



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Council Members
CC: Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager
From: Mike Trimble, Director, Corridor Program Implementation Office
Date: February 15, 2017
Subject: Item 56: Thornton Road Working Group Summary and Recommendations

In January 2017, key stakeholders were invited to participate in a working group to comprehensively evaluate and establish a vision for future development on the commercially-zoned properties on Thornton Road. This process was initiated because two of the four CS-zoned properties have come before Council with a zoning change request within the last twelve months.

In evaluating options, the working group participants agreed the end goal they are working toward is to **balance land use, scale and infrastructure in order to retain/create a comfortable, safe, and enjoyable environment for everyone who lives, works, visits or travels through the area, and property owners are able to ensure an economically viable project.**

In trying to achieve this goal, given that the surrounding single-family and small scale multi-family land uses are unlikely to change, and that even with the recommended improvements Thornton Road will still only be designed for relatively low traffic volumes, the **neighbor's ideal vision** includes:

1. **Compatible land uses:** Acceptable land uses include single family housing, multifamily housing and other uses such as: park/open space, art workshops, performance spaces, afterschool programs, live/work, retirement housing, affordable housing, plant nursery, and/or other neighborhood-serving retail/office uses.
2. **Diversity of uses:** Ensuring a mix of uses across the four properties.
3. **Match to existing scale:** Remain similar to surrounding context, mostly considered smaller scale.
4. **Infrastructure priorities:**
 - a. Street improvements so that street/intersection design best matches expected traffic volumes (low volume design, small-scale uses) to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety in addition to traffic flow.
 - b. Stormwater drainage system designed to accommodate flows without flooding; new development does not adversely affect off-site flows.

The working group supports preservation of existing creative arts uses such as the music schools and would like to see them be protected under the “agent of change” principle if the land uses around them change.

The property owners and developers participating in the working group agreed with the general vision for the area, with the exception of needing a larger scale of development than the surrounding area in order to achieve the goal of ensuring an economically viable project. There is no desire by property owners to limit currently allowable uses of CS-zoned properties in the absence of a property owner-initiated zoning change.

Because of significant challenges and constraints in the area, the working group concluded there is no clear-cut zoning and infrastructure investment strategy to ensure that the desired vision is achieved in terms of both use and scale as new development in response to market demand/feasibility is proposed or changes over time. The Thornton Road visioning process resulted in the following recommendations:

1. Any zoning change request or proposed development along Thornton Road should consider the compatible land uses, diversity of land uses, scale, and infrastructure priorities components in the neighbor’s ideal “Vision” identified within this document.
2. Trade-offs between Vision components should occur if the ideal vision is not achievable through an economically viable project for the property owner. Potential zoning options and trade-offs outlined in Appendix A: Summary Report should be used as a starting point for consideration.
3. Identified community concerns and existing challenges of Thornton Road should be considered when deliberating policy decisions during mapping of zoning categories through CodeNEXT and any other related planning initiatives that may affect this area in the future

Applicability to 2413 Thornton Road:

The working group explored ideas for trade-offs for the active zoning case on 2413 Thornton Road relative to the vision for the area, but did not reach agreement on a specific zoning category and trade-offs. It should be noted that the intent of this process was not to facilitate agreement on this case, but rather to reach clarity about the vision for the area and potential trade-off considerations which could be used for further discussion about any site specific development or zoning proposals on the CS-zoned sites.

For additional details regarding the working group process, vision or associated recommendations, see attached Summary Report. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Cc: Greg Guernsey, Director, Planning and Zoning Department
Jerry Rusthoven, Assistant Director, Planning and Zoning
Rob Spillar, Director, Austin Transportation Department
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