The Natural-to-Urban Transect: The Framework for Form-Based Planning and Coding

The Natural-to-Urban Transect is an organizing principle used in Form-based planning and coding that establishes a hierarchy of places/contexts from the most natural to the most urban. The designation of each transect along this hierarchy is determined first by the character and form, intensity of development, and type of place and secondly by the mix of uses within the area. This hierarchy of places becomes the framework or organizing principle for the entire plan and code, replacing use as the organizing principle as is used in conventional or Euclidean zoning. Transect zones are used to reinforce existing or to create new walkable mixed-use urban environments.

“The Natural-to-Urban Transect is a means for considering and organizing the human habitat in a continuum of intensity that ranges from the most rural condition to the most urban. It provides a standardized method for differentiating between the intentions for urban form in various areas using gradual transitions rather than harsh distinctions. The zones are primarily classified by the physical intensity of the built form, the relationship between nature and the built environment, and the complexity of uses within the zone.”

~ Form-Based Codes Institute

The model transect for American towns is divided into six transects: Natural (T1), Rural (T2), Sub-Urban (T3), General Urban (T4), Urban Center (T5), and Urban Core (T6), together with a District (D), often referred to as a Special District, designation for areas with specialized purposes (e.g., heavy industrial, transportation, entertainment, or university districts, among other possibilities). Each transect is given a number. Higher numbers designate progressively more urban environments, and lower numbers designate more rural environments. For additional information visit the Form-Based Codes Institute website at www.formbasedcodes.org