

Ideas on Form-Based Regulations for Smaller Communities

Although mid-sized communities such as Beacon, Malta, and Saratoga Springs have very good form based coding, smaller communities with fewer resources and little or no professional staff might be able to achieve many of the same results through a simpler set of form-based design standards. Such standards could address the following issues:

- Maximum Front Setback, with allowances for alcoves. Because situations can vary, a range of setbacks is often preferable to one standard distance. Also, when street ROWs are particularly wide (as with arterials) it is important to create a sense of proportionality.
- Minimum Building Height, with requirements for functional upper floors and height proportional to street width. (However, some flexibility can be useful, as many older residential neighborhoods have a variety of height, and not necessarily a second story. In commercial and mixed use areas, if the market for development is not moderate to hot, there can be minimal political support for mandating that the second floor be functional and not merely look functional. However, even chain drug stores have been required to have second stories, sometimes used for storage or offices.)
- Primary door entrances along the street side opening onto sidewalks (or opening to a corner, if at an intersection).
- Minimum glazing requirements along the street side for commercial buildings
- Reduce on-lot parking requirements. (They can be eliminated if public or private structured parking is provided nearby.)
- Parking to the rear or side. Screen side parking from the street by walls, fences, or landscaping to about 42 inches.
- Minimum street frontage built-up to minimize gaps between buildings (The width of permissible gaps depends on the urban-ness of the district.) Exceptions would include the provision of desired civic space in the gaps (for small parks, public art, etc.)
- Limit side parking to some maximum length of street frontage, to avoid small building with wide parking lots. Screen such parking lots (See my comment about depending on the character of the area.)
- Maximum block length
- Permitting a broader mixture of uses within buildings and blocks
- Shade tree planting along streets and in parking lots
- Allow a greater mix of different residential building types. Permit single-family, two-family, or three-family home on any lot in most residential districts, provided they meet lot dimensional standards. Rowhouses and apartment buildings could be restricted to districts for commercial and multi-family, although they may be permitted along major collector streets and arterials in residential districts.
- Set minimum and maximum lot sizes and minimum and maximum widths in residential districts to achieve a minimum target density.
- Prohibit suburban-style signage, such as free-standing (including monument signs) in urban commercial districts (except for traffic and parking lot signs).
- Allow temporary ground-floor residential uses in flex space until the market can support commercial uses. (However, great care should be taken, as it could become very difficult to remove residential tenants when commercial uses become viable.)
- Do not require suburban buffer landscaping. Except for screening parking lots (see above). Focus on street trees.
- Avoid tall outdoor light poles, Focus on street lamps and downward-angled building-mounted luminaires.
- Consider architectural standards relating to exterior materials (color, texture, window proportions and rhythm, etc.) for nonresidential buildings