

Communities By Design, a
nonprofit 501c(3) training and education
organization, in cooperation with the
City of Redwood City,
is pleased to present:

The Forum *at Redwood City*

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION ON CITY DESIGN



BREAKTHROUGH DEVELOPMENT USING THE SMARTCODE

2007-08 SEASON: FORUM #1
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2007
LITTLE FOX THEATER
2209 BROADWAY
REDWOOD CITY
6:00 P.M. - 7:30 P.M.

On October 3, 2007, the City of Redwood City and the nonprofit “Communities by Design” held the first presentation of the 2007-2008 Forum season. The presentation featured **Laura Hall**, Founding Principal of Hall Alminana Inc., speaking on the subject, “Breakthrough Development Using the SmartCode.”

Defining SmartCode

Ms. Hall began by describing the significance of SmartCode in comparison with its predecessor, traditional land use zoning. According to Ms. Hall, the SmartCode basically substitutes one regulation for another, and goes from the region all the way down to the building. Whereas conventional zoning classifies, separates and regulates the built environment based on land uses, the SmartCode employs transect-based zoning which focuses on the form and interaction between zones.

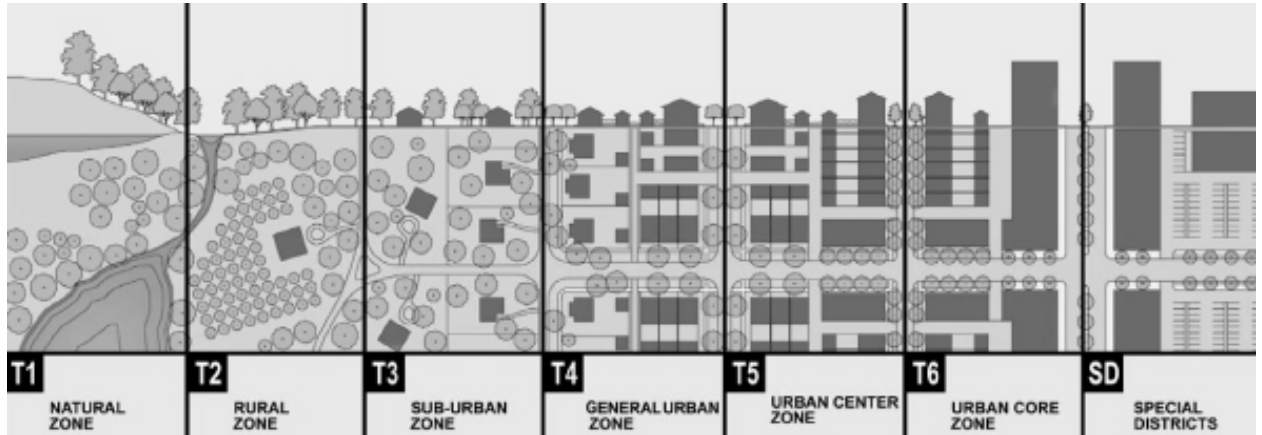
A development transect is described by the New Urbanists as a progression of forms from urban to rural. The transect divides the environment into six zones, plus “special districts.” The transect zones range from T1 to T6 and describe the land uses within them: T1 Natural Zone, T2 Rural Zone, T3 Sub-Urban Zone, T4 General Urban Zone, T5 Urban Center/Downtown Zone, and T6 Urban Core Zone. Ms. Hall explains, “First preserve the valuable habitat. Then divide the rest of it into community types, including hamlets, villages, towns and cities.”

“New Urbanism is not
all about mixed use
and density.”

-Laura Hall

The transect helps integrate and reconcile the intentions of general plan guidelines and zoning codes without focusing on the specific land uses as much as zoning. After city planners classify the transect areas, they can tailor their development plans to the form of the city.

A Sample Transect



From Principles to Practice

The first time Ms. Hall used SmartCode (sometimes referred to as form-based planning) was with the City of Petaluma, CA when it was redeveloping 400 acres in center of the city. She sought involvement from the community through surveys and a charrette and eventually developed the SmartCode Regulating Plan. As other cities began realizing how the SmartCode brought predictability to Petaluma's community development, Ms. Hall began to introduce the method elsewhere including Ukiah CA, Sebastapol CA, Sonoma CA, Pass Christian MI, and San Antonio TX.

“To engage a diversity of people, take the workshop to them!”

-Laura Hall

Overcoming Opposition

One of the things that Laura Hall has learned is in handling opposition to increases in density. She concedes, “We [as planners] are a disgraced profession. We blew it for 50 years. We are not going to convince anybody of anything with just talking.” Instead, Ms. Hall recommends, “seek first to understand, then to be understood.” It is important to start out the conversation with people who are opposed to a project by saying something like, “You are right. You are right to oppose this. What new development or new buildings that have been built in the last 50 years have improved your life?” Then, utilize tools and techniques like guided visualizations, visual preference surveys, written surveys, before and after pictures, etc., to show people what you are talking about and help them understand how it is different.

Gaining Political Acceptance

Ms. Hall discussed the increasing political acceptance for the SmartCode, citing the hallmark California Assembly Bill No. 1268, adopted in July 2004, which legalizes and institutionalizes form-based coding and places it into the State statutes that regulate how California develops. She hopes that since the SmartCode has gained greater acceptance, it will be increasingly used to improve the way developers and cities work together.

Using SmartCode to Address Environmental Issues

With the predictions that global warming will cause widespread environmental change, Ms. Hall hopes that the SmartCode will be used to address these threats, and that planners will use this tool to improve urban design, preserve natural habitat, and create more compact cities that respond to the concerns of sprawl and global warming.

Changing the System from the Top-Down

Now a nationally recognized leader for practicing mixed-use urbanism and the SmartCode, Ms. Hall has taken her expertise and applied it to a grander scale. She is currently working with the State of California to reform the State's General Plan Guidelines and provide a top-down influence to encourage planning with the SmartCode throughout California.