

CONGRESS
FOR THE
NEW
URBANISM

MICHIGAN

FORM-BASED CODES IN 7-STEPS

The Michigan Guidebook to Livability

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January 2010



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The Michigan Guidebook to Livability

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Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the members of the CNU Michigan Chapter and our continuing collaborators: The Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, The Form-Based Code Institute, and the National Charrette Institute for their inspiration and ways to improve the FBC guidebook.

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Mission

CNU Michigan is organized exclusively for educational purposes. Our mission is to:

Organize and produce meetings and conferences dedicated to the refinement and dissemination of the principles and techniques of New Urbanism

Produce and distribute written documents and audio visual materials for the purpose of educating the public and planning profession

Further advance the principles of New Urbanism through networking and publicity avenues

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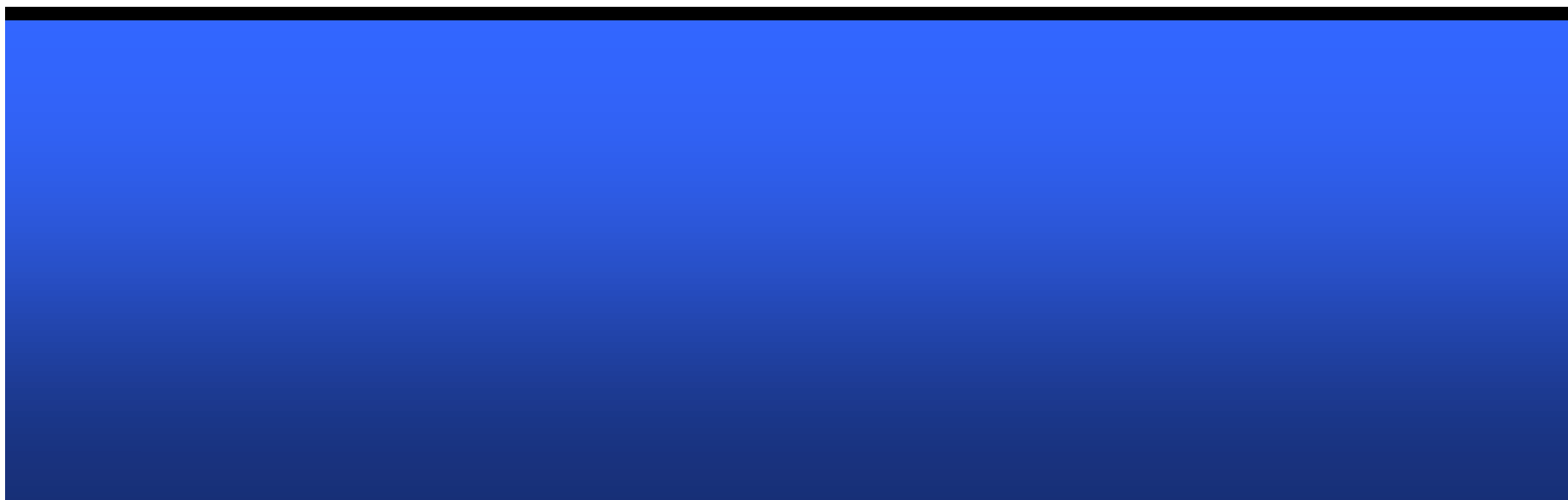
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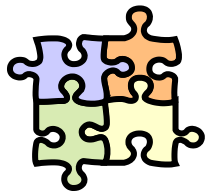
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PART 1

SETTING THE STAGE





Introduction

BACKGROUND

It is widely recognized that Michigan needs zoning reform. The built and natural environments demand it, and so do the demographics and markets. Zoning codes that have been adopted in the last 60 years strongly favor spread-out single-use development. This trend of minimum lot sizes, minimum building setbacks, parking requirements, street width standards, and restrictions that separate uses has led to sprawl in our state and across the country.

Hardly anyone defends conventional codes anymore at professional conferences or in publications – yet they persist. Conventional zoning is very difficult to change because the status quo is so powerful. Zoning has made the public wary of new development because it continually

produces low quality development, and unfortunately, conventional zoning does not encourage walking or alternative forms of transportation or add to cultural, social and entertainment offerings in a way that maximizes and improves quality of life.

WHY WRITE THIS GUIDEBOOK?

The Michigan Chapter of Congress for the New Urbanism (MiCNU) is committed to stopping sprawl and re-establishing compact, walkable and environmentally sustainable cities, villages and neighborhoods. Changing the way communities currently do zoning in Michigan has been identified as the major hurdle in reaching our mission.

After careful research and development by the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) and the Form-

Based Code Institute (FBCI), Form-Based Codes (FBCs) have come to the forefront as the most effective method to accomplish zoning reform in Michigan. To that end, MiCNU has developed three (3)-implementation steps.

[Step 1 - FBC Training](#) First, MiCNU has already begun the process of informing people about FBCs. MiCNU partnered with the Michigan Municipal League and the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association to offer educational workshops. These were held in February, April, May and July 2009. As a result, more than 60 people have graduated with Form-Based Code certificates of course completion.

[Step 2 - FBC Guidebook Project.](#) MiCNU recognized that workshops alone would not be enough to create

the kind of change that is hoped for in Michigan. Therefore, seven (7) members of MiCNU have written this guidebook.

The guidebook simplifies FBCs and removes the mystique associated with them. Specific to Michigan (*and the first of its kind anywhere in the nation*), the guidebook is a step-by-step process that explains what communities need to know, helps them decide what to do, and leads them through the process of how a FBC is written, adopted and implemented.

Site Visits. In addition, the MiCNU organization knows that receiving the guidebook is not enough to really understand the process of implementing a FBC. Therefore as a part of the FBC Guidebook Project, members of MiCNU are conducting site visits to further explain the guidebook and FBCs. The site visitor teams include professional members of MiCNU who are FBC experts.

At this time, the site visits are at no



Hazel Park Site Visit 8-29-09

MiCNU conducted 3 site visits in Pilot Communities to test the guidebook and site visit format. The focus of Hazel Park was a commercial corridor.



charge to communities, but MiCNU will need to charge a small fee in the future to help cover costs. For more information regarding registration, contact www.cnu.org/michigan.

Step 3 - Charrette Training. The visioning process is one of the most critical steps in undertaking the implementation process. A community must agree on a “vision” for their community before a FBC can be

properly written.

MiCNU has received comments from consultants as well as from community representatives that, more often than not, sessions that should help a community arrive at their “vision” are not well run and have been less than successful. Therefore, MiCNU’s final implementation step is to get people certified on how to conduct a successful and effective multi-day charrette.

MiCNU has contracted with the National Charrette Institute to hold certification workshops in February 2010 at greatly reduced registration rates for members of MiCNU. For more information about the implementation program, contact MiCNU at michigan@cnu.org.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE FBC GUIDEBOOK?

This guidebook has been created to provide information about form-based codes, to plan for code implementation and to provide instructions on how communities can create and develop a form-based code.

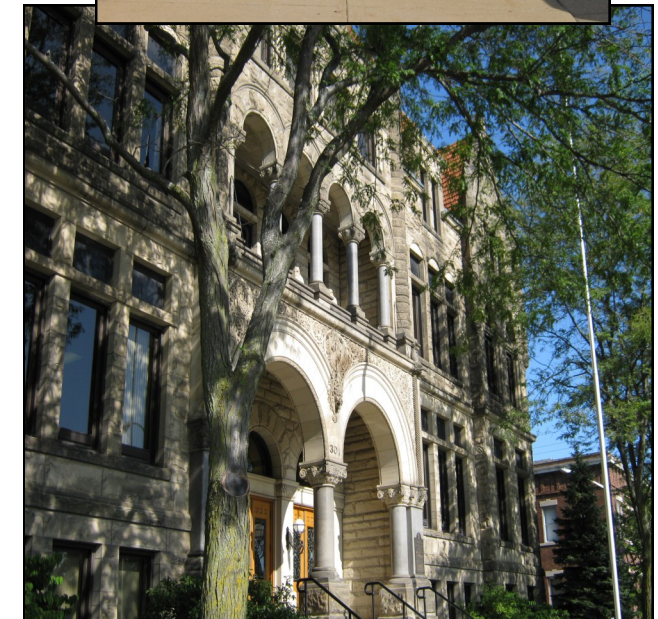
Lake Isabella Site Visit 9-09-09

The Lake Isabella site visit was conducted in 3 areas—an established neighborhood, an emerging commercial area, and a vacant “greenfield” site.



Bay City Site Visit 8-31-09

The Bay City site visit (right) focused on the historic downtown.



FBCs DIFFER FROM CONVENTIONAL ZONING BECAUSE THEY:

- ✓ Are the result of a public design process, which creates a clear and articulate vision for a municipality or a defined district or neighborhood.
- ✓ Pay greater attention to the design of the public realm and the importance that streetscape design and individual building character have in defining public spaces and in creating that special sense of place.
- ✓ Emphasize site design and building form over density and land use regulations. Form-based codes pay more attention to the buildings that will last for many years, instead of uses which change over time.
- ✓ Encourage a mix of uses and housing types to reduce the need for people to travel as part of their daily routines.
- ✓ Make use of graphic illustrations to explain important design elements, rather than relying on numeric standards and text.

WHAT IS A FBC?

Form-based codes are development regulations (*a type of zoning code*) used by local government agencies that emphasize the physical character of development (*its form*) and de-emphasize the regulation of land use.

FBCs provide greater predictability about the look and feel of development and why it functions as a place than a conventional zoning ordinance. They offer developers a clearer understanding of what the community seeks. In addition, FBCs can make it easier for citizens to help create the physical development they want, which will more likely lead to the acceptance of new developments and the street infrastructure investments needed to support the community vision.

HOW DO FBCs DIFFER FROM CONVENTIONAL ZONING CODES?

Most local governments in Michigan use Euclidean or Conventional Zoning codes as the tool to regulate development. Because the original purpose of zoning was to prevent incompatible uses from moving into neighborhoods, conventional zoning focuses first on regulating use and on what is not allowed.

In addition, zoning requirements are usually applied generically throughout the entire community—without any regard for what the community wants development character to be. Although the resulting developments may be “compatible” in terms of density, for example, they are often incompatible with the physical context of adjacent buildings or surrounding neighborhoods.

Conventional zoning ordinances typically leave street design standards to the city engineer or public works department. These standards are normally based on general street classification (*arterial, collector, and local*) with no consideration for how the standards relate to the different districts that the streets serve. For example, it is common for an arterial street to have the same design standards within residential districts as they do within employment and commercial districts.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION & FBCs

In addition to considering the historical development of a building or site, historical preservationists look at whole areas, such as streetscapes, neighborhoods, or cultural landscape. They also record historic resources by style, architectural detail, form, mass, orientation, and spatial relationships to other buildings in the area. Through documentation, historic

preservationists identify character-defining features and then work to mitigate adverse effects to historic properties.

Historic preservation and FBC planning are natural partners. Both practices identify and consider the relationship of building facades to each other and to the public realm. In addition, FBCs provide a planning tool for protecting and/or revitalizing historic places, which takes into account the qualities and character of the community's existing historic fabric.

FBCs IN THE SUBURBS

FBCs are the most important tool to TRANSFORM the suburbs and suburban communities should be encouraged to use them. Redeveloping obsolete parking lots into town centers is a desire in nearly every suburban community.

There are many, many communities

**FBCs are the most
important tool to
TRANSFORM
the suburbs**

that have no center, but desperately want one. FBCs can bring change to suburbs that have a sprawling type of development pattern and can help transform an area from a suburban design to a more urban one.

In light of increasing energy costs, it makes sense for suburban areas to increase overall density of developed areas. The existing development form of sprawl is incredibly wasteful, and as we are all finding out, financially unsustainable.

Both the suburbs of Rochester Hills and West Bloomfield have adopted a FBC. The FBC elements were written specifically to transform tired old retail corridors into interesting, mixed-use places. In both cases, these communities demanded change through their master planning processes.

Transitioning from very low density

placeless, unsustainable (*financially and environmentally*) suburbs into true places with at least a basic level of urbanity will probably be the primary task of planners, architects and transportation professionals in the coming decades.

Ten years ago there was little alternative to conventional zoning. Today, nationwide there are more than 300 communities that have adopted form-based codes. In Michigan, at least 18 have adopted a FBC and another 15 communities are working on or considering a FBC.

RESOURCE INFORMATION

As you read through this guidebook, you will discover more about what a FBC is and how these codes can bring or return livability and walkability to your community.

For a quick view of what FBCs are all about, you'll find a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section in the Appendix, pages 109-111. For

additional information regarding FBCs, visit the following resources:

Form-Based Code Institute
www.formbasedcodes.org

SmartCode Central
www.smartcodecentral.org

In addition, this guidebook can be used with the book, *Form-Based Codes: A Guide for Planners, Urban Designers, Municipalities, and Developers* by Daniel and Karen Parolek and Paul Crawford. You will want to use it as a resource while going through the FBC process.

ARE FBCs LEGAL IN MICHIGAN?

Yes, FBCs are legal in Michigan. For a complete explanation, refer to the Appendix section under Regulations, pages 112-114.

WHAT IS IN THE GUIDEBOOK?

This guidebook is aimed at you—the community official and resident. It is

This guidebook is aimed at you—the community official and resident

written in order for communities to understand the FBC coding process and determine ways to better use resources available for a zoning rewrite. In addition, you will find tips to help decide what tasks can be done in-house and what must be done by outside help. We know that you will want to learn how to start the process of implementing a FBC immediately—and this guidebook will explain the steps to follow in order to do that. The guidebook is divided into 3 parts and brings together information in seven-concise steps.

To assist you, this
guidebook brings together
the information in
7-steps.

PART 1 Setting the Stage

Step 1 Community Intentions

Helps you decide what it is you hope to achieve and clarifies the magnitude of effort that your community is able to support

Step 2 Finance

Includes approaches for you to analyze your own community's financial resources and how to reconcile them with the whole range of community needs

Step 3 Getting the Right People

Includes instructions on how you can get the right people involved to form a planning team, then defines their respective roles and responsibilities

Step 4 Community Scoping

Includes instructions on what information you need to gather in order to self-evaluate your community, then explains how to examine and analyze existing conditions

Step 5 Community Visioning

Explains how you can achieve your community's vision as a basis for adopting a FBC

PART 2 Drafting the Code

Step 6 Writing the FBC

Includes and explains all the components for you to put a Form-Based Code together

PART 3 Administration

Step 7 Code Adoption and Administration

Includes instructions on the adoption process and how you can develop a management system for administration