Based Code can maintain the desired character and integrity of existing communities while effectively directing development in a compact, economically beneficial way. Focus on the physical form and placement of structures helps determine the

character and use of locations; buildings are placed close to sidewalks to encourage pedestrian use, and parking is located behind to also accommodate automobile traffic. Special attention is paid to increasing the "green factor" and safety of pedestrian and bicycle paths and elements, such as window/entrance placement on

commercial establishments that encourage active frontage and increase foot traffic for area business.

Form-Based Codes are beneficial to the overall community and easier for developers to use,
1. *"Because they are prescriptive (they state what you want), rather than proscriptive (what you don't want), Form-Based Codes (FBCs) can achieve a more predictable physical result...*
2. *FBCs encourage public participation because they allow citizens to see what will happen where—leading to a higher comfort level about greater density, for instance...*
7. *FBCs obviate the need for design guidelines, which are difficult to apply consistently, offer too much room for subjective interpretation, and can be difficult to enforce...fostering a less politicized planning process that could deliver huge savings in time and money and reduce the risk of takings challenges."*[2]

Additional Resources
The Form-Based Codes Institute, formbasedcodes.org
The Local Government Commission, Form-Based Codes Fact Sheet, www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land_Use/fact_she ets/form_based_codes.pdf
Duan Plater-Zyberk & Company, www.dpz.com/transect.htm
Congress for New Urbanism (CNU), www.cnu.org
Farmers Branch Planning, www.farmersbranch.info/Planning/codes7FA Qs.html
Madden & Spikowski, *Place Making with Form-based Codes* (ULI), spikowski.com/Madden-Spikowski-Article.pdf

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[1] *Central Hercules, CA Plan*. Online. Available from: hercules-plan.org/Deliverables/Central-Hercules-Plan_Regulating-Code.pdf

[2] Peter Katz, the Form Based Code Institute. *Eight Advantages to Form-Based Codes*. Online. Available from: www.formbasedcodes.org/advantages.html