



# Zoning: Use-Based vs. Form-Based Zoning

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A Deeper Dive into Structure, Design, and Impact

# Introduction to Zoning

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- Zoning is essential to city planning.
- It governs land use, design, and development patterns.
- Plays a critical role in economic growth and quality of life.

# Historical Background of Zoning

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- First zoning laws emerged in early 20th century.
- 1926 Supreme Court case *Euclid v. Ambler* set precedent.
- Urban sprawl and suburban development influenced use-based zoning.



# Basic Types of Zoning

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- Use-Based  
(Euclidean) Zoning



- Form-Based  
Zoning



- Performance  
Zoning



- Incentive Zoning

## Use-Based (Euclidean) Zoning

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- The most traditional and widely used form.

- Separates land uses into categories: residential, commercial, industrial.

- Simplifies regulation but can lead to urban sprawl.

- Strict separation can reduce walkability and mixed-use potential.



## Form-Based Zoning

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- Focuses on the built environment's physical form.
- Encourages mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly communities.
- Designs public spaces and street interactions intentionally.
- Popular in downtown revitalization and historic preservation.





# Performance Zoning

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- Regulates the effects or impacts of land use rather than the use itself.
- Measures include traffic, noise, and environmental output.
- Allows flexibility as long as performance standards are met.
- Often used in industrial or environmentally sensitive areas.

# Incentive Zoning

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- Grants developers benefits like increased density or height in exchange for public amenities.
- Incentives can include affordable housing, open space, or infrastructure improvements.
- Balances private development with community benefits.
- Often used in urban areas to encourage desired outcomes.







# Use-Based Zoning: How It Works

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- Zoning map assigns categories to parcels.
- Each zone has specific permitted and conditional uses.
- Helps prevent land use conflicts but can hinder innovation.

## Use-Based Zoning: Pros and Cons

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- Pros: Predictability, simplicity, neighborhood protection.
- Cons: Rigid, segregates land uses, discourages mixed-use.



# How Form-Based Zoning Works

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- Form-based codes use physical form—rather than land use—as the primary organizing principle.
- A regulating plan replaces the zoning map and guides building placement.
- Building form standards control height, frontage, and massing.
- Streetscape standards define sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, and public spaces.
- Focus is on the relationship between buildings and the public realm, not just the building use.
- Promotes mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods with predictable physical outcomes.



# Form- Based Zoning: Pros and Cons



## Pros:

Urban revitalization,  
flexibility, design  
consistency.



## Cons:

Requires more  
planning, complex to  
enforce.

# Why Communities Shift to Form-Based Codes

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Revitalize

Revitalize declining downtowns.

Encourage

Encourage walkable, vibrant urban cores.

Support

Support economic development and sense of place.

# Case Study: Downtown Revitalization

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MANY SMALL TOWNS AND CITIES ARE SHIFTING TO FORM-BASED ZONING.



FOCUS IS ON REACTIVATING MAIN STREETS AND IMPROVING PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE.



MIXED-USE BUILDINGS COMBINE RESIDENTIAL, RETAIL, AND CIVIC SPACES.



# Form- Based in Practice: Key Tools



- Regulating Plan:  
replaces zoning map.



- Building Form  
Standards: replaces  
height/setback tables.



- Street Standards:  
integrate design and  
transportation.

# Use-Based in Practice: Limitations

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Hard to adapt to  
changing  
demographics and  
market demands.

Can discourage  
investment in older  
neighborhoods.

Promotes car  
dependency and  
infrastructure  
sprawl.

# Community Involvement in Zoning

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- Form-based zoning often involves more public engagement.
- Workshops and visual preference surveys are common.
- Helps tailor codes to local values and identity.



An isometric illustration of a city grid with various buildings, streets, and green spaces. The image is dark and serves as a background for the text.

# Blended Zoning Approaches

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- Many cities adopt hybrid systems.
- Use-based with form-based overlays.
- Allows flexibility while preserving core zoning structure.

# Impact on Economic Development



FORM-BASED ZONING  
CAN ATTRACT BUSINESSES  
TO URBAN CORES.



ENHANCES AESTHETIC  
APPEAL AND FOOT  
TRAFFIC.



SUPPORTS LOCAL  
ECONOMY AND TOURISM.

Local  
Example  
s of  
Form-  
Based  
Codes –  
City of  
Niles

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NILES CITY ESTABLISHED THE  
11TH STREET OVERLAY DISTRICT  
THAT HAS SOME FORM-BASED  
ELEMENTS.

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THE INTENT OF THAT DISTRICT IS TO:

A. IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN AND VEHICLE  
TRAFFIC SAFETY, ACCESS, AND CIRCULATION.

B. ENHANCE THE VISUAL AESTHETICS  
THROUGH IMPROVED LANDSCAPING,  
SIGNAGE, AND LIGHTING.

C. ENRICH THE COMMERCIAL CHARACTER OF  
THE CORRIDOR VIA BUILDING FAÇADE  
STANDARDS THAT SUPPORT BOTH  
UNIFORMITY AND CREATIVITY.

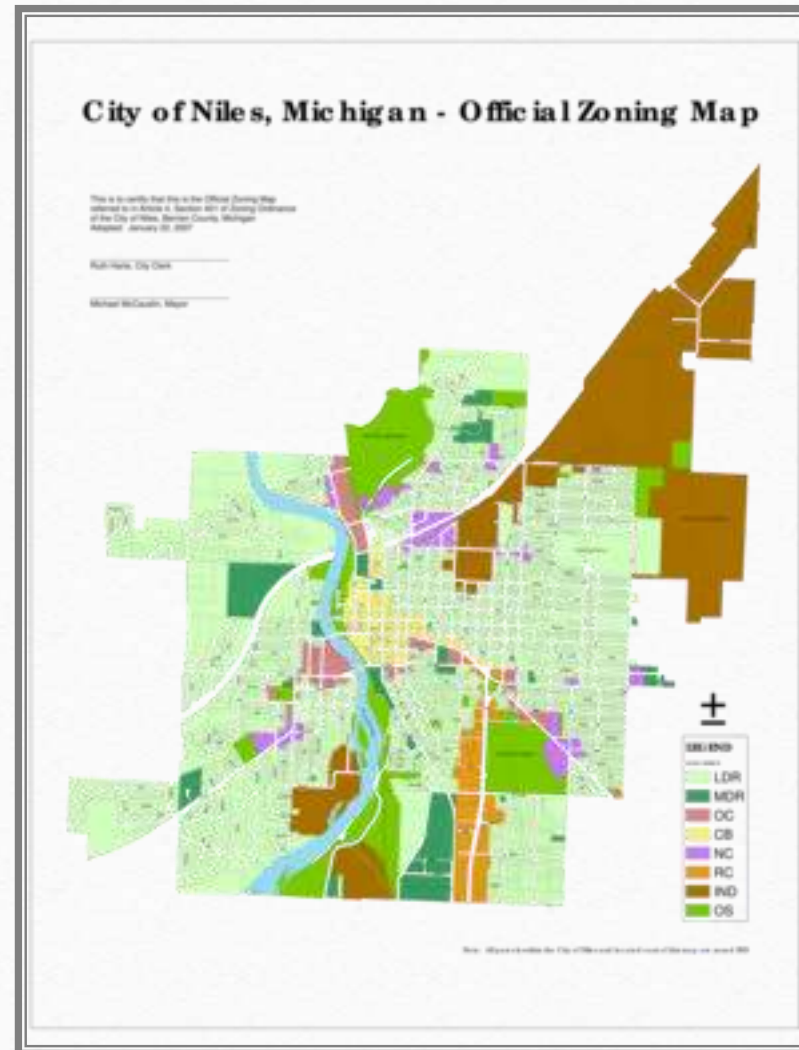
D. REDUCE IMPERVIOUS SURFACES AND STORM  
WATER RUNOFF WHILE IMPROVING THE  
USAGE AND EFFICIENCY OF PARKING AREAS.”

(CITY OF NILES ZONING ORDINANCE, ARTICLE  
511)



# Niles, Michigan Zoning Map

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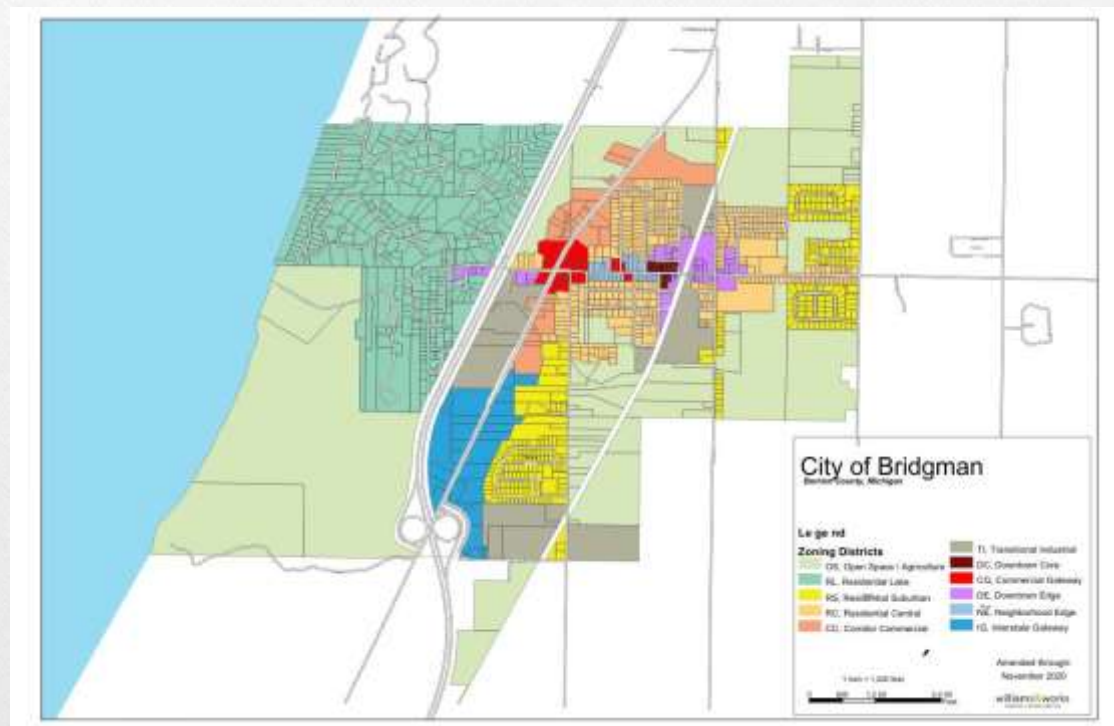
# Local Examples of Form-Based Codes – City of Bridgman

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Several zoning districts are considered “form generating”

- Downtown Core
- Downtown Edge
- Commercial Gateway
- Neighborhood Edge

# City of Bridgman Zoning Map





# Local Examples of Form-Based Codes – City of Dowagiac

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## Form-based elements in some districts like the Central Business District

Any side of a building facing a public road shall be:

1. Comprised of at least thirty (30%) percent windows on each floor.
2. Comprised of at least fifty percent (50%) of the following materials for the remaining portions of the building:
  - a. Brick
  - b. Decorative concrete block
  - c. Cut stone
  - d. Horizontal clapboard siding
  - e. Commercial grade horizontal vinyl siding (at least .44 gauge.)
3. In no case shall vertical siding, sheet metal, cement board, or Efface be considered an acceptable building cover.”

City of Dowagiac Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 10



### City of Dowagiac Zoning Map

5/30/2025, 10:53:17 AM

**Zoning**

- O-3 Office Symple
- R-1 Residential
- R-2 Residential
- R-3 Multi-Family Residential
- C-1 Neighborhood Business
- C-2 Central Business
- C-3 General Business
- I-1 Light Industrial
- I-2 Heavy Industrial
- I-3 Industrial Park
- Planned Unit Development
- Buildings
- Opportunity Zone
- City Boundary
- Parcels

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 1.0 2.0 3.0 4.0 5.0 6.0 7.0 8.0 9.0 10.0 11.0 12.0 13.0 14.0 15.0 16.0 17.0 18.0 19.0 20.0 21.0 22.0 23.0 24.0 25.0 26.0 27.0 28.0 29.0 30.0 31.0 32.0 33.0 34.0 35.0 36.0 37.0 38.0 39.0 40.0 41.0 42.0 43.0 44.0 45.0 46.0 47.0 48.0 49.0 50.0 51.0 52.0 53.0 54.0 55.0 56.0 57.0 58.0 59.0 60.0 61.0 62.0 63.0 64.0 65.0 66.0 67.0 68.0 69.0 70.0 71.0 72.0 73.0 74.0 75.0 76.0 77.0 78.0 79.0 80.0 81.0 82.0 83.0 84.0 85.0 86.0 87.0 88.0 89.0 90.0 91.0 92.0 93.0 94.0 95.0 96.0 97.0 98.0 99.0 100.0

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An aerial photograph of a dense urban area, likely New York City, showing numerous skyscrapers and buildings. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey layer to make the text legible.

# Key Takeaways

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- - Use-Based: Good for managing basic land use.
- - Form-Based: Better for walkable, mixed-use, urban design.
- - Blended approaches are increasingly popular.

# Final Thoughts

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- Zoning is a powerful tool for shaping community futures.
- Form-based zoning offers tools to rejuvenate downtowns.
- Public participation is critical for successful implementation.

# Questions and Discussion

- After a bit more information how do you view the task, we have ahead of us?
- Would form-based zoning and use based zoning hybrid code work best for Buchanan?
- How do we find a happy medium?