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## SmartCode Soars in Pass Christian -- and Hits Hiccup in Gulfport

Submitted by [Filmanowicz](#) on Fri, 02/08/2008 - 4:46am. [form-based codes](#) [Gulfport In the News](#) [Katrina](#) [Pass Christian](#) [post-hurricane planning](#) [smartcode](#)

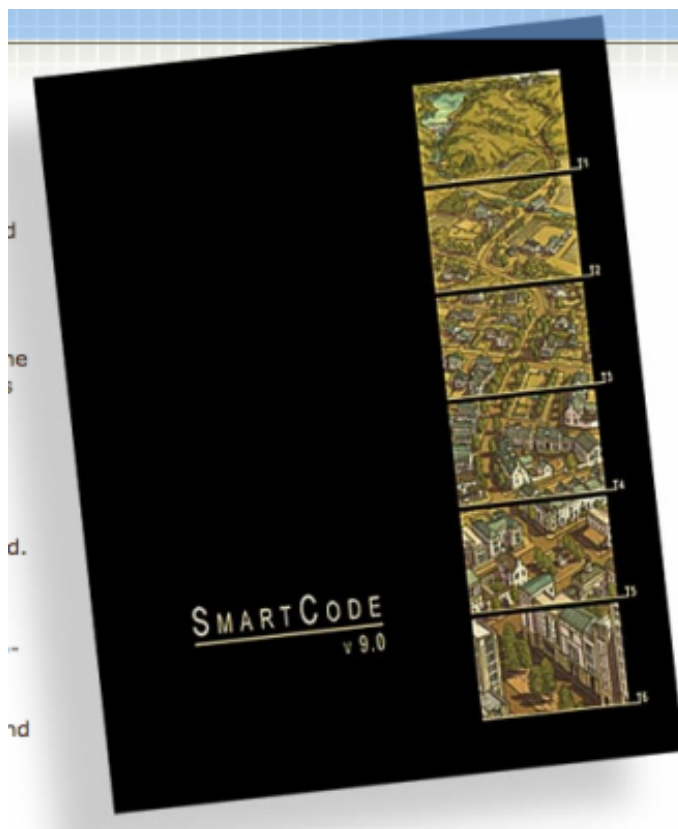
Whether the setting is the recovering coastal areas of Mississippi and Louisiana or anywhere else for that matter, if your goal is to turn inspiring plans for renewed neighborhoods of walkable, mixed-use urbanism into reality, having a strong form-based code on the books is a necessity. That's because a conventional separate-use codes tend to create sprawl -- malls, office-parks, cul-de-sac subdivisions. Form-based codes guide future development to take the form of enduring neighborhoods with homes, storefronts, mixed-use buildings gracefully lining streets and framing parks and squares.

And the past week has been a big one for coding news in Mississippi.

First Pass Christian. This city on the western stretch of Mississippi's coast, where Katrina's surge hit hardest, passed a major milestone this week when its city council adopted three neighborhood plans covering major parts of the city. With these adoptions, a locally calibrated version of the SmartCode replaces existing codes, effective in 30 days. After the completion of a neighborhood plan covering the rest of the city, Pass Christian will be ready to have a citywide SmartCode.

A strong contingent of Pass Christian residents and leaders forged a quick and lasting relationship with new urbanist planners led by Laura Hall of San Francisco-based Hall Alminana, who led the Pass Christian planning team at the Mississippi Renewal Forum in October 2005, a follow-up charrette in the Pass shortly thereafter and ongoing work since then. Robert Alminana, Jeff Bounds and Ann Daigle also deserve praise for guiding the city through the challenging process of adopting a new code.

Gulfport has been another coastal leader in planning and coding, as evidenced by last week's DPZ-led city-sponsored charrette in Gulfport over the past week. But amid the good news, the Sun-Herald of South



Mississippi ran a story that showed the city hitting a possible snag in its code reform progress, which has been impressive to date. At least some members of the leadership team that smartly commissioned a citywide Smartcode and then valiantly won adoption of new Smartcode maps in a neighborhood or two following neighborhood planning projects -- appeared to waver in their commitment to the new code. **See [smartcodecentral.com](http://smartcodecentral.com) for information and the latest open-source model code**

If Gulfport wants to see the amazing images from the Gulfport charrette realized (see this small gallery at [cnu.org](http://cnu.org)), let's hope they keep some teeth in their new codes.

Here's an excerpt from the Sun-Herald:

<http://www.sunherald.com/201/story/343278.html>

Leaders confused about zoning

By RYAN LaFONTAINE  
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GULFPORT --A California SmartCode expert says the building standards were designed to replace local zoning laws, which is not the way the Warr administration interpreted it.

Mayor Brent Warr favored a plan to use SmartCode in conjunction with the city's zoning laws, giving developers a choice of which rules they want to follow. But two urban planners said last week at Gulfport's 10-day design conference that SmartCode was meant to be a mandatory replacement to local zoning.....

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Hall said Gulfport will have to toss out the current zoning laws and implement SmartCode to achieve New Urbanism communities.

The confusion rose from the assertion that adopting SmartCode is an option for each individual community within a city, meaning some areas could have SmartCode while others don't. But once a community adopts it, SmartCode is intended to replace the existing zoning laws.

To make matters worse, Hall said specific language in some of the locally written SmartCode for Gulfport allows the City Council to determine whether the rules should be mandatory.

"The City Council could make it optional if they wanted to, but we would never recommend it," Hall said.

Warr was one of the first Coast leaders to promote SmartCode after Hurricane Katrina. He said he first interpreted it as an option to traditional zoning.

"Really, it's a strange situation for me to be in because it gets adopted as mandatory and I've already told a bunch of people that it would be optional," Warr said.

The City Council adopted SmartCode last year for Mississippi City as a mandatory requirement. But last month, with a strong push from the mayor, the Planning Commission sent a recommendation to the council asking for an amendment that would make the code optional.

Also in January, the Planning Commission recommended SmartCode for the Hansboro community be optional.

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