Enabling Better Places: An Incremental Approach to Coding Reform

A Smart Growth Network Webinar
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OVERVIEW

Introduction
Process/ Approach
Content
Q & A
CODE OVERHAUL: MAKE IT EASY TO INVEST IN PLACES
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Columbia Pike, Arlington, VA
Some of the biggest coding issues
Parking
Too much required
Parking

Required on-site
Parking

None permitted on street
Parking

Required on-site
Streetscape
Sidewalk activities prohibited
Streetscape

Wide lanes & high speeds (no parking)
Streetscape

Narrow sidewalks
Frontages

Required front setbacks
Frontages

Blank walls allowed
Limited uses

No small scale artisanal manufacturing
Uses
Retail required everywhere
Code Changes

Usual Barriers

- Expensive
- Complicated

Requires:
- a long time
- political will
- public buy in
The Project for Code Reform
Coding solutions that enable great places

Why aren't more cities implementing placemaking strategies, which are proven to expand economic activity, increase mobility, protect the environment, and create more equitable places?

In many cases, it's because a municipality's zoning codes and ordinances make it illegal to create the type of vibrant communities that support jobs, foster economic development, and are attractive places for people to live, work, and play that residents and local leaders are seeking.
Process

• Research
  • Understanding state based opportunities and constraints
  • Hearing directly from localities
• Analysis
• Recommendation
  • Translating to code that responds to local conditions
• Documentation
  • Develop guidance materials for accessibility
  • Ground truthing with localities
• Training and Education
The first state: Michigan
Partner Organizations:

CNU Congress for the New Urbanism

THE RICHARD H. AT THE UNIVERSITY DRIEHAUS PRIZE OF NOTRE DAME

MEDC MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

MSHDA MICHIGAN STATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

AARP Real Possibilities
Wandering in the woods
“If you do nothing else, do this...”
What is “incremental code reform”?

**ARC OF ENGAGEMENT**

**STEP 1:**
approve small changes in parking, frontages, uses, form, signs and the public realm

**STEP 2:**
test additional changes in urban standards

**STEP 3:**
adopt new zoning district

**SINGLE USE ZONING**

**NEW CITY-WIDE CODE**
PLACE TYPES

Main Streets  Downtowns  Adjacent Neighborhoods

scale, intensity, range of uses, and other physical characteristics
AREAS OF REFORM

**Streetscape**
Streetscapes are designed according to the intensity of land use through which the street passes. In downtown and main streets, streetscape design should focus on the success of businesses as much as it might focus on vehicular movement. In neighborhoods, streetscape design should focus on the safety and comfort of residents ahead of vehicular movement.

**Form**
Regulations that control the form of buildings, including setbacks, height, lot size, lot coverage, and similar restrictions. In many places regulations designed for suburban setbacks and buffers have been applied to downtowns, main streets, and adjacent neighborhoods, reducing the value of existing buildings and properties.

**Use**
Restrictions on the use of buildings and properties, and the ability to combine multiple uses, both on the parcel and within a single building.

**Frontage**
The design of building facades and yards that face the sidewalk. Frontage quality affects the likelihood that people will walk along a street. This is independent of architectural style. Most issues relating to frontage are regulated to increase vibrancy, which is reflected in the amount of pedestrian activity.

**Parking**
The amount and location of parking. The effects of parking requirements are often underestimated in their ability to improve or detract from the success of downtowns and main streets.
Document released in September 2018

Thousands of downloads
“The Project for Code Reform has completely changed our expectations of what Michigan's local governments can do to reshape their zoning and improve their communities. [It’s] really valuable when your town or city faces budget and staff constraints.”

Dan Gilmartin
Executive Director and CEO,
Michigan Municipal League
...And the research continues

- Vermont- affordable housing
- Michigan – the suburban condition
- Palm Beach – incremental approach to wholesale change
- And other states– population boom, historic preservation, green space, stormwater
- What can you bring to this research?
Now to Susan...