



SEPTEMBER
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**There's
Still
Time to
Register !!**

**Southern
New England
Fall
Conference
Sept. 27th
thru
Sept. 29th**

*See Inside
for
Details*

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A Smart Approach to Land Use at CNU

by Robert E. Azar, AICP

New Urbanists have for years been critical of modern development regulation. Land use laws, they say, often conspire to create sprawl while outlawing desirable historic development patterns. A document called the SmartCode is their solution. Penned by Andrés Duany, William Wright, Sandy Sorlien, and a host of others, it is a comprehensive model ordinance that blends planning, zoning, subdivision, and design regulations into one document. Unlike previous model codes, the wonderfully elegant SmartCode tones down the legalese and provides dozens of helpful illustrations. As a "form-based" code, it describes the preferred design of neighborhoods and buildings, as opposed to the standard approach of allowing any use that is not expressly prohibited. Also, contrary to conventional zoning, the SmartCode encourages mixed-use buildings and high density developments to foster lively street life, access to transit, and a sense of place.

Calibrating the Code

The SmartCode is designed to be customized, for both new communities and infill development in existing towns. The process, called "calibration," was the topic of a session at the fourteenth annual gathering of the Congress of New Urbanism this past June in Providence. The session was a two-day "urban laboratory" that involved a team of experienced practitioners adapting the code for a neighborhood in the city's West End.

Calibrating the SmartCode is a multi-step process that can take planners, lawyers, and architects many months. It involves deliberately planning and regulating land use at several levels: the region, the community, the block, and the building. At the CNU, the session was focused on the community and block level, since our study area was so small. Though it was highly condensed, this crash course gave newcomers to the code a great hands-on introduction to a truly remarkable document, and a tantalizing sense of its power to promote livable, sustainable communities.



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