What is a Form-Based Code?

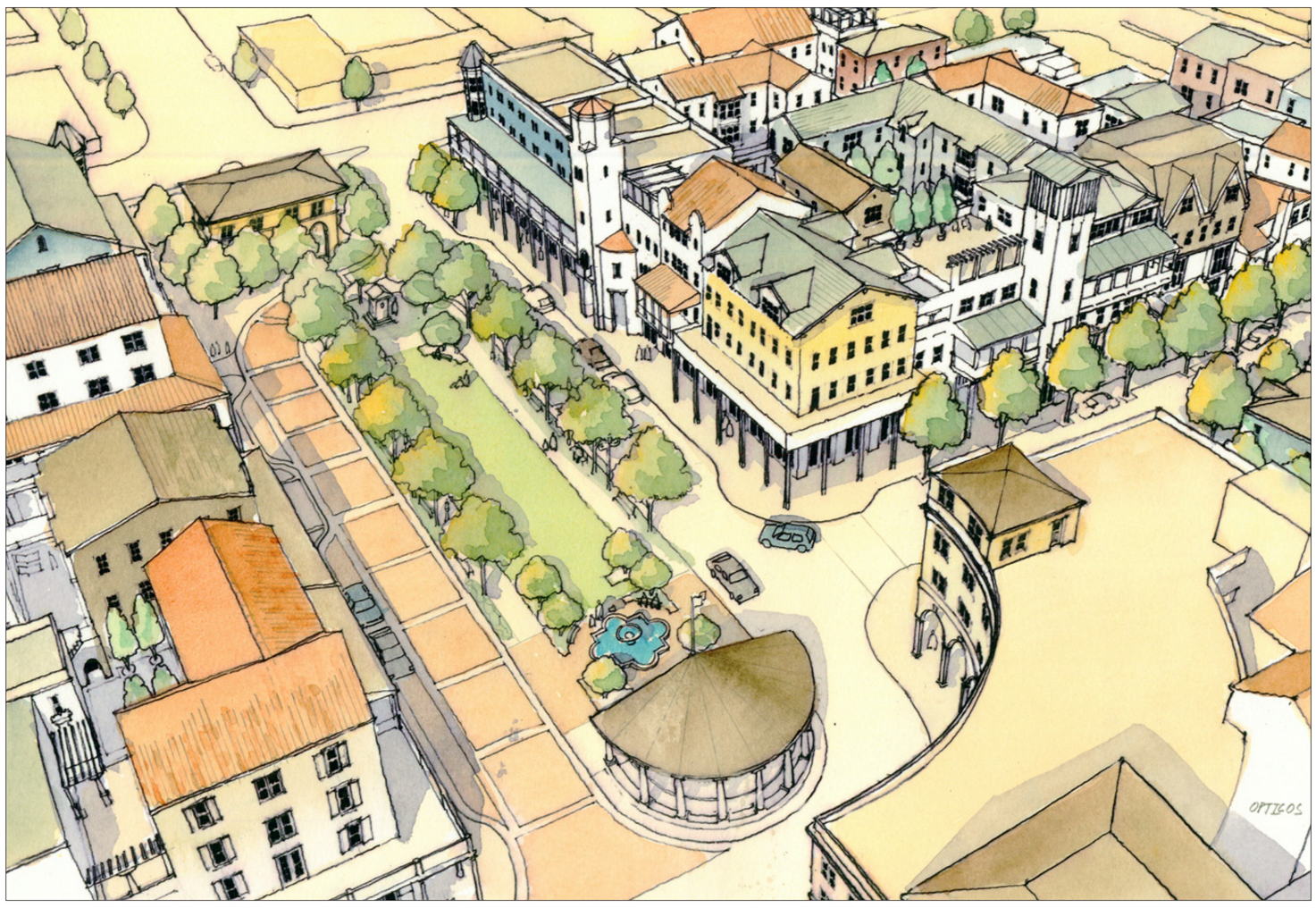
Placemaking with a New Approach to Zoning

Opticos Design, Inc.

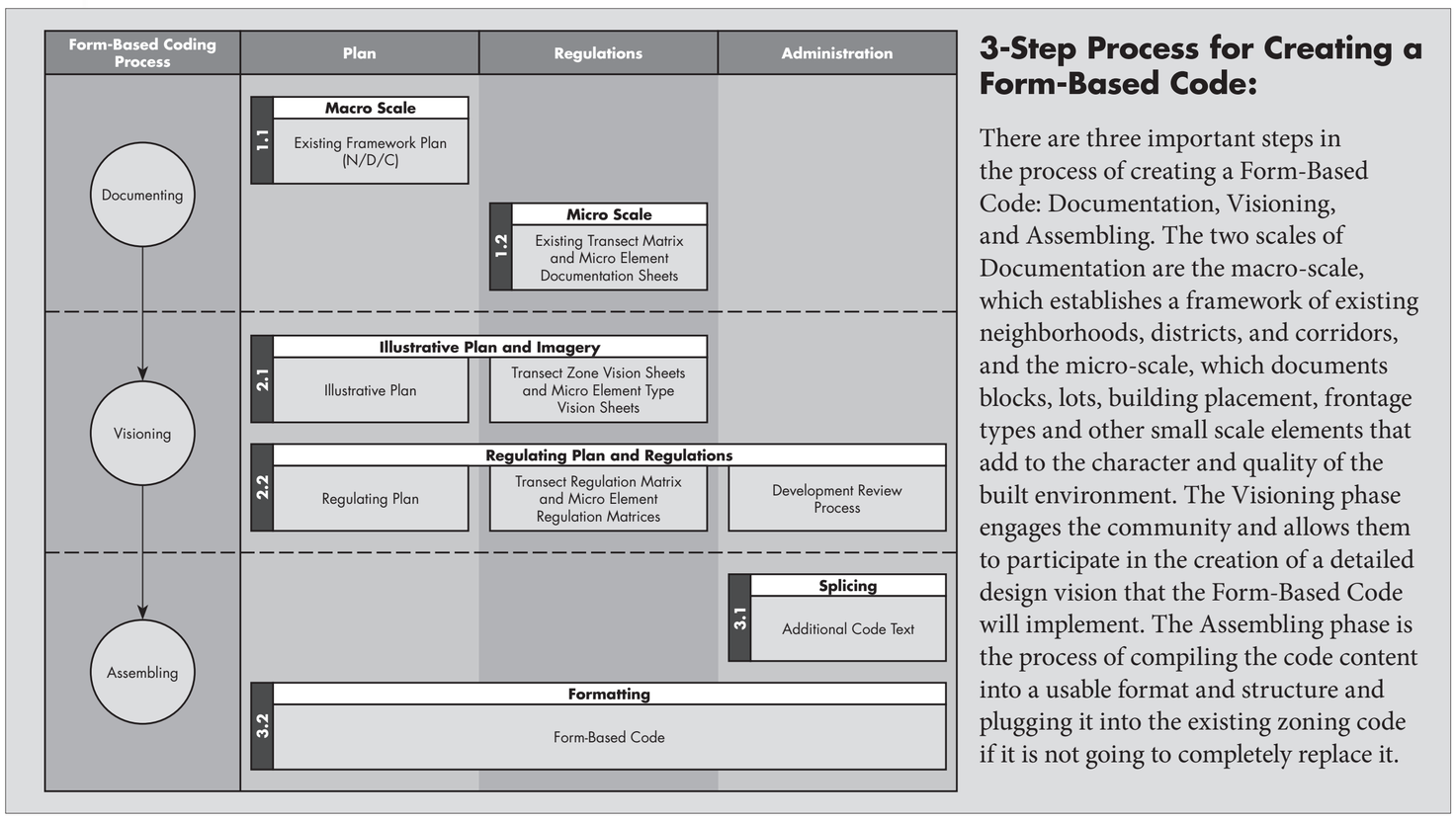
The Form-Based Codes Institute defines Form-Based Codes as follows:

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. These codes are adopted into city or county law as regulations, not mere guidelines. Form-based codes are an alternative to conventional zoning.

The most important aspect of this definition in terms of differentiating FBCs from Euclidean zoning is that the intended physical form or desired place replaces use as the organizing principle, or framework, for the overall code. So instead of a zone being labeled "single-family residential," it might be called "traditional neighborhood," and instead of a zone being called "commercial", it might be called "neighborhood main street." The terms "neighborhood" and "main street" tie back into the intended physical form or place, both of which may include a mix of uses and different building types that create a vibrant walkable urbanism. The urban-to-rural Transect, which categorizes a spectrum of urban to rural contexts in six Transect zones (from the most urban T6 to the most rural T1), is a prominent organizing principle within Form-Based Code practice. The second important aspect of this definition is that FBCs replace zoning and are not merely design guidelines.

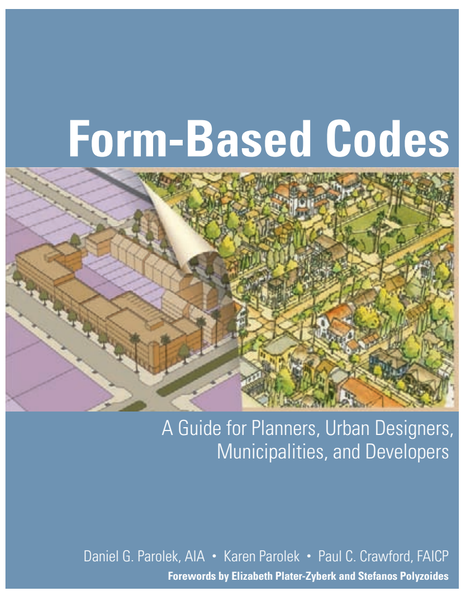


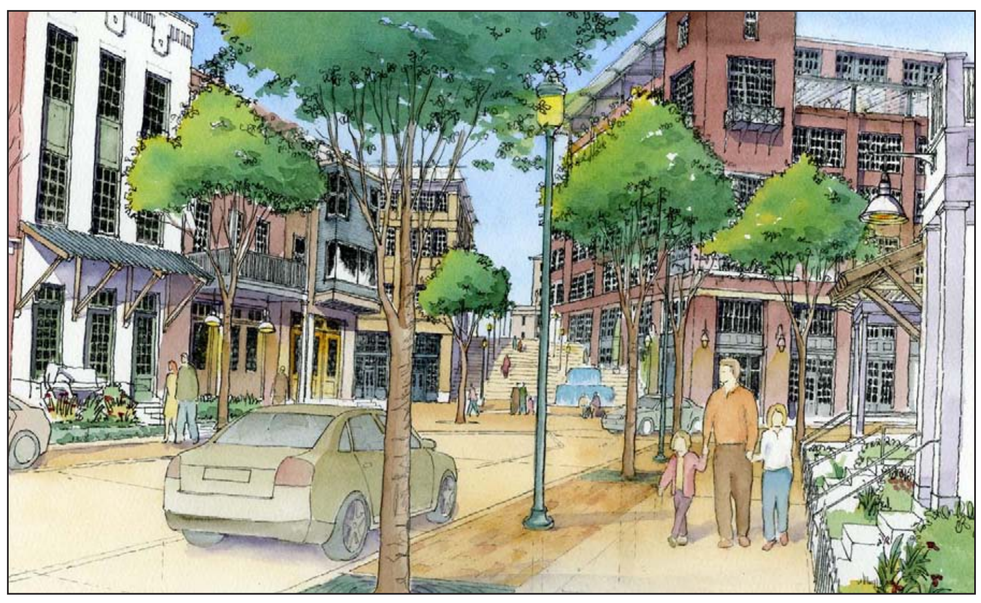
Organizing Principle: The Rural-to-Urban Transect



3-Step Process for Creating a Form-Based Code:

There are three important steps in the process of creating a Form-Based Code: Documentation, Visioning, and Assembling. The two scales of Documentation are the macro-scale, which establishes a framework of existing neighborhoods, districts, and corridors, and the micro-scale, which documents blocks, lots, building placement, frontage types and other small scale elements that add to the character and quality of the built environment. The Visioning phase engages the community and allows them to participate in the creation of a detailed design vision that the Form-Based Code will implement. The Assembling phase is the process of compiling the code content into a usable format and structure and plugging it into the existing zoning code if it is not going to completely replace it.



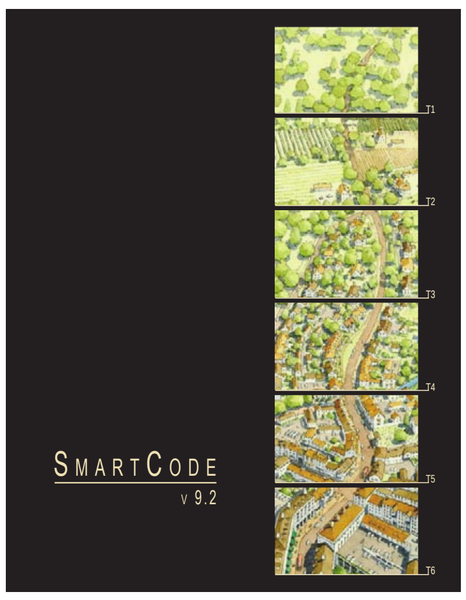


Why are Form-Based Codes Needed?

The current zoning system is broken: It has produced auto-dependent development patterns that have compromised community character, our nation's health and the environment leaving communities searching for tools to address these issues. FBCs are an alternative to Euclidian Zoning that focus on the creation, revitalization, and preservation of vibrant, walkable urban places.

As Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk states in Form-Based Codes, "as Global Society swings into action to reduce carbon emissions, the data ever more clearly points to the need to reduce dependence on vehicular mobility and to re-make the built environment as transit- and pedestrian-friendly places of dense economic and social interaction. Only the Form-Based Code can ensure such an urbanism." Even developers are supporting this push for zoning reform: at the 2009 New Partners for Smart Growth Conference in Albuquerque, developer Rob Dixon presented his "Top 20 Ways to Make a Green, Smart City," and "replace your Euclidean zoning with Form-Based Codes" was number two on his list.

For a more detailed description of FBCs see "Form-Based Codes," by Parolek or go to the Form-Based Code Institutes's web site at www.formbasedcodes.org. The SmartCode is a model, Transect-Based, Form-Based Code.



Components of the Form-Based Code

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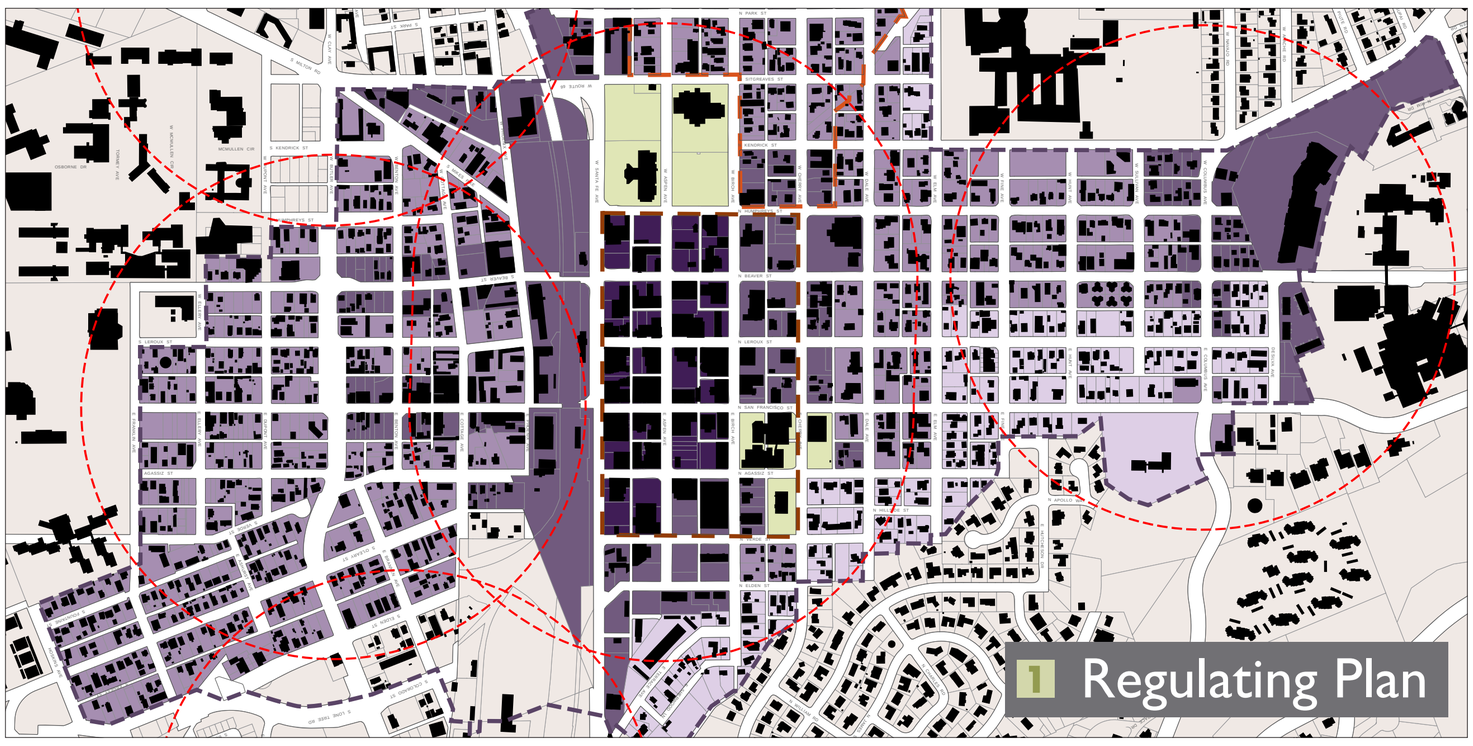
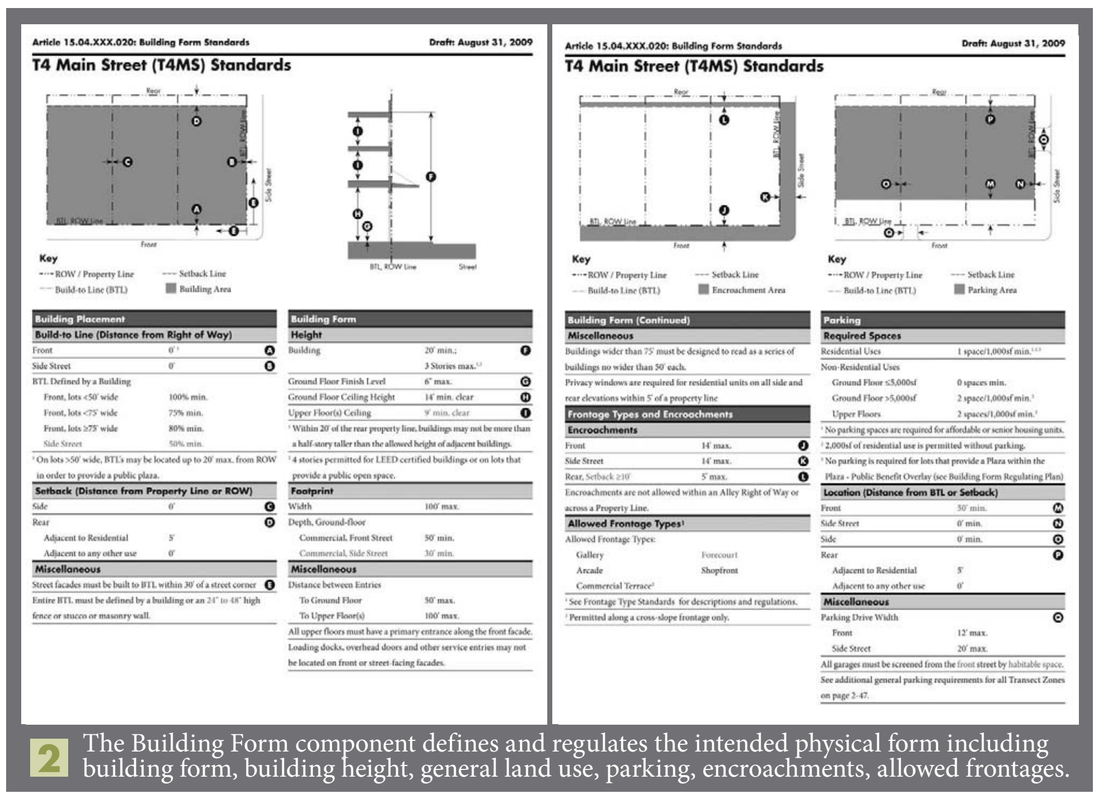
Essential Components

Form-Based Code Components that have proven necessary to an effective FBC:

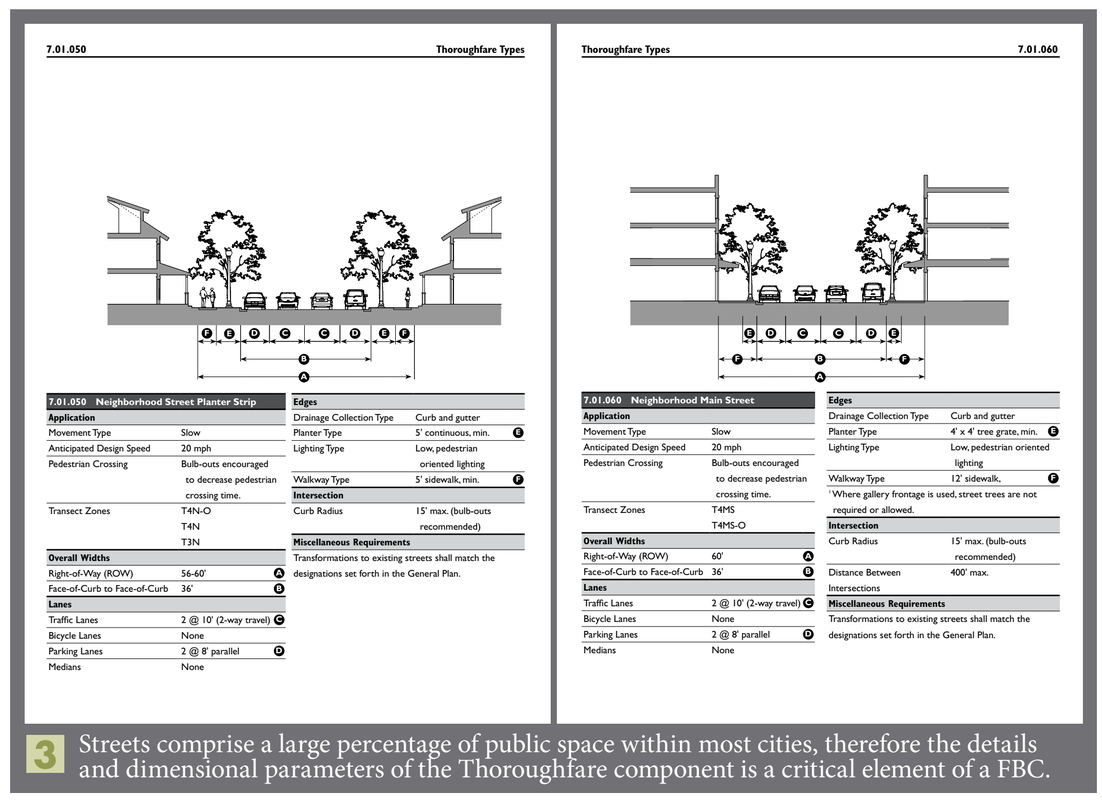
1. **Regulating Plan** (which replaces the zoning map)
2. **Building Form Standards**
3. **Thoroughfare Standards**
4. **Civic Space Standards**
5. **Frontage Type Standards**
6. **Subdivision Standards**
7. **Administration**



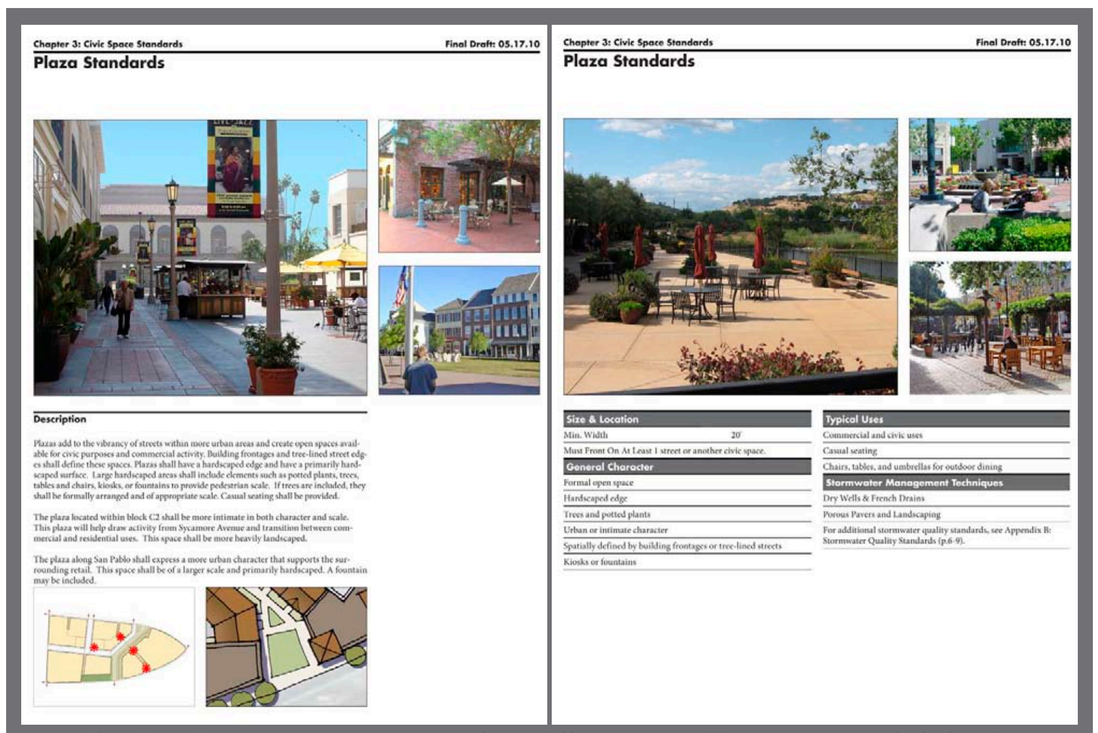
1 Regulating Plan



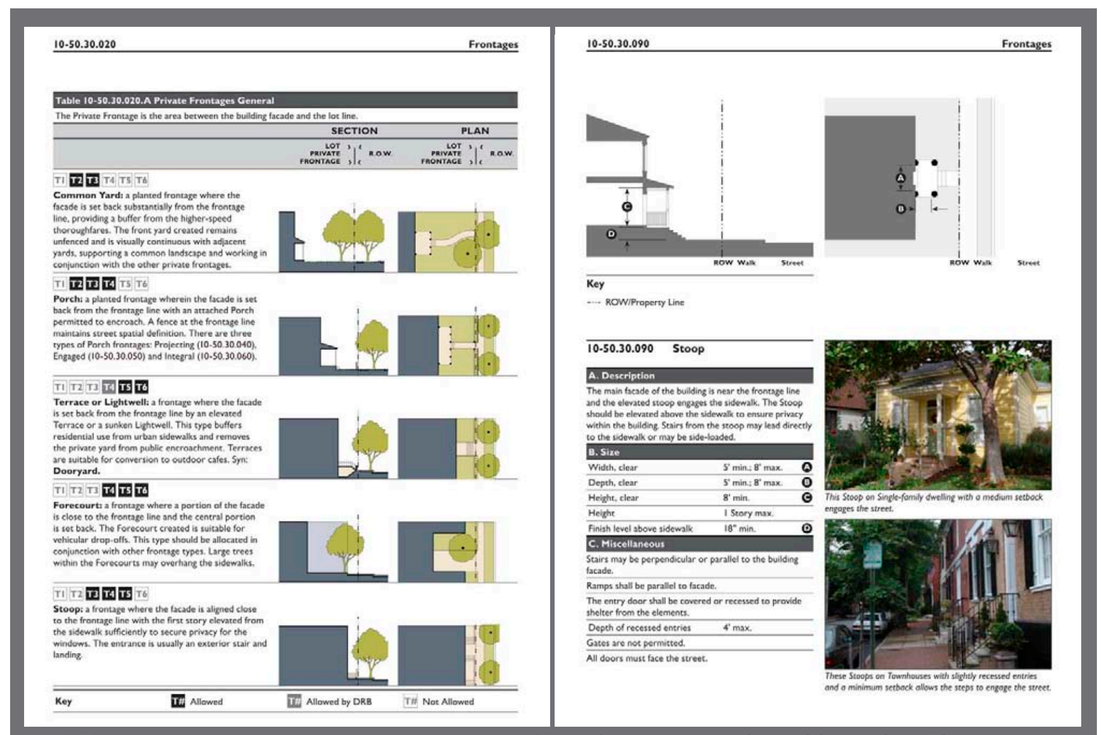
2 The Building Form component defines and regulates the intended physical form including building form, building height, general land use, parking, encroachments, allowed frontages.



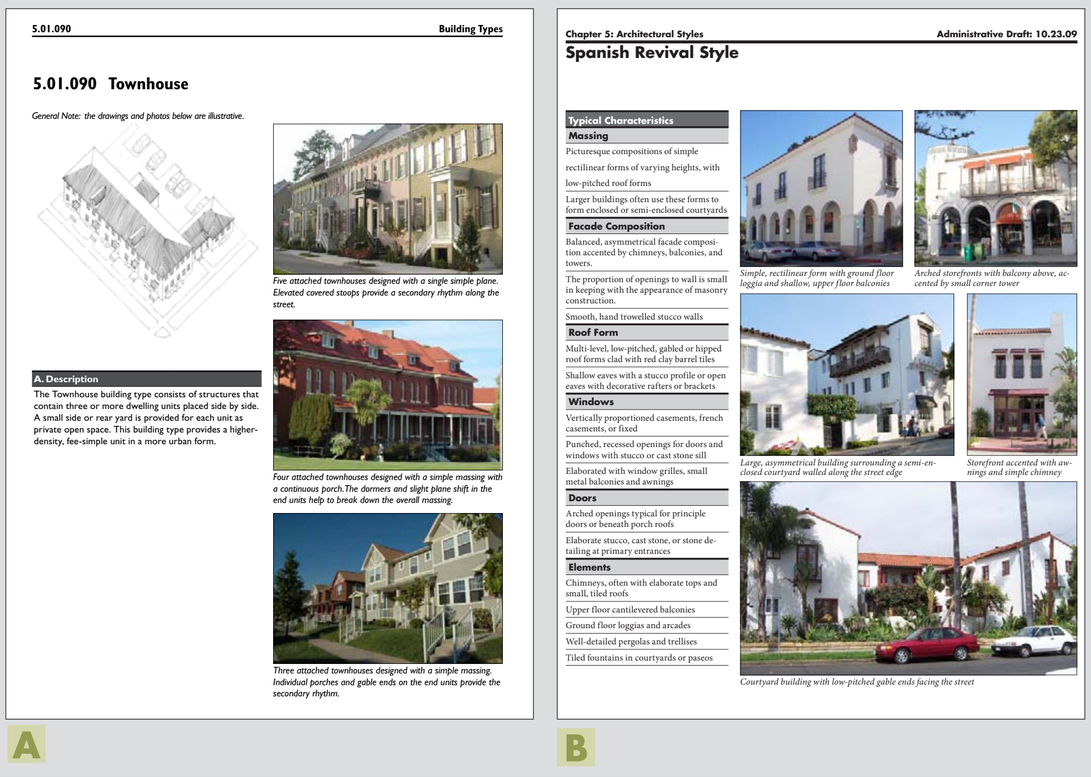
3 Streets comprise a large percentage of public space within most cities, therefore the details and dimensional parameters of the Thoroughfare component is a critical element of a FBC.



4 The Civic Space component ensures that a full menu of public spaces are included in the Code and that the scale and design approach is calibrated for the location of these spaces.



5 Frontages create an appropriate transition from the private to the public realm. This component typically includes porches, terraces, forecourts, stoops, shopfronts, galleries and arcades.



A B C

Optional Components

Supplementary components that are not mandatory for an effective code, but that can give further clarity to the intended type of place. The more of these components that you can include in your code, the more predictable the implementation will be. This list includes :

- **A Building Type Standards**
- **B Architectural Standards**
- **C Sustainability Standards (such as stormwater, alternative energy, greywater, etc.)**
- **D Landscape Standards**
- **E Green Building Standards**
- **F Signage Standards**