

COMMUNITY COMPARABLES BELMONT CENTER ZONING

Residents and members of the Planning Board have requested examples of other communities that have undertaken similar projects and what results have occurred so far. This report will provide specific examples where communities have undertaken codes for their centers—both where development has already occurred and where the regulations have only recently been passed or in process.

It is important to understand that Form-Based Codes are a relatively tool and even for towns that have undertaken center rezoning, as we have also stated, it takes years or decades for projects to come to fruition.

With this in mind, our research started at the most comparable level, communities with a similar population, small town centers, mostly a block or two in size, typically based on a form-based code rezoning of the area. We begin with communities that have approved the zoning and already had some projects developed.

MASSACHUSETTS

Reading, MA -Town Meeting created a 40R district downtown; since then, multiple mixed-use projects have been approved and built: **30 Haven** (4 stories over retail, 53 homes) and **The Postmark** (former post office redeveloped into ~50 condos + ground-floor commercial).



Arlington, MA - MBTA Communities overlay across village corridors

Town Meeting adopted a multifamily/mixed-use overlay (2023–24). Arlington also has concrete mixed-use main-street outcomes like **117 Broadway** (retail + 14 homes) under its existing center-district rules, showing compatibility with small-scale blocks.



Concord, MA - West Concord village design standards + Thoreau Depot rezoning

Concord has long used village-center design standards, and more recently moved center-adjacent rezoning (Thoreau Depot area) and 3A overlays to allow multifamily near rail—in other words, precedent for character-guided upzoning in a historic town center. Thoreau Depot is located along a long one block commercial area adjacent to the commuter rail station near the historic district.



Natick, MA - Natick's downtown bylaw explicitly allows mixed-use and has been refined repeatedly; projects like **Modera Natick Center (150 units)** opened steps from the rail station under this framework as well as Natick Residences (below).



Great Barrington, MA - Zoning: B3 explicitly promotes mixed-use downtown; the town also adopted North and South 40R SGODs (South Main Street). Built results: Powerhouse Square (22 condos over/along retail incl. Berkshire Food Co-op) and Windrush Commons (49 units, within the 40R SGOD, opened 2023).



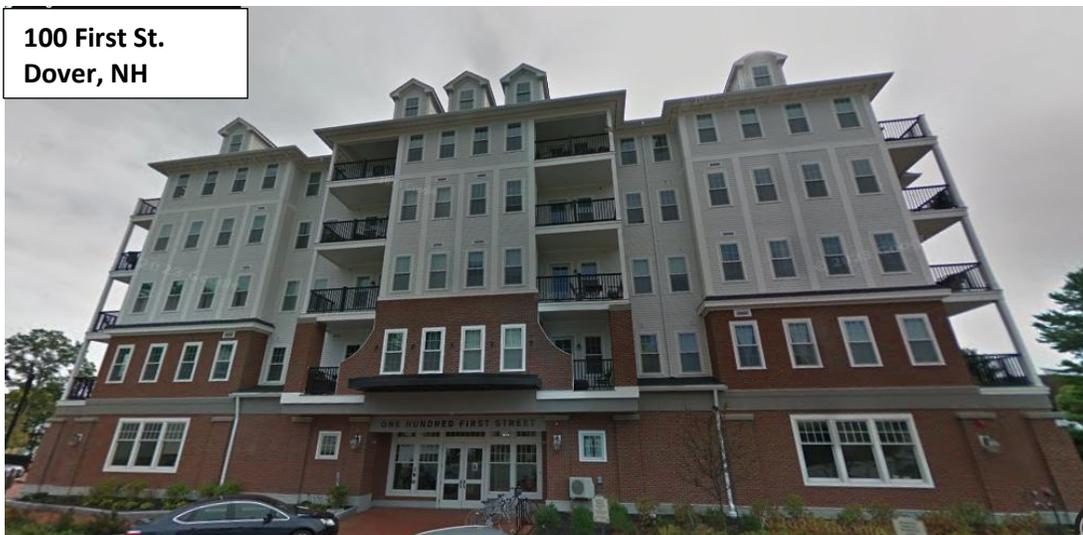
Lee, MA – 40R Smart-Growth overlay (2018). Zoning: Eagle Mill SGOD adopted; town and EEA filings confirm the overlay. Results: Phase 1 (56 units) financed 2024 and under construction; additional phases (± 43 units next) advancing—i.e., a multi-phase pipeline triggered by the overlay.

Northampton, MA (Pleasant St. downtown corridor) – Downtown-supportive code; repeated infill. Built results: LIVE 155 (70 units + retail) delivered on Pleasant St.; Northampton also has 40R districts elsewhere (Village Hill), illustrating the region’s use of SGOD tools.

Easthampton, MA (Union/Cottage St. core) – Smart-Growth design standards; mixed-use renovations. Zoning/design: 40R Design Standards encourage mixed-use reuse in the mill/main-street area; city docs and plans note multiple mixed-use renovations on/near Union St.

NEW ENGLAND

Dover, NH - Downtown Form-Based Code: Adopted FBC for the Central Business District to steer building form and streetscape quality; Dover documents cite the code as a key tool for downtown infill and mixed-use.



South Burlington, VT (City Center FBC, 2016) — City notes the FBC has “guided the approval and construction of many new buildings” in its new center.



Biddeford, ME (Downtown/Mill District reforms) — Parking reforms and pro-mixed-use policy enabled Lincoln Mill Hotel & Lofts (148 units + hotel, opened 2022) and broader Main-Street-scale resurgence.

NORTHEAST US

Beacon, NY — Main Street CMS zoning supports mixed-use; current public-sector-led TOD at the Metro-North station (\approx 265 mixed-income units + retail) demonstrates the regulatory environment is delivering scale near the core.



Kingston, NY — Citywide form-based code adopted Aug 2023 (affordability requirements, missing-middle allowed); early applications underway and it’s an award-winning code.

NATIONWIDE

Benicia, CA - Benicia's adopted form-based downtown code covers essentially one main street (First Street). City documents pair the code with built/approved infill (e.g., Harbor Walk on First and other mixed-use), and the municipal Zoning/Housing docs show the tool is still in force for downtown approvals.

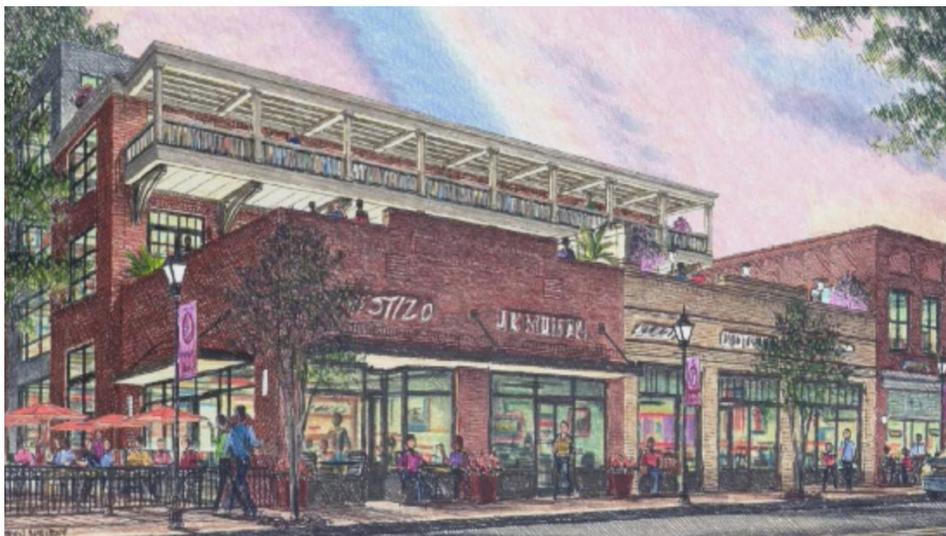


Marquette, MI - Marquette adopted two small form-based districts specifically to transform its waterfront edge directly next to the compact downtown. EPA and planning case studies point to the code's use to guide multiple waterfront redevelopments and infill along a short frontage.





Davidson, NC - Davidson's form-based "Planning Ordinance" governs building types and frontages; training materials and case summaries report "several small projects...approved" under the code, and town packets show new 3-story mixed-use on South Main/Catawba moving through the process. It's a classic one-block college-town main street scale.



Next, we will provide examples of communities that are in a similar point in the process as Belmont. There are several current, *still-in-process* efforts (various stages of drafting, hearings, or outreach) to create downtown or town-center overlay districts that use form-based codes or form-based elements, similar in spirit to Belmont's BCOD. Here are some examples:

- **Hamilton, MA – Town Center Form-Based Code**
Hamilton spent Spring 2025 in joint PB/SB workshops on a [draft Town Center FBC](#) with design guidelines. (Note: Hamilton's articles were ultimately voted on at Special Town Meeting in July 2025 for MBTA 3A, so it's now *adopted*, not pending—but the April–May 2025 materials show how a small MA town framed a center-wide FBC before the vote.) Note that some of the districts were 3A relevant and some were not.
- **Burlington, VT – planBTV Downtown Code (Article 14) – AMENDMENTS PENDING**
Not a brand-new overlay, but active *pending amendments* to the adopted downtown form code (e.g., parking setback flexibility). Shows current legislative activity on a downtown FBC. [Burlington, VT](#)

- **Jericho, VT – Village Center bylaw updates (FBC) – DRAFTS POSTED**
The town is simplifying an existing form-based code for its village center; draft amendments released May 2025. [Join in Jericho](#)
- **South Burlington, VT – City Center FBC – UPDATE IN PROCESS**
City is refreshing its adopted City Center FBC with proposed height and other updates discussed at the Planning Commission in 2025. (Again, not a brand-new overlay, but an active FBC rulemaking.) [southburlingtonvt.gov+1](#)
- **Sumner, WA – Town Center Plan & Code + new overlay – IN PROCESS**
2025 docket includes Town Center code amendments and adds a new IDEA Overlay; town-center zoning changes are under development this year. [Sumner Connects](#)
- **Petaluma, CA – Downtown Housing & Economic Opportunity Overlay – IN PROCESS**
A proposed overlay for a defined downtown area that (while not a full form-based rewrite) uses form-driven height bonuses and case-by-case approvals to shape downtown infill. [Petaluma](#)
- **New Braunfels, TX – Downtown code update to add FBC elements – IN PROCESS**
City outreach notes they are considering incorporating *form-based code elements* into downtown zoning; collecting public feedback in 2025. [New Braunfels+1](#)
- **Waco, TX – Downtown Form-Based Code – IN PROCESS (drafting)**
Project roadmap shows drafting in Spring–Summer 2025 with adoption targeted for early 2026. This is a comprehensive downtown FBC effort. [wacodowntownredevelopment.com](#)

Note that Hamilton used Utile, the firm that created Belmont’s MBTA 3A By-Law. Their By-Law also has five subdistricts like Belmont.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

The Office of Planning and Building, conducted extensive research which resulted in nearly 100 closely comparable examples of smaller communities that used a Form-Based Code or similar tool to rezone their town center for redevelopment. We selected these examples which in most cases provide new development that is not explicitly post-modernist and of a scale proposed for Belmont. Many of these examples in our wider list and the short list undertook their rezoning partially with economic development and expanding the tax base as the impetus.

While Form-Based Codes are relatively new as a zoning tool, many communities have utilized it for a range of reasons and a good number have chosen it to revitalize their town centers and main streets, expand their tax base, lean on form as an organizing principle, and do it by-right because the requirements are so exacting and specific, resulting in more predictable results.

Are there precise comparables that would be “exactly like Belmont”? Of course not, but Belmont and every city and town in the US and World is unique. But Belmont’s effort is *not* unique and mirrors the concerns and aspirations of many, many communities. To provide specific reasons why this is not unprecedented, please consider the following:

- **Main-street mixed use is standard practice**, is not a novelty, allowing housing over shops at 2–4 stories is a widely used tool to keep village centers alive.
- **Form/character-based standards are mainstream** and actually *tighten* control over massing, frontage, and materials compared with old, use-only, conventional/Euclidean zoning.

- **By-right with clear standards does not mean anything goes**, it replaces unpredictable Special Permits with predictable rules, findings, and enforceable conditions.
- **Robust review remains** including site plan review, peer review (engineer/traffic/geo-tech), public meetings, and staff memos are all typical and effective.
- **Design safeguards are the norm** with build-to lines, stepbacks, height caps, transparency, roof-equipment screening, lighting cutoffs, etc.
- **Parking modernization is common** that employs shared/managed parking, EV readiness, and TDM reduce spillover without overbuilding asphalt.
- **Economic-development purpose is routine** where upper-floor housing stabilizes ground-floor retail and **broadens the commercial tax base**.
- **It's incremental, not explosive**, proceeding one to two projects at a time, on existing lots, within strict envelopes; the market, not zoning text, sets the pace.
- **Historic and small-town character are protected** in many cases using façade retention, compatible materials, and frontage types guide how (not whether) change occurs.
- **Traffic is mitigated, not ignored** with standard tools that include traffic impact study thresholds, safety fixes, sight-line/corner-visibility checks, and TDM commitments.
- **Construction impacts are managed**: Construction Management Plans (routes, hours, dust/noise, vibration monitoring) are standard conditions.
- **Infrastructure and stormwater are addressed** through DEP compliance, LID/green infra, O&M plans, and performance securities are commonplace.
- **Rules/regulations carry the checklists** with detailed submittals live in Planning Board Rules (so they can be updated) while the bylaw stays concise.
- **Overlays are typically opt-in** so base district rights remain; the overlay offers a predictable path if you meet higher design/public-realm expectations.
- **Alignment with local plans and state policy** is normal and centers are exactly where gentle density and mixed use are encouraged.
- **Documented results elsewhere** show this framework **delivers small, context-sensitive projects**. The pattern is familiar and repeatable.

We assume that the request for this exercise is well-intended and that you, the reader, can find some comfort and agreement in the results. Alternatively, we know that there is the possibility that some may reject these examples with off the shelf arguments like:

- We're not at all like those towns
- Those buildings are horrible
- That town is too big, that main street too long
- California or New York State is not like Massachusetts

We will not argue those or other criticisms. Everyone has an opinion and a position. This report shall stand on its own and be a part of the record, hopefully for the better. But if you have remaining forthright questions on other issues, keep them coming.