

Proposed FBC Amendments/Interpretations

Form Based Code

Neighborhoods Form Based Code

Map Amendment _____

Text Amendment

Topic: Form Based Code Architecture

Issues:

Concerns have been raised regarding Architectural Standards and corresponding Building Envelope Standards resulting in similar building designs among built and approved Form Based Code projects.

1. Is the extent/nature of prescriptive regulations found in the FBC partially responsible for a homogenous façade design among those facades built along the Required Building Line?
2. Could the FBC be improved to ensure greater architectural diversity?

Study Purpose:

To verify if any changes are necessary to the FBC/N-FBC in order to achieve more architectural diversity along the Columbia Pike corridor with future FBC buildings resulting in high quality designs and materials.

FBC References:

- A. Commercial Form Based Code:
 1. Section IV. Building Envelope Standards
 2. Section VI. Architectural Standards
 3. Section VII. Definitions
- B. Neighborhoods Form Based Code:
 1. Part 4. Building Envelope Standards
 2. Part 6. Architectural Standards
 3. Part 10. Definitions

Staff Analysis

1. Background

Building design and architectural treatment of facades is regulated by a combination of standards found in multiple sections of each Form Based Code. Collectively, their purpose is to provide a clear vision for the built environment through the establishment of the building envelope and the use of appropriate building materials, roof treatments, fenestration, shopfronts, and signage. While some of these standards apply universally to all frontage types, some are unique to certain conditions and may vary between the Commercial FBC and its Neighborhoods counterpart. While the intent of the FBC is to allow multiple architectural styles to be built and meet the Columbia Pike vision, concerns have been raised that a traditional style is implied through certain intent statements, illustrations, and definitions. Although this issue was originally raised with the Commercial FBC, staff's analysis has

included a review of both Codes to ensure any potential changes are considered wherever necessary. To better understand the context of this review, staff also assessed approved projects in the surrounding jurisdictions and invited the development community to provide feedback on their experience with using the FBC.

2. Local and Regional Development Trends

Following an extensive review of development built in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area over the last 13 years, staff compared approved development proposals in Columbia Pike corridor to those found in surrounding jurisdictions during the same period of development when the Form Based Code became available. This research suggests that a new style of development has gained popularity and is largely representative of buildings that rely on wood-frame construction for upper stories and a concrete podium for ground floors. Certain articles on this trend identified it as “developer modern” architecture, characterized by non-specific and negligible facades that can be easily implanted into any neighborhood due to their lack of distinctiveness.

While this regional and perhaps national trend includes examples throughout Arlington County, it remains most visible along Columbia Pike due to the nature of adopted density limits which foster the wood-frame construction/concrete podium approach for buildings up to 6 stories in height. Additionally, the frequency of redevelopment approvals along this corridor has remained high since the adoption of the Form Based Code in 2003, resulting in 17 new construction projects, several of which utilized the above referenced construction method. As a result, members of the community have questioned whether a relationship exists between the prescriptive nature of the FBC and the resulting architectural trends found in a number of those projects. Research suggests that the current trends are less driven by architects or local regulations but rather are the outcome of a response by developers to increased costs in land value and the overall real estate market. Nonetheless, staff has determined certain changes to the FBC may be appropriate and could lead to improved architectural results.

3. Proposed Changes

The following summarizes staff’s recommended changes to the Commercial Code, and to a lesser degree, Neighborhoods Code. The proposed amendment addresses feedback received from the various stakeholder groups who participated in a series of architecture workshops that took place in March, May and July of 2017, as well as feedback from the development community with experience on Columbia Pike.

Recommended changes are captured in three main categories as follows:

A. Organization, Visuals, Intent Statements (Architectural Standards)

1) Organization:

- i. Re-ordering of standards will result in a clearer approach to understanding of regulations governing building design and architecture.
- ii. Most of the reorganization will affect the Commercial FBC and result in a format that closely follows the Neighborhoods FBC
- iii. Apply a consistent page layout and page spread

- 2) Introduction of Inappropriate Examples:
 - i. Additional illustrations from local and regional projects will clarify undesirable elements and architectural treatments that are considered unacceptable
 - ii. New illustrations will be introduced to further support key building design elements (i.e. façade compositions, block corners, upper-most stories, etc.)

- 3) Apply Style-Neutral Approach to Meeting the Vision:
 - i. Removal of images that convey a specific architectural style
 - ii. Revised intent statements and images will purposefully reference multiple styles and architectural treatments that can be used to meet FBC regulations

- B. Simplification of Standards and Consistency between Codes
 - 1) Reduce overly prescriptive regulations
 - i. Maximum window and doors sizes
 - ii. Certain roof details (minimum overhangs/cornice projections)
 - iii. Redundant standards (flashing/animated lighting)

 - 2) New regulations
 - i. Add new and revise several existing defined terms in order to closely follow N-FBC
 - ii. Expand BES to include a "general" section
 - iii. Complete minor technical adjustments

 - 3) Apply County-wide sign standards
 - i. Lack of consistent vision through past FBC approvals
 - ii. Replace unique FBC standards with reference to ACZO Article 13

- C. Complete and Discrete Vertical Façade Compositions and Building Placement
 - 1) Improve overall effectiveness of key regulations
 - i. Adjust prescriptive nature of façade rhythms and patterns
 - ii. Increase maximum composition lengths
 - iii. Improve transition between façade compositions

 - 2) Convert guidance in "determinations" to standard regulations
 - i. Re-locate standards to an appropriate section(s)

 - 3) Expand intent, definition, and adding new regulations to support vision
 - i. Clarify the purpose and role of façade compositions
 - ii. Ensure key defined terms are consistently utilized
 - iii. Introduce images to further clarify good/bad examples