



# News from Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc.

February 2009



**Planning  
Communities  
& Transportation  
Systems**

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## **More Information on Form-Based Codes**

### Form-Based Code Institute

## **Awards & Honors**

On February 17, the **Charter Township of White Lake** presented David Birchler with a **Special Tribute** to celebrate the 20-year anniversary of Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc., noting that "after 12 years of faithful & dedicated service to the citizens of White Lake Township, Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc. has lived up to and exceeded our expectations."

## **Land Use and Economic Development**

As communities struggle to retain tax revenues and maintain essential services, reconfiguring zoning codes may not come to mind as a top priority. However, communities should consider how their built and natural environments function as an economic development tool. The relationship between single-family homes, schools, grocery stores, office buildings and parks impacts safety, transportation and the environment. The development pattern of a community affects its identity and quality of life—a crucial factor in the decision-making process for business location.

### **Do zoning regulations help create livable communities?**

Over the last few years, land use planners have examined the impact of zoning regulations on how communities function. The purpose of conventional "Euclidian" zoning is to separate uses from each other to avoid conflicts. The typical community zoning map illustrates, with colored shapes, the use districts. The text of the use districts lists the uses allowed in designated areas. Thus, residential areas are separated by level of density and from commercial and industrial uses. The results of such zoning have been, in many cases, largely forgettable communities with cookie-cutter businesses in which the automobile is an absolute necessity.



### **How do form-based codes differ from traditional zoning regulations?**

Form-based codes are a fairly new tool in planning. These codes are based on the idea that the form of the building and related elements should be a higher priority than the use within the building. Such codes consider the context of development--



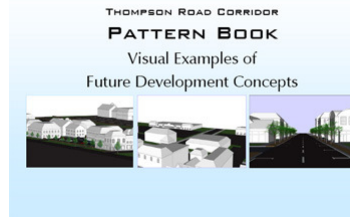
individual buildings and their relationship to each other and to the public realm. They are typically filled with graphics and illustrations, rather than text. Most form-based codes encourage quality building design and materials, promote a mix of uses within a building, and foster pedestrian-oriented development. They require significant pre-planning and are generally more prescriptive in the regulatory approach.

**Where to begin?** The transformation of an existing "Euclidean" zoning code into a code that is more form-based does not happen overnight and will not immediately result in improved development. Establishing the community's values, identity and goals for the future is an important first step. With a clear vision, the community can examine its existing commercial corridors, residential areas and civic spaces on the basis of quality and efficiency as well as the impact of existing land use on the environment, transportation and economic development. The community should also consider how insufficient or failing infrastructure impacts land use and the quality of development.

## Did You Know?

**David Birchler's** band, The Paisley Fogg, performs at fundraisers and venues throughout Michigan, including municipal parks, bandshells, and festivals. The six-person band features Dave, two of his brothers plus three friends. They specialize in performing 1960's rock and roll. For more information, go to [The Paisley Fogg Web Site](#).

**Rod Arroyo** recently wrote and designed three books featuring his photography. Each book features a unique location in southeast Michigan: Birmingham, Royal Oak, and Northville's Mill Race Historical Village. For more information go to [Rod Arroyo's Photography Web Site](#).



## **Is there a better pattern for**

**development?** Comparing the current land use pattern with the community vision will shed light on where improvements are needed and where opportunities exist to implement the vision. Communicating these opportunities can be challenging, especially when they take the form of land use regulations. Using graphics that illustrate

such opportunities is a beneficial tool in creating land use policies and rules. Graphics also visually portray development patterns and techniques that the community desires.

A pattern book is a unique planning document that examines building forms and architectural details in the context of the community. It suggests, on a street by street basis, if desired, the kind of building form that would achieve the desired community identity. It makes recommendations on the built environment, including open space, that can provide the basis for additional land use regulations and guidelines, such as a form-based code. It can also be used as a foundation for infrastructure and transportation plans.

**Development codes for the future.** Not all communities will need form-based codes to implement their vision as illustrated in the pattern book. Of those that do choose form-based codes, most will not require this approach for all geographic areas of the community. For example, existing areas developed as single-family residential neighborhoods will not likely benefit from such codes. Form-based codes represent a new way of thinking about the land use puzzle. In today's economy, communities must consider how the puzzle pieces (elements in the built and natural environment) can work together to increase local opportunities for economic development and preservation of community character.

**Top photo credit:** [www.newurbanism.org](http://www.newurbanism.org)

**Middle photo** - from the City of Rochester Draft Form-Based Code, prepared by Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc.

**Bottom photo** - from the recently completed Pattern Book for the Thompson Road Corridor in Fenton Township, prepared by Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc.

**We'd love to hear from you!** If you would like more information on the above articles, or if you have any other planning or traffic-related questions, please feel free to contact us. Our email addresses are our first initial and last name, followed by [@birchlerarroyo.com](mailto:@birchlerarroyo.com). Our main phone number is 248.423.1776. Extensions are noted below:

Rod Arroyo x 11 | Jill Bahm x 16 | Rebecca Bessey x 15 | David Birchler x 12 |  
David Campbell x 13 | Michele Ciscon x 24 | Stacey Dogonski x 10 | Sheila Starks x 21 |  
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