

# Narberth Borough Form Based Code March Workshop

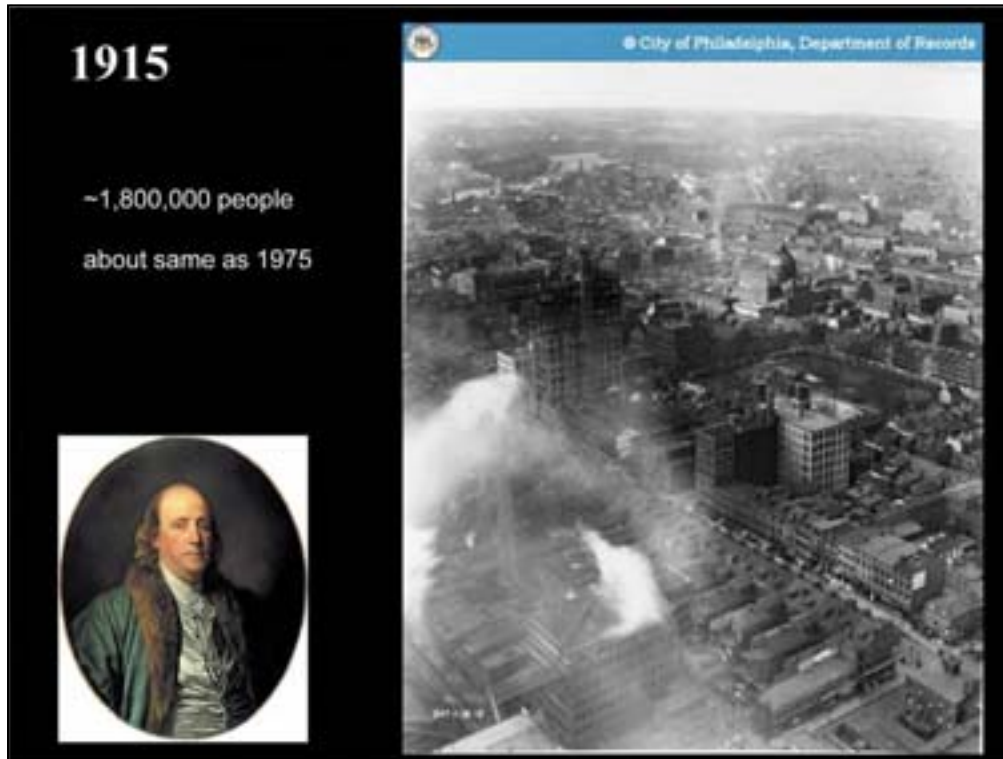




winter has been warm so we've taken a lot of photos.



never mind the man behind the curtain. It's time for a little zoning history and explain the plan we are following.



View from City Hall towards what would become Ben Franklin Parkway ca. 1915. Zoning as we know it began around this time (New York City, Berkeley, CA), when cities were densely populated places of heavy industry. Philadelphia was poised to grow by another ~400,000 to its peak in 1950. Cities and the people that lived in them dealt with the effects of early industrial manufacturing. Pollution, no access to green spaces, overcrowding, etc.

## Euclid vs Ambler

not the Greek mathematician

a village near Cleveland

not the town in Montgomery County

a realty company representing heavy industry

1926



The landmark US Supreme Court case forever ordained the term Euclidian zoning as a means to regulate land use on private lands provided the reasons were rational. The concept was protecting health safety and welfare by separating non compatible uses such as factories and homes. The Court has never heard a case to overturn Euclid vs Ambler. It set in motion the adoption of zoning codes in every major city (except Houston), based upon the spatial segregation of uses.



Ambler, PA – here you see the Wissahickon Creek and the asbestos manufacturing facility that operated for many decades. A reminder of the times in which zoning came into being and some of the good reasons behind separating uses.



Conshohocken, PA – Foundries up and down the Schuylkill Valley turned ore and coal into iron and steel. In the 1920s the steel we used came from places like Pittsburgh, Phoenixville, Pottstown, Coatesville, and Conshohocken. Nowadays heavy industries like steel have been outsourced to Asia and Latin America. We currently don't live with heavy industry the same way our parents and grandparents did.



Something happens. History guides American development in new directions. No one could have foretold the events of 1933-1945. After the war America's homeland was undamaged. Europe and Japan were utterly destroyed. Pent up demand from a decade of depression, more than four million service men returning to civilian life, the 30 year mortgage, and a legacy of dirty industrial cities primed the American economy for a new type of economic expansion, the likes of which had never occurred in the history of the world. The formation of the modern private corporation as we know it today (General Motors). Economic growth exploded as did population. It created a new kind of living arrangement on the landscape. The economic expansion lasted until about the early 1970s.





Housing construction took off and industry abetted the transformation by standardizing designs, processes, and outcomes. Eager homeowners left cities in droves for greener pastures in single use residential areas of larger lots and homes. Everybody had a nice yard to mow and grill in. This worked since there were enough well paying jobs for the middle class to expand, buy homes and a car. Perpetually low fuel prices helped too. At war's end the US was the world's largest producer of oil. Cheap fuel lasted a long time. Adjusted for inflation, gasoline was actually cheaper in the 1990s than at any other time in history.



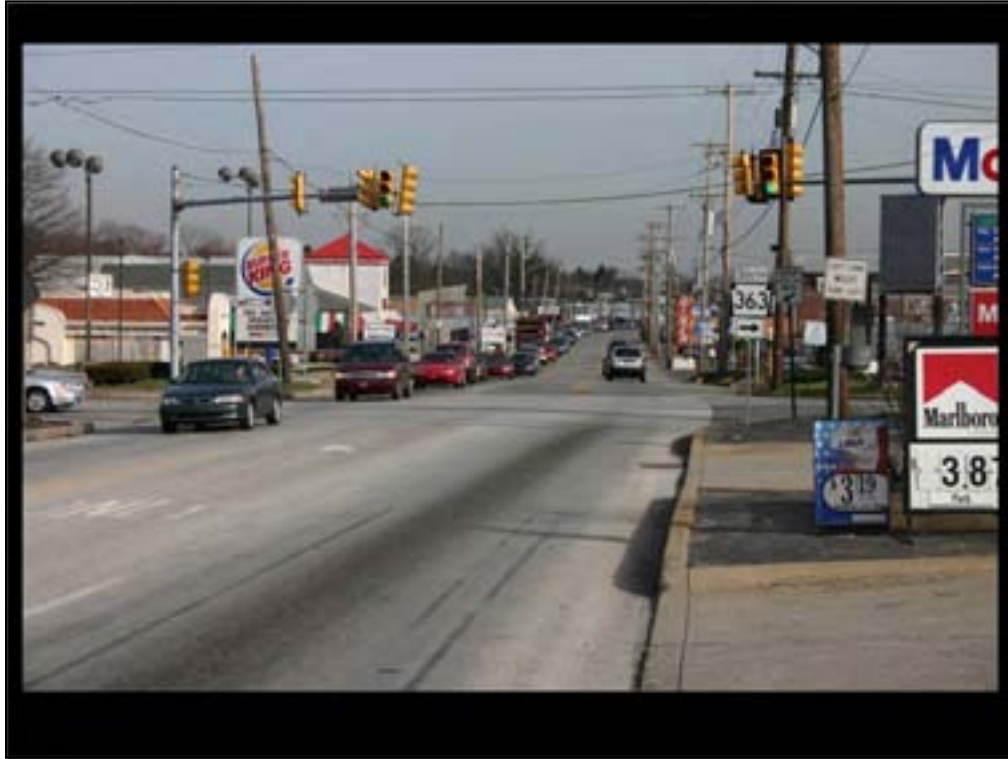
Euclidian zoning, born in the industrial pre-war cities, was applied to the new living arrangement. Uses were spatially separated, sometimes great distances. Cheap fuel and jobs made it possible for people to live this way. The pattern took hold, even though the spatial arrangement started to fly apart. Consumption of green space and greater entropy of urban fabric was the result. People started to notice some problems like – Where did the farms go? Why am I always sitting in traffic? It costs a lot of money to extend sewer and water services, and run school districts that are so spread out.



Nevertheless, the pattern kept functioning and growing. A new term was coined - suburban sprawl. Euclidian Zoning was a (not the only) guilty party. Regulations about how land was to be used are made by local governments and they weren't helping to create well functioning communities that were easy to get around in and efficient. Many codes actually forbade the types of mixed use development that is at the heart of smart growth ideas.




Ridge Pike in Lower Providence Township. American culture adapted to the new reality.




Ridge Pike in 2006. Planning always has one foot in the past and one in the future. The present is a narrow divide between the two that we make the best judgments we can about the destiny of geo-political and macro economic trends and their interpretation at the local level. How should the living arrangement be designed? Euclidian Zoning is silent on this issue.

# New Urbanism to the Rescue



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CITY PLANNING

Between 1980 and 2000, a movement of architects, land planners, landscape architects, developers, etc coalesced around the limitations of Euclidian Zoning in the context of post-industrial America. We were no longer running from cities and factories, but instead had created new difficulties by virtue of the choices we made. The present living arrangement is very energy intensive and is reaching its estimated useful life span. A lot of money is needed to maintain infrastructure; the new urbanists ask is there is a better pattern to follow? In 1990 the Congress for New Urbanism is founded and in 2000 the first version of its model zoning ordinance (The Smart Code) is published.

# The Smart Code Model Ordinance

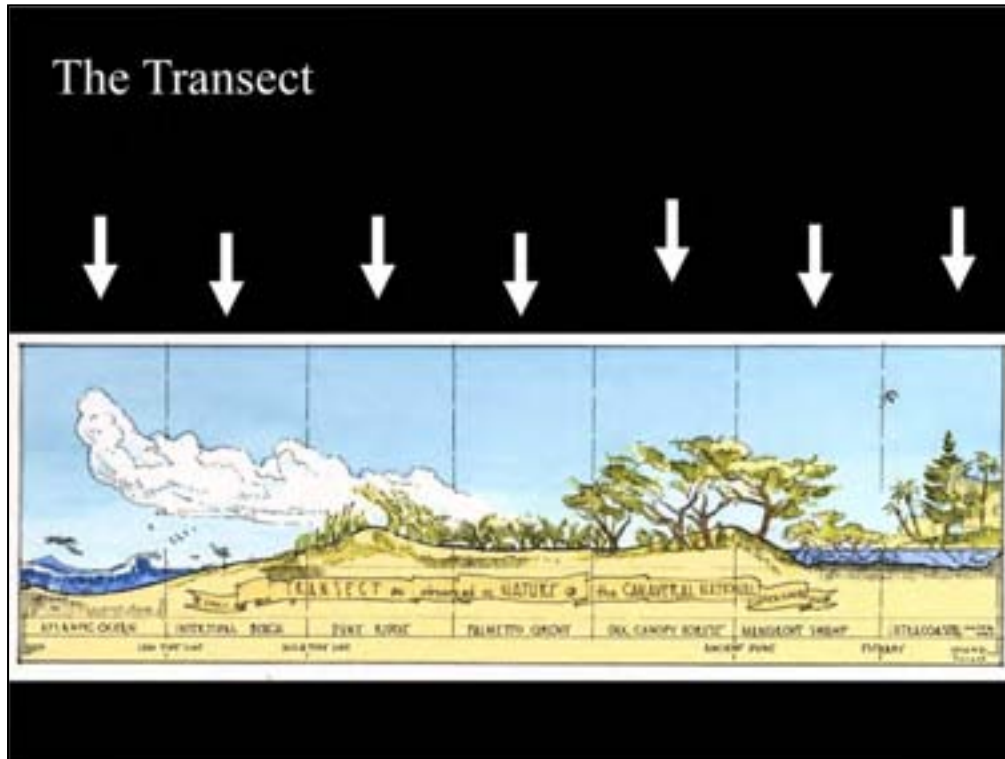
yes

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Walkable Urban Form	*	*				
Walkable Urban Form Edge Extension		*	*			
Walkable Urban Form Infill		*	*			
Walkable Urban Form Infill			*	*		*
Walkable Urban Form Infill			*	*	*	*

no



We'll be following the main tenets of the smart code in our process over the next few months. A detailed explanation will take time. The main idea is to restore a walkable urban design where densities and land uses are most appropriate. The smart code is a form based code which regulates the design of buildings of public spaces. The Smart Code is smart growth since it helps support green space protection by directing development to areas of existing infrastructure. Smart Code and form based code means the same thing.



The work for tonight centers around a very important concept of form-based codes – the transect. The transect is the organizing principle behind form based codes – a theory for guiding the work of building a form based code. A transect is an imaginary line on the landscape viewed in section detail. As you move from one end of the transect to another natural conditions change, like in the shore community pictured above. In each zone certain plants and animals are adapted and thrive due to the conditions of light, moisture, soil, wind, and wave action. When you determine the geography of a form based code you are declaring the unique conditions that exist in certain locations and creating design standards for the types of buildings appropriate in each zone.





This is an intersection of everyone's work from February when we talked about the character of Narberth's communities. You came up with 5 zones (red, green, blue, purple, and the blue line around the town center area). This rough draft of the geography of code declares the zones of your transect. Downtown (purple) you expect a certain look, intensity, and activity whereas in a red area, the community is quite different and needs different standards. Note that transitions are not always along a line as depicted by the transect. That's ok.



Tonight you are working in groups of four to five people. Each group has 50 photographs that should be sorted into one of the five categories from the community character map. Do the sorting first. Once you are done sorting take a minute or two to talk in your group and comment on the photo- please note your comments with the markers I provided. Above is a picture of townhouses in West Philly with an attached parking structure in the rear and a surface parking area. I don't see a mix of uses going on but it seems like a very dense style of development. The garage seems awfully big so it must be serving more than just the homes pictured. Where would I need dense housing and a lot of extra parking?



I chose to put this into our town transition area (the blue line around our town center). Seems like it wouldn't fit in a red zone. You might be able to do this in our green zone, but our discussions of density and intensity for that area make me think this might be too much for that part of town. Town center isn't a good fit either because I don't see any retail or office on the ground floor, even though the scale of the building might work. Montgomery Ave seems like not a good fit either since the building is so close to the busy road. I like that the front façade is broken up but I don't like the fake features such as the third floor faux balcony. The stoop is awkward and would not be a good place to hang out or plant some flowers. The building needs a more inviting frontage with some green in it. I like that the parking is hidden behind the buildings. I like the planted buffer between the sidewalk and parking area, but the plant palette is lame. Street trees are awesome, they will look really nice ten years from now. The fence between the parking area and sidewalk is too tall. I'd prefer it to be about 36" tall max. I wonder too about those parking lot lights- I would rather they were closer to the ground and completely shielded from view. Could be awfully bright for those folks next door trying to sleep.

## Tonight's Workshop Task

1. Sort the photos into the categories of the map
2. Comment on the design features you like/ dislike
3. Present sample of findings



You'll get to work in groups and present your findings at the end. Begin...