

Award-winning codes in Livermore, California, and Lee County, Florida

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New Urban Network

This year's winners of the Driehaus Form-Based Codes Awards are the [Development Code Rewrite of Livermore, California](#), an 81,000-population city at the eastern edge of the San Francisco Bay Area, and the [Compact Communities Code of Lee County](#), Florida, a county that encompasses Fort Myers, Cape Coral, and other communities.

The Livermore rewrite nestles a form-based code (FBC) into a larger development code overhaul, guiding a city that has sprawled over the years. The FBC applies to higher-density residential areas that are, or could easily become, walkable, compact neighborhoods. In addition, the form-based code is “designed to expand to all walkable areas — as the City is ready,” the [Form-Based Codes Institute](#) said in announcing the awards.

The FBCI said of the mixture of code types: “the overall effect is an elegant development regulation that integrates FBC with conventional zoning... not muddled hybrid code.” The aim is first to make the changes that are easiest and most efficient to complete, and then move on to more difficult challenges once some momentum has been generated.

The form-based code includes one T3 (suburban) and four modified T4 (general urban) [Transect zones](#), with the hope that T5 (center) and T6 (core) zones will be instituted once density is massed. The FBC establishes frontage standards with porch, stoop, forecourt, shopfront, and gallery requirements as well as building and street typologies. Through a charrette process, Livermore's code writers illustrated alternative scenarios, showing how strip malls might be converted into main street shopping areas and how housing types might change under different code arrangements.

Lee County's code was described by the jurors — including academics and practitioners from the US and abroad — as a “unique and ground-breaking type of Form-Based Code. It offers administrative approval of new communities at the specified sites and is also a zoning overlay that can be applied to infill sites at the initiative of individual landowners.”

The code also includes a provision for [Transferable Development Rights](#) (TDR), which allows for higher-density development in “receiving areas” and which protects farmland and open space in the “sending areas.” The code seeks to reform the “extreme sprawl” that characterizes current development in the region; it is hoped that the code will serve as model for other nearby jurisdictions.

The code focuses primarily on standards for lots, blocks, buildings, and streets that will need only administrative approval. It also provides means for developers to propose plans that can be certified as meeting the conceptual plan requirements.

The primary goal — in a county with about 500,000 residents spread over approximately 1,200 square miles — is to allow landowners to build new housing without displacing farming. This is achieved by making traditional neighborhood development (TND) the “default development pattern, allowed ‘by right.’” Density bonuses are also provided to encourage landowners to protect the most sensitive and productive open space.

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