Rural to Urban, Village-City County: Advanced Form-Based Coding Coast to Coast

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FBC Definition

Form-based codes foster 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. They are regulations, not mere guidelines. They are adopted into city or county law. Form-based codes are an alternative to conventional zoning.
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Damariscotta, Maine and
Newport and Huntington, Vermont

Jane Lafleur, Executive Director, Friends of Midcoast Maine
Paul Dreher, Zoning Administrator, Newport City, Vermont
Three Communities

- Newport City, Vermont
- Damariscotta, Maine
- Huntington, Vermont: code in progress
Form Based Codes in small towns

“Setting the stage and then preparing for the actors, the script, the audience...and the reviews....”

Setting the stage...

- Visioning and capacity building
- Community code writing
- Community building and place-making
FORM BASED CODES

“Allowing communities to decide what they want to “be” rather than allowing developers to determine what they should become.”
The Beginnings - Sleeper Place
Developing a Community Vision: The Charrette & AIA R/UDAT Processes
Could it work here?

Future with Current Code

Future with Form Based

Benefit to:
- Community
- Municipality
- Businesses

Create a Framework for:
- Multi-Purpose/Multi-Use Destinations
- Better Pedestrian Experience
- Reinforcing Historic Fabric
- Great Placemaking
A new model: Empowering the community

The power of the pen in the hands of the community...
“Begin with the map and end with the map...”
The Public Process: The Community as Expert
Forming Partnerships
Using Illustrative Tools

Existing Conditions: Hannaford Area

Hannaford Area: With Form Based Codes
Using Illustrative Tools
Using the Media

The Damariscotta SmartCode

A Community Built Code

Why Form Based Codes?

Thoughtful, community-based planning is at the heart of Damariscotta. Over the past few years the Town has been engaged in a very open, active public process to chart our future. Through the retail zone cap vote in 2005, citizens determined that they needed to be fully engaged in the land use planning and economic development of the Town. In response, the Damariscotta Planning Advisory Committee (DPAC) was formed and authorized by the municipality in 2007 to engage the community in work to better steer Damariscotta’s course into the future.

The Ortiz Family Foundation’s planning grant to Damariscotta to conduct the Heart & Soul Community Planning Project ignited energy and commitment about the Town’s future. The Heart & Soul project was a two-year intensive process, involving the Damariscotta community through discussions about our future. We also incorporated a week-long, community-based planning charrette process to identify and illustrate a town vision. More recently a series of 30+ community workshops were held to gather public input to inform the form-based code writing process to reflect the Town’s vision, called the Damariscotta SmartCode.

The Damariscotta SmartCode (also known as a Form Based Code) has been constructed by the community to help implement the open and vision of the Charrette. It is a regulatory plan that will replace portions of the current zoning regulations. The Town’s current traditional use based zoning promotes the kind of sprawl that is not only expensive to maintain, but detracts from the Town’s vision of its future. Simply put, Damariscotta SmartCode will address the Town’s concerns regarding the preservation of the unique character of the Downtown, while requiring aspects of the RU-10 checker, and guiding future growth and development throughout Damariscotta to better reflect its own values.

Upholding Community Values

The proposed Damariscotta SmartCode affirms the community values identified by the citizens of Damariscotta during the Heart & Soul project. We value:

Working locally

Living locally

Having access to culture and nature in close proximity

Being an involved community

Having a strong sense of community

Being an accessible community

The proposed SmartCode works to build community places, encourages close-knit neighborhoods, allows for jobs to be developed locally to keep young people here, and maintains open spaces in the rural areas to allow dense development closer to the decentralization where service and utilities are available or can easily be extended. The “smart” part about this code is that it protects what the Town values and ensures that future growth will happen in accordance with these values.

The Community Code Writing Process...

Hundreds of volunteer hours... invested in democracy...

Building Neighborhoods, The Economy and Connecting the Community

Damariscotta’s proposed SmartCode works to build neighborhoods that complement our existing neighborhoods like 1st Street and Water Street. The code will protect our vibrant Downtown by allowing the form of it to continue and new businesses to locate here on the ground floor as well as upper levels. The code works to build pedestrian friendly development on Route 130 and better alternative connections through street networks, paths and trail systems. The auto-oriented nature of Route 130 will change over time with fewer car traffic, more sidewalks, restored open space, walking and biking corridors and safer connections between the buildings.

Creating Opportunities through the Code

The Damariscotta SmartCode will help to build a public realm and work to ensure that the uses of public places are accommodated, whether they are pedestrian, cyclist, or driver. The vision expressed in the Charrette process was a vision of connectedness and access. The SmartCode will help to bring this vision to reality. The code addresses the built form and the street form—where the public exists, where we meet and how we interact, where we drive, walk and bicycle. It includes the design of streets and spaces and how they relate to people, not how they relate to cars.

A SmartCode encourages walking as well as safe, alternative forms of transportation. The goal is to create a place for ourselves, our children and seniors so they can walk to the store or to school without danger or worry. The code addresses connectivity: interconnected streets, walkability, and multiple ways to get around our towns are important to the fabric of community. This code supports a vibrant Main Street as we know it.

The code encourages economic opportunities through smaller setbacks and the use of a “build to” line, allowing smaller lots and allowing and promoting mixed uses.

Be Sure to VOTE

Tuesday, June 14
Municipal Building
10 am to 8 pm
On the ground... The Code
The code effect
Lessons Learned

• Don’t underestimate your community’s capacity
• Take time
• Build unlikely allies (property rights people and environmentalists; downtown businesses and home owners, voters and government)
• Focus on transparency and trust
• Build local capacity to talk about the code
• Build community along the way.
Lessons Learned

• No heroic leaders...instead community ownership and shared leadership
• Time and number of workshops
• Code education and a political campaign
• From vision to policy to community building and place making
• Capacity building - community building and the community as the expert
Damariscotta, Maine –
“In the process of creating a code...we built community.”
Newport, Vermont: from “Can’t happen here” to “Anything is possible”.
For more information

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