Dear Neighbors,

In an effort to make better plans for the Peninsula we should try Form Based planning. I am initiating an effort in this respect and have invited members of the two design schools in San Diego to use the Peninsula as a model and basis for their senior or graduate programs in City Planning a Urban Design. We are in the programing stages for a course of study. I invite you all to visit the following website to become acquainted with this promising way to establish reliable and enforceable Community Plans. Once our programing has taken shape my intention is to begin a series of committee meetings.

The Form-Based Codes Institute, FBCI, website has an interesting introductory page with an animated gif, or graphic examples of their method and thinking. Just click on one of the numbers in black. You will enjoy the implicit optimism you find here:

http://www.formbasedcodes.org/

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What Are Form-Based Codes?

Definition of a Form-Based Code

Form-based codes foster predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code. They are regulations, not mere guidelines, adopted into city or county law. Form-based codes offer a powerful alternative to conventional zoning.

Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in form-based codes are presented in both words and clearly drawn diagrams and other visuals. They are keyed to a *regulating plan* that designates the appropriate form and scale (and therefore, character) of development, rather than only distinctions in land-use types.

This approach contrasts with conventional zoning's focus on the micromanagement and segregation of land uses, and the control of development intensity through abstract and uncoordinated parameters (e.g., FAR, dwellings per acre, setbacks, parking ratios, traffic LOS), to the neglect of an integrated built form. Not to be confused with design guidelines or general statements of policy, form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory. They are drafted to implement a community plan. They try to achieve a community vision based on time-tested forms of urbanism. Ultimately, a form-based code is a tool; the quality of development outcomes depends on the quality and objectives of the community plan that a code implements.

Beyond the Priesthood

12 August 2010 - 4:40pm
Author: **Peter Katz**

In 1995, author and planning authority Peter Katz wrote an article scolding planners for being "planners who talk" rather than "planners who draw". The original article generated much controversy, and appears here with a postscript added by Katz that reveals a glimmer of hope for the planning profession in the U.S.

"We found it impossible to do good buildings in the suburbs. No matter how hard we tried, we were constantly defeated by the uncoordinated surroundings of parking lots and arterials. Ultimately we came to realize it wasn't an architectural problem we could address within our site, but rather a planning problem that had to be resolved at the scale of the entire community."

That's how Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk described the realization that led her and husband Andres Duany to the practice of planning in the late 1970s. Since then â€• together with architects Peter Calthorpe, Victor Dover, Joseph Kohl, Elizabeth Moule, Stefanos Polyzoides, Mark Schimmenti, Daniel Solomon, and others â€• they've forged a new approach to the making of communities. First called neotraditional planning, the approach has since come to be known as the New Urbanism.

Importantly, the 15 contributors to the book **The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community**, which I completed in 1994, are all architects. At the time I didn't find that odd. It seemed logical that designers of the human habitat should be equally comfortable at the scale of a kitchen sink or an entire metropolitan watershed.

Since then I've come to realize how heretical the notion of physical planning by architects is to those who've come up through the complex world of professional planning—a world of policy, statistics, law, and social programs. The New Urbanists refer to themselves as 'planners who draw." They call the others "planners who talk." The differences in product and process are stunning.

The bigger question that fascinates me is this: How did we stray so far from the physical planning concepts that served professionals so well in the early part of the last century? What led us to think that we could define our communities primarily through words and numbers and let their physical form be determined primarily by policy-makers, regulators and developers? If one looks at the places we've planned over the past 70 years, the answer becomes self-evident.

My conclusion is that since about 1938 planners haven't been in the business of planning; they've been reacting. They've been processing permits, holding meetings, and trying as best they can to respond to the proposals of developers on the one hand and the protests of citizens on the other. In such an adversarial environment, it's not surprising that planners would hesitate to be proactive. When bullets are flying, conventional wisdom suggests that one should lie low. But I'm not convinced that's a viable strategy these days because the conflicts aren't going away. If anything, theyâ€™re growing worse with each passing year. In his book **Community and the Politics of Place**, former Missoula, Montana, Mayor Dan Kemmis writes about "the procedural republic," a method of government that has replaced the sort of face-to-face citizen interaction we associate with an earlier model of American democracy: the New England town meeting.

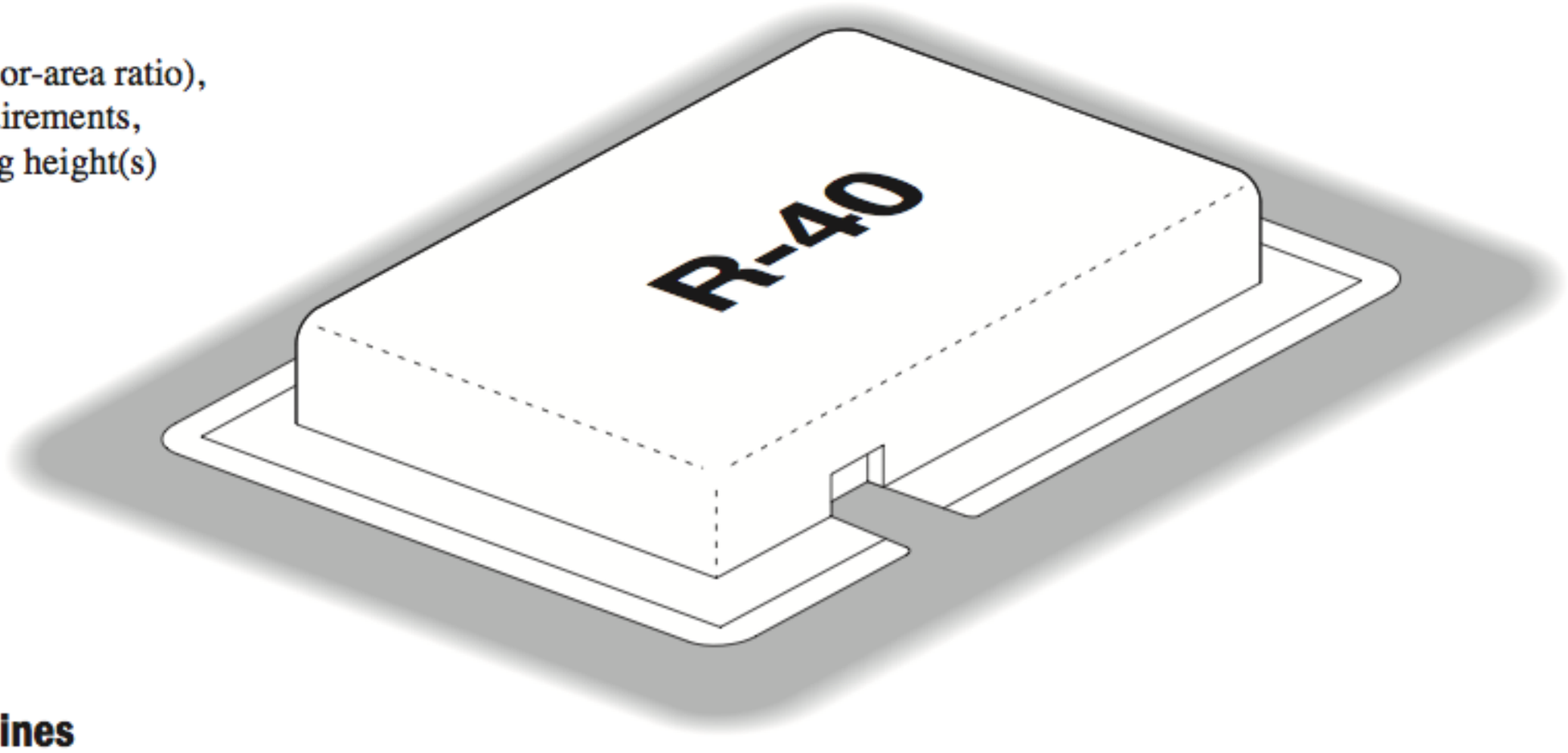
In my view most conventional planners seem to be the product of, and servant to, the procedural republic. Carefully mediating between the conflicting rights of various individuals and groups, they persevere through an endless hell of public hearings—a forum where Mayor Kemmis notes there is precious little real "hearing" going on.

The alternative, and the source of my optimism for the future, is the New Urbanism with its use of participatory planning techniques that deliver tangible physical plans. When neighbors see and discuss what's being proposed in visual rather than statistical or policy terms, they're often able to transcend their usual NIMBY concerns. Visionary planning efforts from Palo Alto to Providence are achieving success by engaging citizens in this way. One caveat though: Although the term "participatory" is frequently uttered by planners, I find it often consists only of multiple meetings and requests for "input," with little credence ever given to the actual suggestions of citizens that might bubble up from the process.

My sense is that much of the planning profession still regards itself as a kind of "priesthood" with its processes and documents closed to all but a select few in its inner circle and shielded by layers of complex data that grow thicker with each new wetlands ruling. The New Urbanists question this approach and are trying another way.

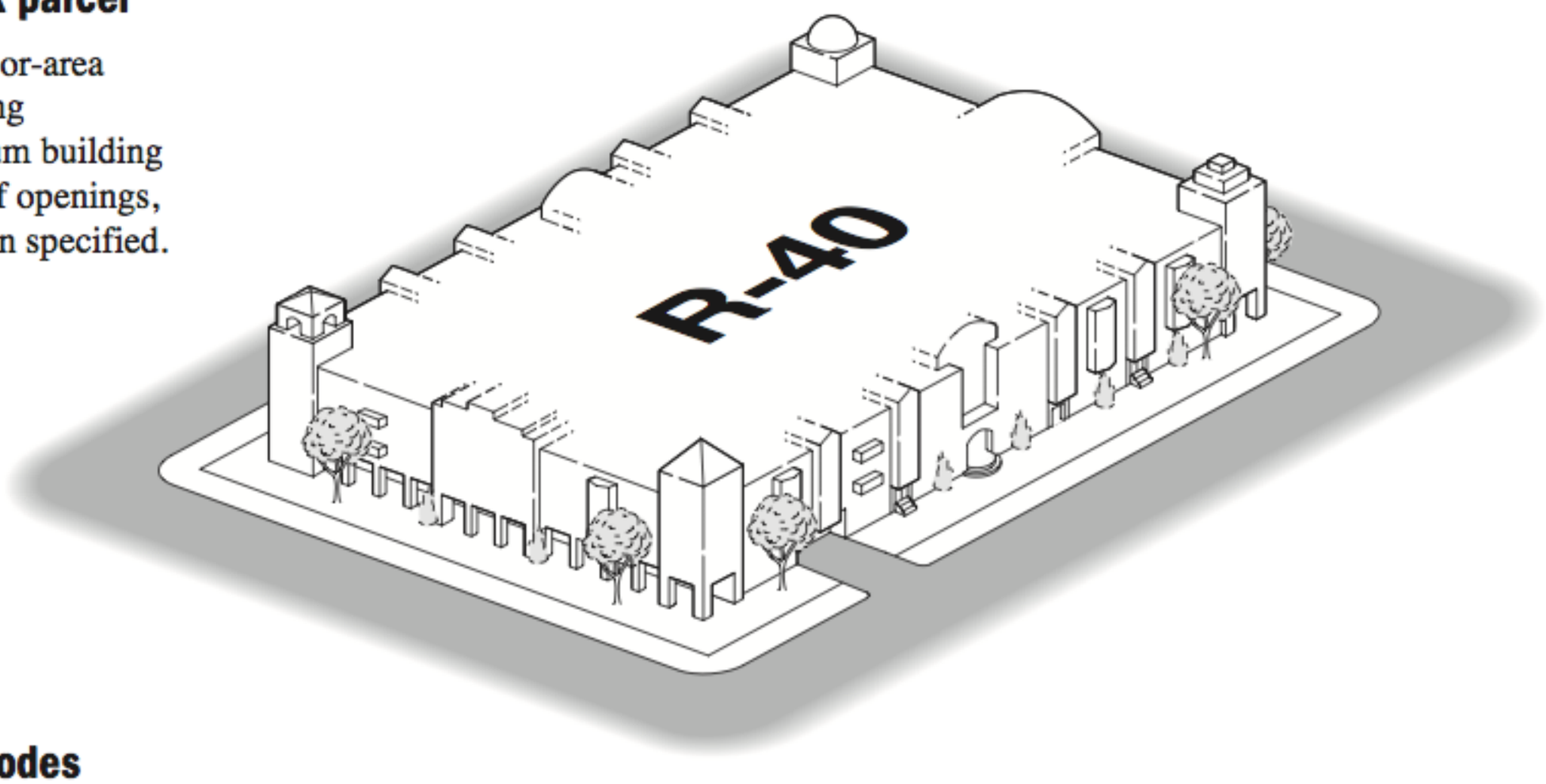
How zoning defines a one-block parcel

Density, use, FAR (floor-area ratio), setbacks, parking requirements, and maximum building height(s) specified.



How design guidelines define a one-block parcel

Density, use, FAR (floor-area ratio), setbacks, parking requirements, maximum building height(s), frequency of openings, and surface articulation specified.



How form-based codes define a one-block parcel

Street and building types (or mix of types), build-to lines, number of floors, and percentage of built site frontage specified.