

# SmartCode comes to New England

**J**amestown, Rhode Island, and Hamden, Connecticut, could be the first two New England communities to adopt the SmartCode. New urbanist teams conducted charrettes in both towns this fall, with the aim of adapting the form-based code to strikingly different local concerns.

The SmartCode arrival in New England is emblematic of how the code has reached far and wide recently. In the nearly five years since the first edition of the SmartCode was produced by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. (DPZ), customized versions of the code have been adopted by 15 localities in nine states (see table at right). Adoption is currently in process in more than 50 other municipalities and counties in the US, including Jamestown and Hamden. Outside the US, the SmartCode is in process in Airdrie, Alberta, Canada, and Bran, Romania. Other Transect-based codes have been adopted by other governments.

In Jamestown, a rural island town of 5,600 people in Narragansett Bay, charrette participants led by Donald Powers Architects concentrated in mid-October on how to enlarge the supply of affordable housing. As might be expected of a beautiful location within commuting distance of both Providence and Newport, little of Jamestown's current housing stock is considered affordable. "There are few houses for sale under \$500,000," said Sandy Sorlien, whose firm SmartCode Local participated in the charrette along with Cornish Associates and New Commons, both based in Providence.

"The state requires that municipalities comply with its affordable housing mandate of 10 percent," said Sorlien. "Jamestown is only at about 4 percent." In the core village area, the code team proposed common new urbanist techniques such as small lots, accessory units, mixed uses, and the ability to walk to everyday destinations. The team also examined incentives that could produce affordable housing subject to deed restrictions, which keep prices lower than what the real estate market would normally dictate.

What made the five-day charrette different from others, Sorlien said, was the focus on precisely how many affordable units to add, "coupled with the desire of nearly everyone to not change anything

## The spread of the SmartCode

### Adopted

**Alabama:** Elmore, Montgomery, Pike Road  
**Arkansas:** Conway  
**California:** Petaluma  
**Florida:** Fort Myers, Sarasota  
**Louisiana:** Abbeville  
**Mississippi:** Flowood, Gulfport, Pass Christian  
**Missouri:** Liberty, St. Charles  
**Tennessee:** Germantown  
**Texas:** Leander

### In process

**Alabama:** McClellan  
**Arkansas:** Fayetteville  
**California:** Azusa, Sebastopol Northeast Area, Sonoma Mountain Village (Rohnert Park), Ukiah Downtown, Ventura  
**Connecticut:** Hamden  
**Delaware:** New Castle County  
**Florida:** Broward County, Dade County, Davie, Hillsborough County, Hollywood, Lauderdale Lakes, Lauderhill, Margate, Miami, Miami Gardens, Miramar, North Lauderdale, Parkland, Plantation, Tamarac, Tarpon Springs, West Park  
**Georgia:** Blakely, Early County, Monroe  
**Idaho:** Post Falls  
**Indiana:** Michigan City  
**Iowa:** Iowa City

**Kansas:** Lawrence  
**Louisiana:** Delcambre, Erath, Lake Charles, St. Bernard Parish  
**Michigan:** Grand Rapids  
**Mississippi:** Bay St. Louis, D'Iberville, Gautier, Gulfport, Harrison County, Long Beach, Moss Point, Ocean Springs, Pascagoula, Saucier, Waveland  
**Missouri:** Dardenne Prairie  
**New Mexico:** Taos  
**Rhode Island:** Jamestown  
**South Carolina:** Bull Street (Columbia), Columbia, Spartanburg  
**Texas:** El Paso, Lancaster, San Antonio, Spotsylvania County  
**Vermont:** Montpelier  
**Virginia:** Caroline County.

### Other Countries in process:

**Alberta, Canada:** Airdrie  
**Romania:** Bran

### Other transect-based codes adopted<sup>1</sup>

**Florida:** Jupiter, Kendall in Miami-Dade County, Miami, St. Lucie County  
**Louisiana:** Baton Rouge  
**New York:** Saratoga Springs  
**Ohio:** Columbus  
**Texas:** McKinney

Source: [www.smartcodecomplete.com](http://www.smartcodecomplete.com) and Placemakers

<sup>1</sup> Not a complete list of codes that refer to the Transect

— to protect existing character."

Donald Powers, of Providence, said his firm has been compiling a charrette report that will be presented, along with specific recommendations, to the town council in December. "By the end of the charrette, many of the island residents came to understand that the qualities of scale, walkability, character, and diversity of residents that they so cherished ... were best protected by allowing some targeted and modest change to their ordinances," he said. Both Powers and Sorlien have personal ties to the island.

## TACKLING DEVELOPMENT, TRAFFIC CONCERNS

In Hamden, a mostly built-out, 58,000-population suburb of New Haven, Robert Orr Associates of New Haven and Planimetrics of Avon, Connecticut, led a four-day charrette in late October that showed how the town could accommodate economic development while handling traffic better and enhancing existing neighborhoods and business districts.

"We want to relieve homeowners

from the increasing tax burden," Orr said during a final presentation. That can be accomplished partly by attracting development to established neighborhood business districts, where buildings would be allowed to reach heights of four stories — and five stories if they meet LEED Gold standards, he said.

A jumbled stretch of strip commercial development on Dixwell Avenue — referred to almost sardonically as the "Miracle Mile" during the charrette — would be encouraged to fill in, as large parking lots become blocks with well-defined open spaces bounded by new buildings. Architect Catherine Johnson of Middletown, Connecticut, explained how portions of Dixwell could be transformed into an attractive boulevard, with walkable centers along its route.

Rick Chellman of TND Engineering said Hamden should do what many communities are doing: convert some of its four-lane roads — which encourage speeding and intimidate pedestrians — into roads with just three lanes of traffic. A technique that Chellman advocates is to provide one lane of through traffic in each

direction, plus a center turn lane for motorists turning from either direction. The reduction in lanes allows some pavement to be converted to on-street parking or to be replaced by planting. Consequently, sidewalks become more sheltered from through traffic. Chellman noted that "street parking is about 35 percent more efficient than parking lot parking."

Orr recommended reintroducing streetcars in Hamden and New Haven.

Hamden Town Planner Leslie Creane expressed jubilation over the outcome of the charrette, and said regulations will be drafted over the next year to allow the ideas to be implemented.

A comprehensive source of information on the SmartCode, consultants, and related matters is [www.smartcodecentral.com/resources.html](http://www.smartcodecentral.com/resources.html). ♦

*Note: New Urban News Publications publishes the SmartCode & Manual.*

## Town center triumphs

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made to prevent a new urban center from being built.

The Nov. 3 ribbon-cutting for the Square — named for the "Blue-backed Speller" that West Hartford native Noah Webster compiled to instruct American schoolchildren more than two centuries ago — took place as the town was preparing to file a counter-suit against Taubman.

"We have a fiduciary responsibility to recover the taxpayer money and the other damages associated with the delays of the project because of Taubman's frivolous claims," said Mayor Scott

Slifka. The town is asking \$4 million in legal expenses and lost revenue, blaming Taubman for unnecessary legal wrangling that delayed the start of Blue Back Square by about a year.

Taubman's campaign against Blue Back Square "was their [Taubman's] attempt to say 'don't do this near any of their malls,'" Heapes told *New Urban News*. Heapes said his development team was able to persist in the face of Taubman's opposition because "our equity partner is European and a single individual" — Ronus Properties of Atlanta, which is owned by a businessman across the Atlantic. If the project had depended on financing from a conventional US source, Blue Back might have been shelved, he said.

In the late 1980s, Heapes designed Mizner Park, a pathbreaking new urban

center that has become one of the most popular gathering places in Boca Raton, Florida. Since then, he has played a major role in designing mixed-use centers such as Bethesda Row in Bethesda, Maryland, Santana Row in San Jose, California, and Rockville Town Center in Rockville, Maryland. In 1999 he and Ken Narva founded Street-Works, in White Plains, New York, with the intention of not only consulting on projects around the country but also becoming a developer.

"We have eight other deals we're looking into now," Heapes told *New Urban News* during a tour of the West Hartford project. "We're looking up and down the East Coast." Street-Works lines up financial partners for its projects and often works closely with local governments. Two cities where the company has decided to work on projects are Quincy, Massachusetts, and Norwalk, Connecticut.

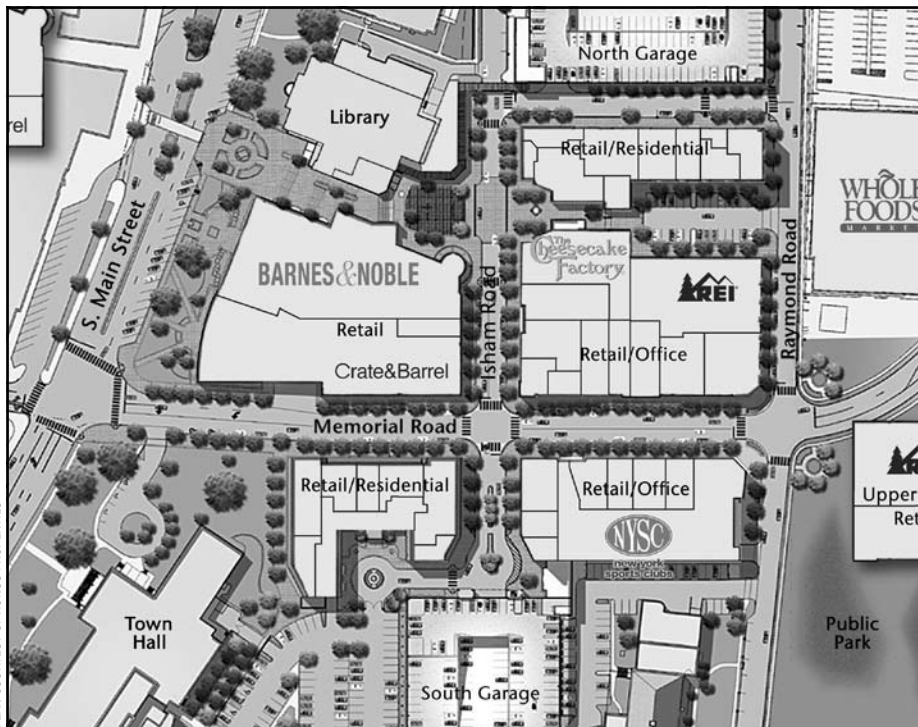
For the undertaking in West Hartford, Street-Works established a firm called Blue Back Square Development LLC (BBS), which agreed to make new or expanded civic buildings important elements in the town center expansion. "The police and courts building has been renovated," Heapes noted. A public library has been enlarged. The town is getting a municipal office building large enough to accommodate the Board of Education as well as town departments. The First Congregational Church, a large orange-brick complex occupying one corner of the project's site, also has been renovated. "Twenty-five percent of the project consists of civic uses," said Heapes.

The town contributed several key properties to the project, along with \$48.8 million in bond funds, which will be paid off through revenue generated by the development. An old town hall, which had been occupied by the Board of Education, has been converted to commercial uses, including restaurants. As part of the package, BBS has built two large parking garages which the town — not the developer — will own.

### MANAGING THE MIX

As Heapes describes it, the key to Blue Back is that it consists of four components, each composing 25 percent of the project: civic buildings; retail, restaurants, and entertainment; housing (both rental and for-sale); and health care and wellness facilities. The sloping terrain made it possible for Blue Back to have

A plan for Blue Back Square, below, includes first-floor retail tenants. A multiplex cinema is located above the Barnes & Noble.



PLAN COURTESY OF RONUS PROPERTIES