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PICTORIAL ZONING CODES

Description:

Often, zoning codes consist of maps and confusing legal language to describe what development and buildings are allowable and not allowable in a community. Such text, as well as the use of industry-specific terms, is not readily understood by residents and others who are not directly involved in land use or the development professions; in addition, such language can lead to arguments over the interpretation of the codes.

Across the country, a movement to reform the fashioning of zoning codes is gaining momentum, and an increasingly popular approach is to use graphics and photos in place of lengthy, repetitive text to explain the details of zoning requirements.¹ As more communities choose to use an inclusive planning process that includes broad resident involvement and active participation by multiple community sectors, a pictorial approach allows everyone involved to concentrate their efforts on the essence of the ordinance's requirements rather than spending energy and time on interpreting legal wording or the meaning of specific expressions, or on "word-smithing" language in the hopes of clearly spelling out what is to be achieved.

Reference:

¹ *Form-Based Codes: Implementing Smart Growth*. Sacramento, CA: Local Government Commission.

Benefits:

For residents:

- Pictorial zoning codes are more democratic instruments:
 - They are more readily understood by individuals who are not familiar with the language of the land use and development professions, and
 - Pictures and graphs are less technical and easier for the lay public to readily understand, thereby encouraging the public to become more involved in the planning efforts and development projects in their communities.

For the community:

- A pictorial zoning approach is particularly well-suited to form-based codes (see Form-Based Codes in the Resource Manual), as the physical form and arrangement of buildings and other public amenities can be more easily conveyed through a picture or a graph.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- Municipal planning officials and legal staff often prefer the more familiar, more traditional, technical approach to zoning.

Resource—examples and ordinances:

- City Council—Downtown Action Team (2000), *Downtown 2010 Sector Development Plan*. Albuquerque, NM: City of Albuquerque, Planning Department, Downtown Action Team.
<http://www.cabq.gov/planning/publications/down2010/preface.pdf>.
- Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (2001), *Onondaga County Settlement Plan*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse-Onondaga Planning Agency.
<http://syracusehenandnow.org/SettlementPlan/SettlementPlan.htm>.
<http://www.esf.edu/la/resources/TNDCode/TNTCode.PDF>.

Resource—written and web:

- *Form-Based Codes: Implementing Smart Growth*. Sacramento, CA: Local Government Commission.
http://www.lgc.org/freepub/docs/community_design/fact_sheets/form_based_codes.pdf.
- Thomas Comitta Associates (March 16, 2010), "Evolution of Form-Based Code," *Planning and Development*. <http://www.comitta.com/blog/?p=10>.