

## DESIGN and FORM

*Plan Warrenton 2040* refers to a form-based approach for new and infill development. It states that visual surveys, public workshops and electronic voting were used to determine the preferred architecture and streetscapes for the Character Districts. The Plan calls for amendment of the zoning ordinance to specify uses, lot, and building regulations (height, form, setback, and street frontage) for each District.

### WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS ABOUT DESIGN and FORM?

#### 1) Creating the Design Standards:

- The Plan talks about form-based design, but never says the town will use a "Form-Based Code" with the design considerations, training and safeguards recommended by the Form-Based Code Institute.
- It seems that the template and standards for the various Character Districts for form, height, setback and street frontage have already been determined.
- The recommended building heights (4-7 stories) are not in keeping with the scale and character of Warrenton. The vast majority of workshop participants voted for the smallest building heights presented to them (2-3 stories).
- Form-based design works where there is a strong community vision about where and how it would be used, the impacts, and the process. Neighborhood input in developing the code is a necessary key to success.
- Drafting enforceable form-based design requires specialized training. Concepts must be drawn in a precise manner showing measurements with explanatory captions that make the meaning of graphics clear. The Town has no one with form-based code background.

#### 2) Theory vs Reality--When Form-Based Design Doesn't Work:

Reliance on form-based design that focuses more on building exteriors than interior use can result in much higher densities, reduced citizen input, and a lopsided land use mix, especially when coupled with by-right implementation.

- Towns may shy away from performing build-out analyses when they adopt mixed use form-based design (*Plan Warrenton 2040* is a case in point) because it is not clear how many units could actually be built, and because the ordinance could result in so much growth that it would not receive public support.
- By-right implementation of mixed use development instead of the traditional rezoning process removes meaningful citizen input and mitigation of developer impacts.

- The market (the developers) determines the land use. The town loses control over relative quantities of Commercial, Industrial and Residential and ends up with a preponderance of whatever happens to be selling -- right now that is residential.
- Often times mandated ground floor commercial space goes unoccupied-- too inflexible to be adapted for specific uses or incompatible with the residential uses above-- stripping the area of the vitality mixed use was hoping to create.
- Design goals are not realized because the design ordinances contain broad exceptions.
- Intense uses do not integrate well if placed next to a quiet residential neighborhood.

**WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING:**

1. Lower the suggested building heights.
2. Form-based requirements must not be a substitute for public process. Density increases and mixed uses should still be implemented through rezoning or special exception.
3. If the town does allow mixed use by-right, a true Form-Based Code should be developed.
4. Staff should be specifically trained in the adoption and administration of form-based design.
5. Allow residents and business owners to take part in development of the code. Each code would also be subject to public hearing as part of its adoption.
6. Any form-based ordinance drafted should be reviewed by The Form-Based Codes Institute.
7. Form-based designs should also include:
  - Architectural standards for external materials and quality.
  - Landscaping standards to address impacts on public spaces (*e.g.*, parking lot screening and shading, sight lines, unobstructed pedestrian movements).
  - Signage standards for sizes, materials, illumination, and placement.
  - Environmental resource standards for issues such as storm water drainage and infiltration, slope development, tree protection, solar access.
8. Waivers should only be allowed for very specific reasons that serve a public benefit or require substantial mitigation. Granting of waivers should be subject to public hearing.
9. Create a form-based code advisory group that involves the community for each application of the code. Arlington has done this as part of their application approval process.