

# Columbia Pike Form-Based Code

## Arlington, VA

### PROJECT DETAILS

Project Area:	3.5 miles
Client:	Arlington County
Year Adopted	2003
Website:	columbiapikepartnership.com

For more information, visit [doverkohl.com](http://doverkohl.com).



Existing conditions at the Town Center study area. A blank white wall faces Columbia Pike, and a parking area is shown beyond.



Proposed development shows the corner site redeveloped, with glazed surfaces meeting pedestrians on the street and upper floors adding office or residential space.



Buildings fill in the former parking lot, and enhanced public transit helps to reduce the number of parking spaces required for infill development.



Town Center Study Area

### The Project

The Columbia Pike Special Revitalization District Master Plan and Form-Based Code introduce livable approaches to redevelopment and revitalization throughout the Columbia Pike corridor in Arlington County, Virginia. Limitations caused by existing zoning and development regulations had continually deterred development along the once vibrant corridor. While explosive development has occurred in the Washington D.C. Metro region, Columbia Pike, the "main street" of southern Arlington County, faced rapid decline and disinvestment. Development pressures in the county and region led the County to adopt a policy of Smart Growth to encourage redevelopment and revitalization of its central corridors and neighborhoods. The Columbia Pike Special Revitalization District Master Plan and Form-Based Code represent the County's commitment to Smart Growth. The comprehensive effort sets forth a long-range vision to create a competitive and vibrant corridor and urban center.

Dover, Kohl & Partners worked together with Ferrell Madden Associates, UrbanAdvantage, and VOA Associates to create the Master Plan and Form-Based Code.

### The Process

During an extensive public charrette process, over 700 citizens, along with local stakeholders and the design team, studied four specific areas along the corridor: the Western Gateway, the Neighborhood Center, the Village Center, and the Town Center. Each area had its own unique characteristics and challenges that were addressed. At the conclusion of the charrette week, work began on developing the detailed Code and Regulating Plans that would lay out the rules for new development in these areas. The result was the creation of a livable approach to redevelopment and revitalization throughout the Columbia Pike corridor that focused on a range of acceptable building types and locations for mixed-use development.

### Status

The Arlington County Board unanimously approved the Columbia Pike Form-Based Code in February 2003. At that time, Arlington County was one of the first jurisdictions in the nation to apply a form-based code to revitalize existing older sectors, and among the largest (if not the largest) application of form-based codes in the country. The first mixed-use development projects in over 40 years, made feasible under the Form-Based Code, have been completed. The Code has unlocked development potential, and public and private reinvestment in the area is helping to transform the Pike.

# Tools for Implementation: The Components of the Form-Based Code

The **Columbia Pike Form-Based Code** was designed to foster a vital Main Street for its adjacent neighborhoods. It serves as a legal document that regulates land-development, setting careful and clear controls on building form—with broad parameters on building use—as a way to shape clear public spaces (good streets, neighborhoods and parks) with a healthy mix of uses. These prescriptions and parameters are set forth in several documents and renderings, including the Illustrative Plan, Regulating Plan, and Building, Street, and Architectural Standards, which are outlined below.

The **Illustrative Plan** is the result of the public planning process; it shows the hypothetical buildout of the corridor, locating building footprints (new and existing), open spaces, and parking areas.

The **Regulating Plan** (below) illustrates the required building line (RBL), the line along which all new development must locate a required percentage of its front wall. The Regulating Plan also identifies the street tree alignment line and the street frontage type for each street. Rather than establish permissive minimums such as setbacks, which can result in disorderly streetscapes that disrupt pedestrian continuity, regulating plans proactively lay out where new buildings must locate, which results in a continuous wall for the newly-formed urban room.

There are four street frontage types identified on the Regulating Plans (Main Street Sites, Avenue Sites, Local Sites, and Neighborhood Sites).

These frontage types are codified in the **Building Standards**, which articulate regulations for buildings constructed within a particular frontage type, such as height, placement, allowable architectural elements, parking location, and permitted uses. The goal of the Building Standards is the creation of a healthy and vital public realm through good street space.

The **Architectural Standards** regulate the proportion, material, and configuration of such elements as building walls, roofs and parapets, windows and doors, and signage. The intent behind these standards is to utilize a discipline of form when designing new buildings in order to foster a coherent Columbia Pike aesthetic.

The **Street Standards** ensure the coherence of the street network, demonstrating various criteria for reconfigured streets; these include how wide the streetspace (the distance between buildings) should be, how many lanes of traffic there should be, and where street trees and on-street parking should be located. The goal is to establish an environment that encourages and facilitates pedestrian activity.

