



FORM-BASED CODES

State of Dallas Housing: Resident Guide
2020



Photo Credit: David Hudson

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PREPARED BY

The buildingcommunityWORKSHOP is a Texas based nonprofit community design center seeking to improve the livability and viability of communities through the practice of thoughtful design and making. We enrich the lives of citizens by bringing design thinking to areas of our city where resources are most scarce. To do so, [bc] recognizes that it must first understand the social, economic, and environmental issues facing a community before beginning work.



INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the desire for walkable neighborhoods and places has steadily increased among residents, planners, city officials, and even some developers. Neighborhoods built prior to World War II, with their smaller lots, street grids, and mixture of housing and businesses have become increasingly popular. However, in many communities, conventional development regulations make it very challenging to build or preserve areas like this.

Use-based zoning, or Euclidean zoning, is one of the primary barriers to developing diverse walkable neighborhoods. Use-based zoning began as a tool to separate hazards, like tanneries and raising pigs, from urban housing. During the second half of the twentieth century, use-based zoning was more and more segmented by local officials - not only separating industrial, commercial and residential buildings, but also separating single-family from multifamily and small homes from larger homes.

Over the years, many localities added exterior design and facade requirements to their standard zoning districts as a way to improve the look and feel of large developments. Even with those additional requirements, many view use-based zoning as a hindrance to developing neighborhoods, commercial corridors, and whole communities with strong public space and quality urban design.

So what is the solution? One strategy is to shift our zoning from conventional use-based codes to form-based codes. This booklet will introduce you to form-based codes, consider what they can and can not do, and explore how they might address development challenges in Dallas' South Dallas/Fair Park neighborhood.



Near Southside, Fort Worth

The Near Southside neighborhood created a new form-based zoning district to ensure new development supported the scale and character of this historic area of Fort Worth.

WHAT ARE FORM-BASED CODES?

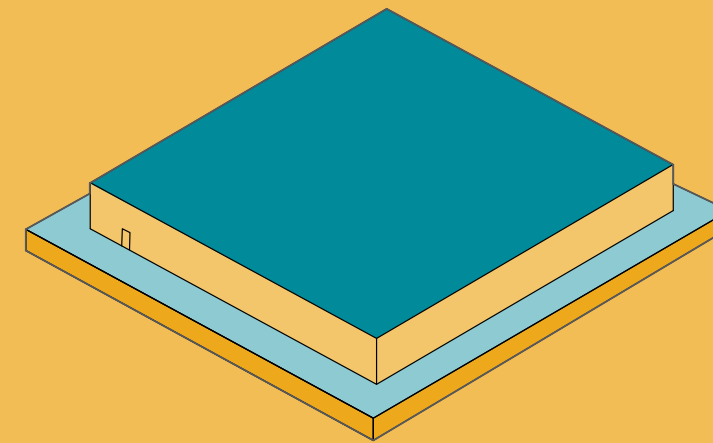
Form-based codes are used to regulate new development. They work similarly to conventional zoning or use-based development codes. The difference is that they place more importance on the physical form of the building than what happens inside (the use). The goal of form-based codes is to deliver more predictable development results, and emphasize the role of each building in creating quality public space.

What CAN Form-Based Codes Do?

- Promote more predictable physical outcomes. Meaning, they are a more precise and reliable tool for achieving what communities want, preserving what they cherish, and preventing what they don't want.
- Promote quality public space by setting standards for how new buildings are placed on a property, and how they meet the sidewalk.
- Promote and/or conserves interconnected street networks and pedestrian-scaled blocks.
- Promote flexibility in how existing homeowners use their property - allowing them to add additional dwelling units.
- Promote the character of low density neighborhoods [particularly where development interest is high] by allowing small increases to density, which fit into the current neighborhood.
- Promote an increase in housing units, and a diversity of housing types which may offer more housing options for new and existing residents.

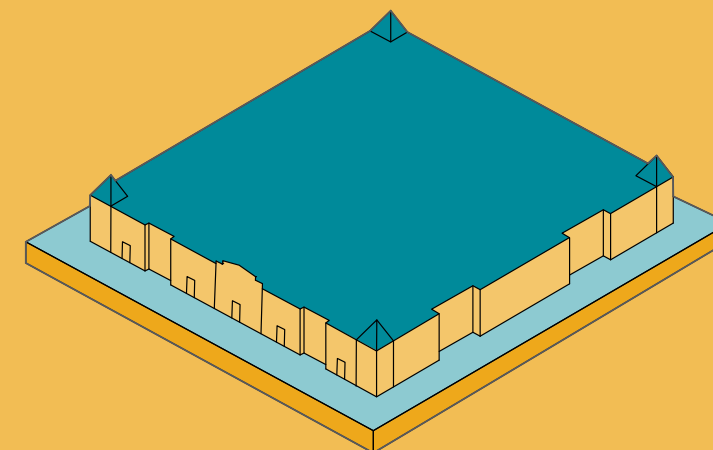
What Can Form-Based Codes NOT Do?

- Guarantee that new and existing housing would be affordable to current residents
- Deliver specific types of businesses
- Ensure increased development in your community



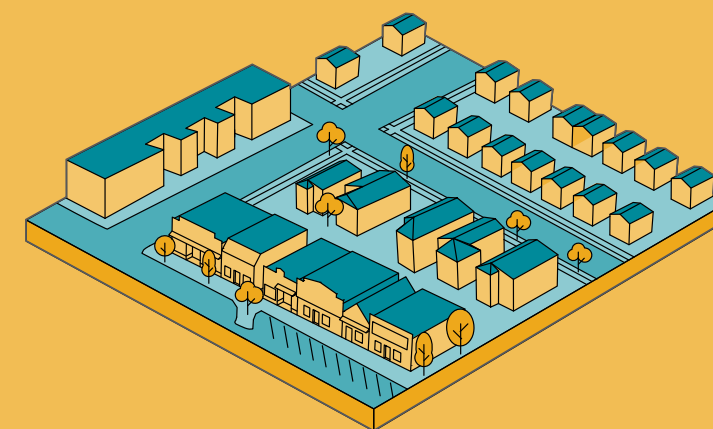
Conventional Zoning

Regulates a build's use, density, setbacks, building heights, lot coverage or floor-to-area ratio (FAR), and parking requirements.



Zoning w/ Design Guidelines

Conventional zoning requirements, with added requirements on the number of openings, building exteriors, and breaking up long exterior walls.



Form-Based Codes

Establishes standards for street and building types (or mix of types), build-to lines, number of floors, and what percentage of a building should be frontage.

DALLAS' FORM DISTRICTS

The City of Dallas developed and adopted Article XIII-Form Based Codes in February of 2008. Article XIII had the following three objectives:

- Provide an additional tool for the implementation of *forwardDallas!*.
- Create walkable urban neighborhoods with a higher density of mixed uses and mixed housing-types, supporting a reduced dependence on automobiles.
- These areas are intended to transition successfully to existing neighborhoods through the judicious mapping of permitted districts.

forwardDallas!, Dallas' comprehensive plan, identified urban and urban mixed-used neighborhoods as distinctly different from residential neighborhoods. In adopting Article XIII-Form Districts, the City recognized that its existing zoning would not produce the development and neighborhoods that residents advocated for.

Many of the examples of quality area plans were actually individually adopted Planned Development Districts (PDDs). PDDs have become the preferred tool to develop or preserve neighborhood qualities that did not fit within the conventional zoning. Article XIII-Form Districts sought to provide an alternative to the conventional zoning, while also providing a fairly uniform set of regulations. Many of these form-based districts are intended for use in the vicinity of rail transit stations, immediately adjacent to the Central Business District, and in the areas within the Trinity River Comprehensive Plan. However, they have been underutilized as a planning/development tool by residents, developers, and city officials.

Aligned with the *forwardDallas!* vision of walkability and mixed-use neighborhoods, Article XIII created the following form based districts. Each district seeks to deliver the type of development referenced in the both the comprehensive plan, and multiple other plans for the area.

● Walkable Urban Mixed Use

Walkable Urban Mixed Use (WMU) districts accommodate a mix of compatible uses in close proximity to one another in a pedestrian-friendly environment. WMU districts are divided into three intensities: low (WMU-3, -5); medium (WMU-8, -12); and high (WMU-20, -40)

● Walkable Urban Residential

Walkable Urban Residential (WR) districts are intended to create residential neighborhoods with mixed housing options in a pedestrian-friendly environment. WR districts are divided into three intensities: low (WR-3, -5); medium (WR-8, -12); and high (WR-20, -40)

● Residential Transition

Residential Transition (RTN) districts provide single-family and duplex living intended to serve as a land use transition between the more intense WMU or WR districts and established single-family neighborhoods. RTN district is a low intensity district, and is intended to accommodate a limited set of development types with up to two dwelling units per lot.

NEIGHBORHOOD SPOTLIGHT

South Dallas/Fair Park

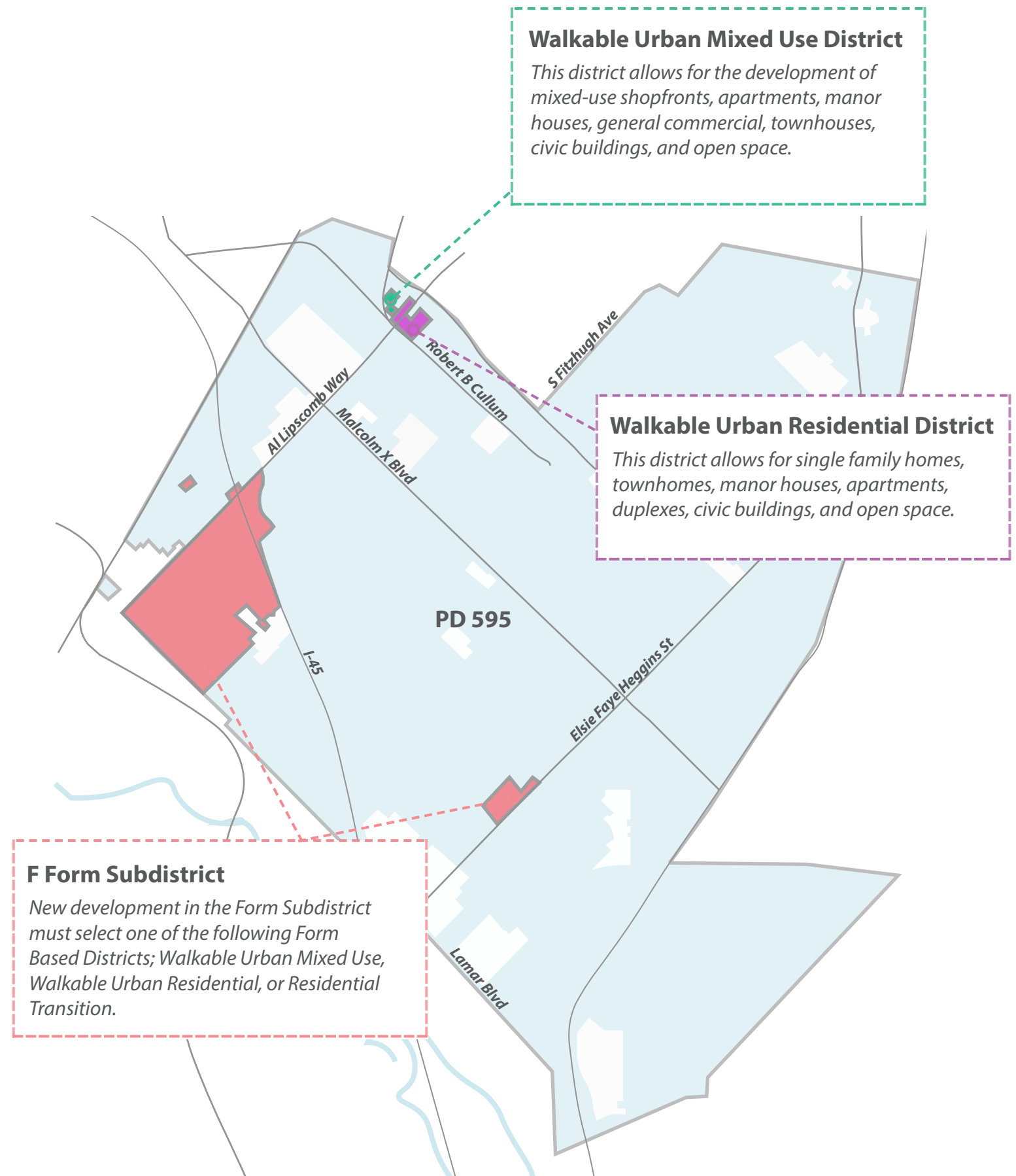
In September of 2001, Planned Development District 595 in South Dallas was adopted. PD 595, shown in the adjacent map, includes three form based districts within its boundaries. The adoption of the PD and the form-based districts was initiated by a landholder/developer, and is one of the few areas in Dallas with any form-based districts. For the most part, the land within the form-based districts is undeveloped. Any new development would be shaped by their form-centric guidelines.

To understand the significance of this, it is important to understand that South Dallas/ Fair Park is one of the most planned-for communities in Dallas. Despite the 170 planning and policy documents, spanning from 1934 to 2019, the area continues to struggle with underdeveloped and underinvestment. In reviewing the most relevant of these documents, themes arise in which form-based codes could be a valuable tool.

Past Planning Themes

- Honor Local History
 - Preserving Neighborhood Identity & Creating Spaces
 - Promoting Architectural Form & Character
- Housing & Development
 - Affordable Housing
 - Infrastructure Improvements
 - Streetscape improvements
 - Safe Pedestrian
 - Mixed Use Development
 - Addressing Vacancy

This guide will explore how the form-based districts within PD 595 (highlighted on the map) and potentially in other areas of South Dallas/Fair Park support the themes and preferences expressed by residents in past planning efforts.

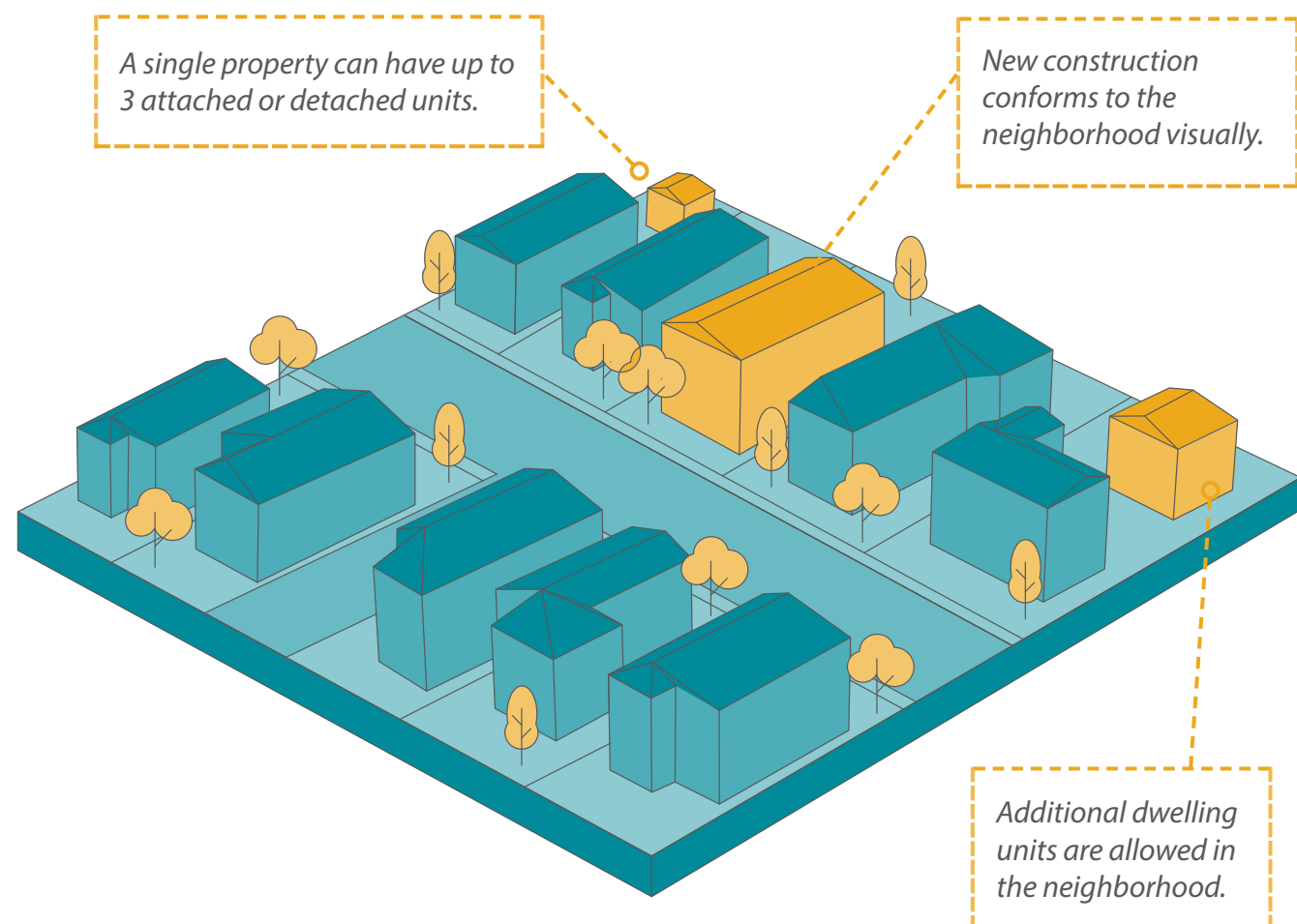


IMPACT OF FORM-BASED CODES

Potential Impacts to Development in South Dallas/Fair Park

Residential Impact

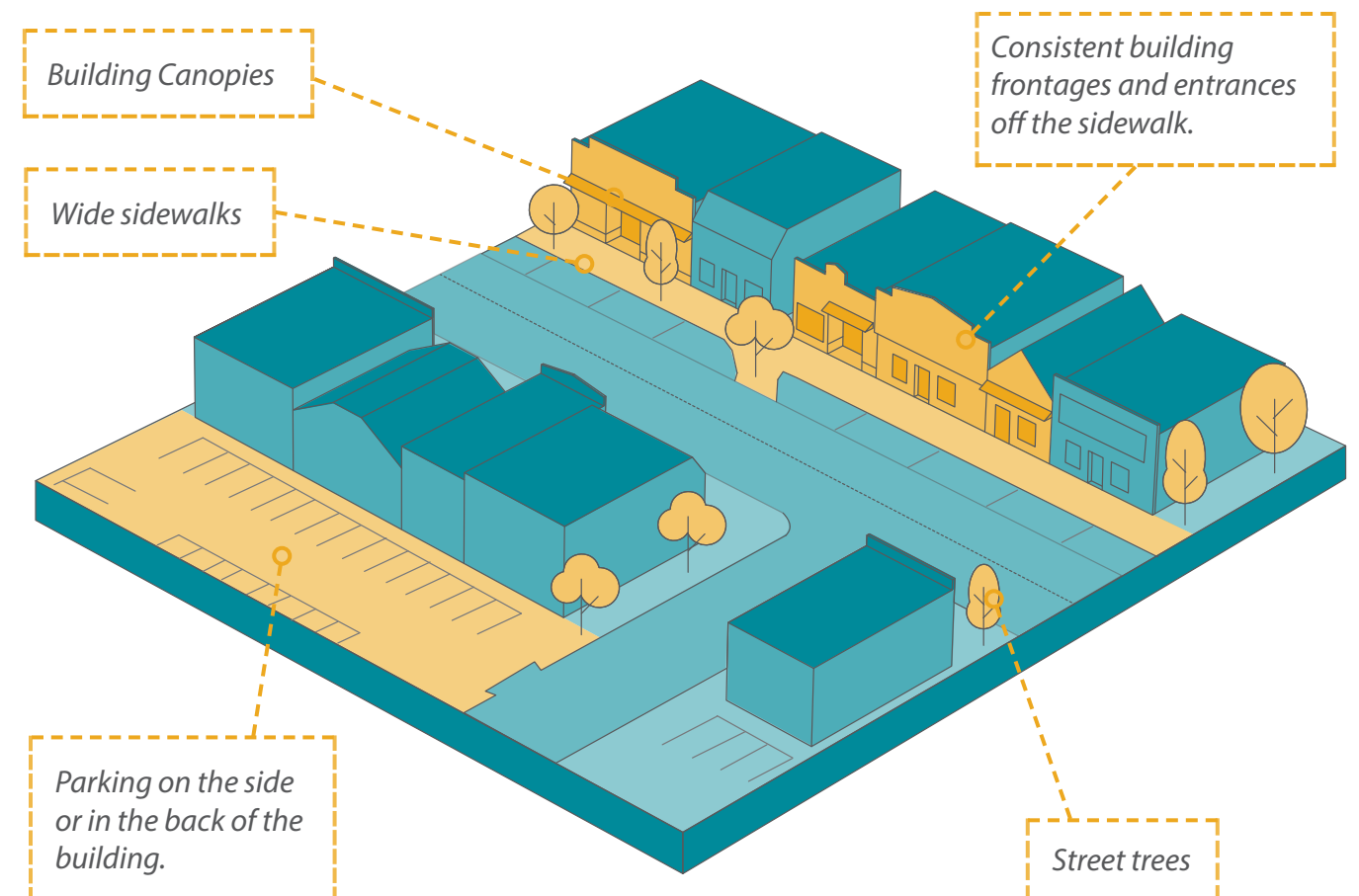
- Current homeowners could choose to add additional units on their property
- New construction would have to fit into the neighborhood - regardless if it is a single unit or multi unit building
- Lots could have between 1 to 3 dwelling units



What impact could form-based districts have on new development when it comes to these mostly unbuilt properties? How could it shape new development if it were expanding to the other part of PD 595? The diagrams below provide some insight into the development current and expanded form based districts could deliver.

Commercial Impact

- New commercial buildings would need to contribute to walkability and quality public space. This would include...
 - Wide sidewalks
 - Locating parking on the side or in the back of the building
 - Planting street trees
 - Requiring building canopies
 - Building frontages facing the street and having windows





CONCLUSION

Advantages to Form Based Districts

- Gentle density, Aging in Place, & Greater Choice for Homeowners
 - Allowing 1 to 3 dwelling units on residential lots would allow existing homeowners more options for how to benefit from their land. They may choose to subdivide their home, build an apartment addition, or build an accessory dwelling unit for their family members or to gain rental income.
 - Removing the single-family restriction on residential lots will support more housing options in the neighborhood, and a gentle form of density
- Preserving Character while Supporting New Development
 - Increasing the allowable dwelling units in residential development supports the development of new housing in existing single-family neighborhoods, while preserving its character
- Greater Walkability
 - Greater emphasis on walkability will ensure that new developments contribute to creating quality public spaces, smaller blocks, and stronger street networks
 - Commercial development in form districts are more likely to deliver buildings
- Supports Mixed-Used Development

Concerns to Form Based Districts

- Affordability
 - Form-based codes can support housing diversity, but they can not ensure housing affordability
- New Development
 - Shifting to a form-based code can not spur new development alone
 - Unfamiliar or additional development requirements may be seen as an additional burden by some developers

