



**DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Thursday, June 18, 2015 – 7:00 P.M.**  
**Neutra House**  
**181 Hillview Avenue, Los Altos, California**

**DRAFT**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Attendance**

Committee members present: Thomas Barton, Anita Kay Enander, Deb Hope (arr. 7:08 p.m.), Edward Infante, Par Marriott, Susan Mensinger, Teresa Morris, Jane Reed (arr. 7:10 p.m.), Denis Salmon, Nancy Nealon See (arr. 7:10 p.m.)

Committee member absent: Hillary Frank

City Council: Megan Satterlee, Facilitator

City staff: Zach Dahl, Senior Planner

1. Approve minutes from May 21, 2015 meeting

The Committee reviewed the notes and materials from the May 21, 2015 meeting and accepted them by consensus.

2. Review 2015 Downtown survey results presented at June 9, 2015 Council meeting (taken out of order; see page 2)

3. Receive subcommittee reports

- Quality of materials; curb appeal; landscape; access to light/air/views (H. Frank, T. Morris, D. Salmon)

D. Salmon provided an overview of the subcommittee's initial findings

- Height; tower; setback; variances; public benefit (T. Barton, A. Enander, E. Infante)

A. Enander presented an overview of the overview of the subcommittee's findings thus far

- Application of guidelines (D. Hope, P. Marriott, S. Mensinger, J. Reed)

P. Marriott provided a written report on the subcommittee's findings thus far and reviewed it with the group (Exhibit 1)

4. Review process and procedures for development application review and approval

Z. Dahl provided a brief presentation and answered questions related to the City's development review process.

2. Review 2015 Downtown survey results presented at June 9, 2015 Council meeting

M. Satterlee provided a brief presentation – but due to time, there was no follow-up discussion. The item was tentatively scheduled for the July 16, 2015 meeting for further discussion.

5. Discuss presentations by developers/applicants

Did not discuss – move to the July 16, 2015 meeting

6. Consider public engagement approaches for feedback on Committee recommendations

Did not discuss – move to the July 16, 2015 meeting

7. Identify future meeting agenda topics and potential additional meeting dates

Did not discuss – move to the July 16, 2015 meeting

Meeting adjourned at 10:04 p.m.

## 6-18-15 APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

Jane, Deb, Susan, Pat

**Approach:**

- Reviewed Los Altos Design Guidelines and development documents
- Reviewed similar documents for other cities: Los Gatos, Carmel, Palo Alto
- Gathering info on processes & checklists

**Expected outcomes:**

- Development will be more predictable, fair, smoother for developer and the city (staff, commissions, council, public).
- Reduce subjectivity.
- No surprises: What gets built will be what's presented in plans.

**Progress to date:**

- Revising "Design Guidelines" to "Design Directives," making them as specific as possible.
- Make the focus a HOW TO guide for developers.
- Use photo examples of what does and does not fit: THIS ... NOT THIS.
- Find examples of commercial buildings that we think would fit in Los Altos. Indicate locations (so developers could go to see them) and take photos to include in Design Directives.

**Our subcommittee's ASKs:**

- Require 3D modeling – similar to Bill Maston's presentation – for every application  
<http://losaltosforward.org/programs/community-conversations/>  
What You See Is What You Get: The Latest in Design & Planning Tools for Visualizing Developments with Bill Maston (March 5, 2015)
- Require a Design Review (Architectural Review Board) for ALL development
- Allow developers to submit applications and plans electronically. Maintain up-to-date documentation online for easy reference by public.
- Support Vision & Specific Plan for downtown and civic center
  - Better than piecemeal development
  - Sets level playing field
  - Leads to objective decisions
  - Codifies rules (Loyola Corners example: in the code!)

Fellow Committee Members:

In looking at other cities, I discovered “Downtown Land Use and Economic Revitalization Plans” – yet another planning document! – at [http://m.losaltosca.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/Community%20Development/page/429/downtown\\_land\\_use\\_plans\\_for\\_website\\_revised.pdf](http://m.losaltosca.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/Community%20Development/page/429/downtown_land_use_plans_for_website_revised.pdf)

Page 8, says “The other major effort undertaken ... was the establishment of form-based zoning for all commercial districts in the Downtown triangle, and specifically the CD/R3 zoning for First Street.”

I asked Zach Dahl about form-based zoning and he said, “The use of design review findings, removal of lot coverage and floor area limits, and the simplification of use definitions in each zone district were intended to move Los Altos toward a more form based approach to zoning that was less prescriptive. But I wouldn’t say that Los Altos is using purely form based zoning because we still have parking requirements, setbacks and other site standards.”

I still have a lot of questions about it (see my red comments below), but as we consider possible zoning changes, I think it’s worth looking into form-based zoning. I like the specificity of the Benicia documents (example below).

pat

<http://formbasedcodes.org/definition>

### Form-Based Code

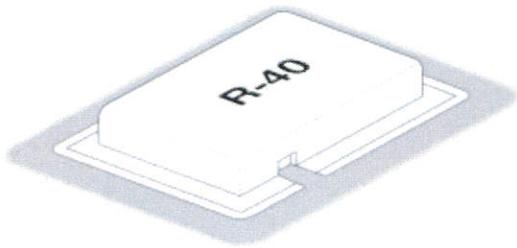
A form-based code is a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code. **A form-based code is a regulation, not a mere guideline**, adopted into city, town, or county law. A form-based code offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulation.

Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in form-based codes are presented in both words and clearly drawn diagrams and other visuals. They are keyed to a regulating plan that designates the appropriate form and scale (and therefore, character) of development, rather than only distinctions in land-use types.

This approach contrasts with conventional zoning’s focus on the micromanagement and segregation of land uses, and the control of development intensity through abstract and uncoordinated parameters (e.g., FAR, dwellings per acre, setbacks, parking ratios, traffic LOS), to the neglect of an integrated built form. **Not to be confused with design guidelines or general statements of policy, form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory. They are drafted to implement a community plan.** They try to achieve a community vision based on time-tested forms of urbanism. Ultimately, a form-based code is a tool; the quality of development outcomes depends on the quality and objectives of the community plan that a code implements.

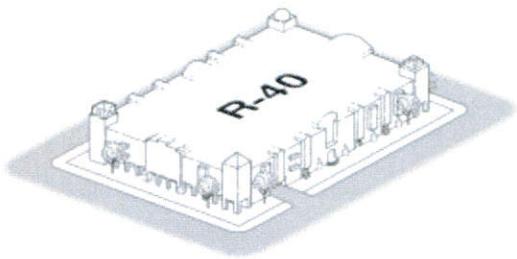
### Conventional Zoning

Density use, FAR (floor area ratio), setbacks, parking requirements, maximum building heights specified



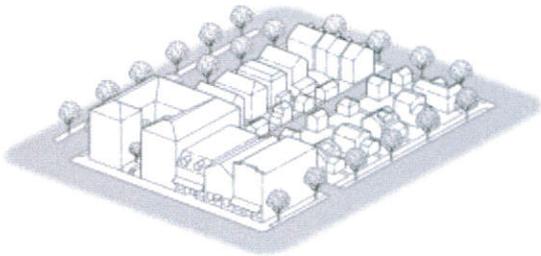
### Zoning Design Guidelines

Conventional zoning requirements, plus frequency of openings and surface articulation specified



### Form-Based Codes

Street and building types (or mix of types), build-to lines **HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM SETBACKS?**, number of floors, **HOW IS HEIGHT REGULATED?** and percentage of built site frontage specified. **WHAT ABOUT PARKING?**



### Five Main Elements of Form-Based Codes

#### 1. Regulating Plan **WE HAVE**

A plan or map of the regulated area designating the locations where different building form standards apply.

#### 2. Public Standards **WE HAVE**

Specifies elements in the public realm: sidewalk, travel lanes, on-street parking, street trees and furniture, etc.

#### 3. Building Standards **WE HAVE**

Regulations controlling the features, configurations, and functions of buildings that define and shape the public realm.

#### 4. Administration **WE HAVE**

A clearly defined and streamlined application and project review process.

#### 5. Definitions **WE DON'T HAVE**

A glossary to ensure the precise use of technical terms.

#### Additional Optional Elements

##### Architectural Standards **WE SORT OF HAVE**

Regulations controlling external architectural materials and quality.

##### Landscaping Standards **WE SORT OF HAVE**

Regulations controlling landscape design and plant materials on private property as they impact public spaces.

##### Signage Standards **WE HAVE**

Regulations controlling allowable signage sizes, materials, illumination, and placement.

##### Environment Resource Standards **I THINK WE HAVE THIS +CEQA**

Regulations controlling issues such as storm water drainage and infiltration, development on slopes, tree protection, solar access, etc.

##### Annotation **WE DON'T HAVE**

Text illustrations explaining the intentions of specific code provisions.

#### Examples

FBCI gathers examples of well-designed form-based codes from communities across the U.S. and abroad to aid research and plan making. Selections such as the [Regulating Plan of Peoria](#), and the [Building Envelope Standards of Pleasant Hill Bart Station](#) offer a glimpse of best practices in the design and implementation of form-based codes.

Please also browse the [Library of Codes](#) and the [Driehaus Award](#) page for further examples. Or watch Bill Spikowski's video presentation "Creating Urban Form" for an in-depth look at history and practice of form-based coding.

<http://formbasedcodes.org/codes>

#### Library of Codes

FBCI gathers the best examples of form-based codes from communities across the United States and abroad. The codes represent a variety of community types and applications of form-based standards. Click on the Show Search Options button to search the library by phrase, location, Driehaus Award recipients, and the categories described below.

- **Physical Context:** size or type of government entity
- **Organizing Principle:** underlying organization for the code standards
- **Implementation Method:** how the code standards operate within the zoning ordinance
- **Development Type:** development types impacted by the code standards
- **Special Features:** unique code attributes or awards

#### EXAMPLE from Benicia

<http://formbasedcodes.org/content/uploads/2014/02/benicia-downtown-mixed-use-master-plan.pdf>

## **Benicia Chapter 4 INTRODUCTION**

The Form-Based Code is organized as follows:

The Regulating Plan (page 4-3) allocates plan zones and their corresponding land uses. Building Form Standards (pages 4-5 through 4-32) provide regulations for buildable areas, required frontage conditions, and acceptable land uses for each zone of the Regulating Plan. Additional Standards (page 4-33) provide regulations for frontage types and parking requirements.

The Form-Based Code is intended for adoption in the Zoning Ordinance for the City of Benicia. Upon adoption it will supersede and replace the City Zoning Ordinance provisions regarding zoning districts, allowable land uses, permit requirements, and site development standards.

### **Town Core (TC):**

The primary intent of this zone is to enhance the vibrant, pedestrian-oriented character of First Street. The physical form and uses are regulated to reflect the urban character of the historic shopfront buildings.

**How mixed use is defined within this zone:** Mixed use within this zone primarily refers to vertical mixed use where retail or commercial are on the ground floor and residential or commercial are above.

### **Town Core-Open (TC-O):**

The primary intent of this zone is to regulate the physical form of shopfront buildings along the side streets between First Street and Second Street in order to provide an appropriate transition from First Street into the residential neighborhoods. The physical form of a shopfront building is regulated while allowing flexibility in use.

**How mixed use is defined within this zone:** Mixed use within this zone is defined by the flexibility and compatibility in use, allowing retail, commercial, or residential live/work uses in a shopfront form.

### **Neighborhood General (NG):**

The primary intent of this zone is to protect the integrity and quality of the downtown residential neighborhoods.

**How mixed use is defined within this zone:** Appropriately-scaled ancillary buildings are allowed that can accommodate residential, home-office, or workshop uses.

### **Neighborhood General-Open (NG-O):**

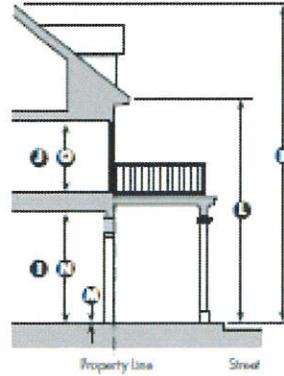
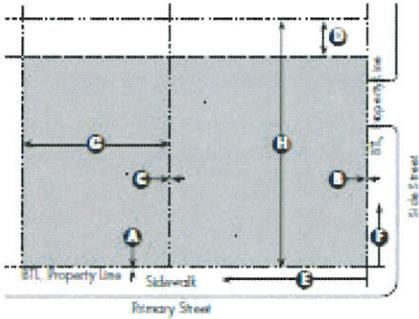
The primary intent of this zone is to ensure a residential physical form to relate to adjacent residential buildings along the side streets between First Street and Second Street in order to provide an appropriate transition from First Street into the residential neighborhoods. The physical form of a residential building is regulated while allowing flexibility in use. This zone is applied to buildings with an existing residential form that has been compromised by on-site or adjacent development making pure residential use inappropriate.

**How mixed use is defined within this zone:** Commercial or residential uses are allowed in this area in a residential form both in the main buildings as well as in ancillary buildings.

**Example in chapter 4 in the Benicia master plan.**

Page 4-6

## Town Core (TC) Standards



**Key**

- Property Line
- Setback Line
- Build-to Line (BTL)
- Building Area

Building Placement		
<b>Build-to Line (Distance from Property Line)</b>		
Front	0'	A
Side Street	0'	B
<b>Setback (Distance from Property Line)</b>		
Side	0'	C
<b>Rear</b>		
Adjacent to NC Zone	5'	D
Adjacent to any other Zone	5'	D

Building Form		
Primary Street Façade built to BTL	80% min.*	E
Side Street Façade built to BTL	30% min.*	F
Lot Width	125' max.	G
Lot Depth	100' max.	H

\*Inset façades must be built to BTL along first 30' from every corner.

**Notes**

All floors must have a primary ground-floor entrance that faces the primary or side street.

Loading docks, overhead doors, and other service entries are prohibited on street-facing façades.

Any building over 50' wide must be broken down to read as a series of buildings no wider than 50' each.

4-0

Use		
Ground Floor	Service, Retail, or Recreation, Education & Public Assembly*	I
Upper Floor(s)	Residential or Service*	J

Height		
Building Min.	22'	K
Building Max.	2.5 stories and 40'	L
Max. to Eave/Top of Parapet	35'	M
Ancillary Building Max.	2 stories and 25'	N
Finish Ground Floor Level	6" max. above sidewalk	O
First Floor Ceiling Height	12' min. clear	P
Upper Floor(s) Ceiling Height	8' min. clear	Q

**Notes**

Mansard roof forms are not allowed.  
Any section along the BTL not defined by a building must be defined by a 2'6" to 4'6" high fence or screen or masonry wall.

Downtown Mixed Use Master Plan  
Opticos Design, Inc.