

Zoning for Transit Oriented Development

By Zachary Coleman, Planner

Transit oriented development, or TOD, involves more than just focusing development near transit stops. In order for a TOD to be successful, it should include the right mixture of housing options, offices, retail spaces and other amenities in a density and scale that promotes walkability and is inclusive of all ages and incomes. Based on the rigidity of current zoning codes around the existing transit stops in Orange County, this may be a difficult task to accomplish.

The traditional “Euclidian” zoning that exists within the majority of the municipalities across the County predominantly focuses on how the land is used more so than the scale, form and function of the buildings as they relate to each other and to the community’s assets or infrastructure. This single-use zoning mechanism is often too restrictive to facilitate the incremental development of varying building types and scales that is often indicative of successful pedestrian-centric environments. It is also a major contributing factor to sprawl because it restricts singular land uses to particular areas rather than promoting a mix of uses.

So how can municipalities promote TOD without completely overhauling their current traditional zoning? One of the best answers is a form-based code zoning district around transit stops. Form-based codes are development regulations (not just design guidelines) that focus on controlling the physical form of the built environment in a manner that produces a well-designed place indicative of a community’s area vision. It is a commonly accepted TOD principle that people are willing to walk about ½ mile to access transit options. Based on this principle, municipalities could positively influence the development of successful mixed-use, walkable communities around transit hubs by creating form based code districts within a ½ mile radius of existing transit stops.

There are signs of progress and hope for

TOD within Orange County. The City of Newburgh introduced four form-based code zoning overlay districts in 2015 to encourage dense, mixed-use development in areas prime for growth and revitalization. The Broadway Corridor, Downtown Neighborhood, Waterfront Gateway, and Planned Waterfront Districts each have unique standards to encourage the goals defined in the purpose and intent of the City Code. There are also overarching supplementary standards that ensure future development is cohesive and representative of the desired neighborhood character. The potential for TOD is there, as the Newburgh-Beacon Ferry docks along the Hudson River in the Planned Waterfront District and provides connecting service to Metro-North at Beacon Station. Aside from encouraging healthy communities and economic growth, allowing increased mixed-use development within the District through form-based codes has created the potential for increased bi-directional Ferry ridership demand encouraged by new residents and businesses from future TOD.

Another community in the County has taken a slightly different approach to encourage TOD. The Village of Woodbury adopted a code for the creation of a Transit Village Zoning District around the Harriman Train Station on Metro North’s Port Jervis Line (PJL) that includes the ½ mile walking principle discussed above. The code permits a multitude of commercial and residential uses while listing design requirements for roadways, residential uses, nonresidential uses and open spaces. It provides the regulatory framework that would allow a vibrant TOD to be built in a prime location.

With Metro-North currently in the planning stages of improvements to the PJL, including a Mid-Point yard near Campbell Hall Station and the construction of passing sidings, service on the line is anticipated to drastically increase from 27 daily



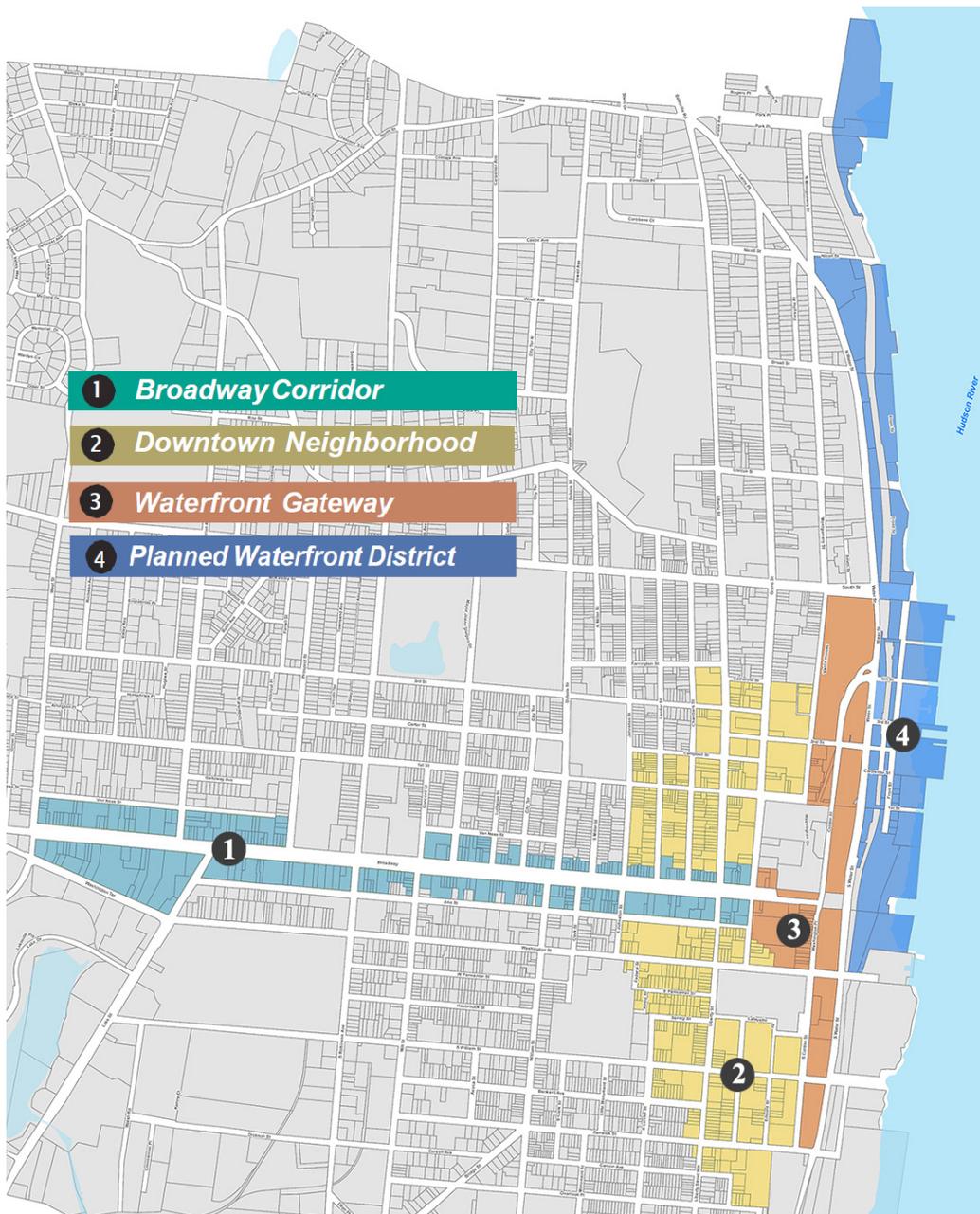
weekday trains to 44 and 14 daily weekend trains to 26 . With improved service, ridership levels and demand are anticipated to rise, along with demand for amenities surrounding the stations. It would seem that now could be a prime time for other municipalities to begin thinking about the current zoning regulations around existing stations on the P/L, what areas may be prime for TOD, and how form-based codes might be used to help make future

visions a reality.

Do you have ideas of where TOD could be implemented in Orange County? Send us your thoughts at planning@orangecountygov.com.

For more information on form-based codes and how your community can implement them visit the Form-Based Codes Institute's website at www.formbasedcodes.org.

Example of Form Based Code City of Newburgh



Benefits of TODs

Besides reducing urban sprawl, what are some benefits of TOD? Take a look at what Reconnecting America lists below:

- Reduced household driving and thus lowered regional congestion, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions
- Walkable communities that accommodate more healthy and active lifestyles
- Increased transit ridership and fare revenue
- Potential for added value created through increased and/or sustained property values where transit investments have occurred
- Improved access to jobs and economic opportunity for low-income people and working families
- Expanded mobility choices that reduce dependence on the automobile, reduce transportation costs and free up household income for other purposes.

Above: Picture on the left is the City of Newburgh's Form Based Code, adopted in 2015. Newburgh was the first community in Orange County to adopt an FBC into their zoning code. Above and to the right: a list of benefits of TODs provided by Reconnecting America (ReconnectingAmerica.org).