

MEMORANDUM

To: Honorable Mayor Phil Dyer and the Plano City Council
From: Christopher J. Caso, Chairman of the Planning & Zoning Commission
Subject: Research/Technology Center zoning district examination
Date: February 21, 2011

Background

Last fall, approximately 70 acres in the far southeast portion of Plano was rezoned from Planned Development-202-Research/Technology Center to Single-Family Residence-6 (SF-6) and Single-Family Residence Attached (SF-A) zoning (map attached). Following these rezoning cases and based on the changing conditions in this region of the city, the City Council requested a review of the existing Research/Technology Center district (RT) and directed staff to work with the Planning & Zoning Commission to develop a new plan for this area.

In our evaluation of the area, the Commission looked at two issues: what the boundaries of the “core” RT area should be, including analyzing appropriate uses for any areas that might be removed from the RT; and the existing RT zoning district regulations.

The following recommendations that are being forwarded for the Council’s consideration are the result of many discussions with various interested groups. The Commission received input from property owners, tenants, residents, and Economic Development and Planning staff. Letters were mailed to all RT property owners to invite them to participate in each of the Commission’s discussions. Staff and commissioners attended the Southeast Plano Business Alliance meeting on January 11, 2011, to solicit additional feedback from area businesses regarding the zoning district regulations.

Recommendations

District Boundaries:

In evaluating the current zoning, recent changes, and development the Commission developed the following recommendations about the RT zoning district boundaries and appropriate uses.

- The area west of Bradshaw Drive currently zoned as RT constitutes the “core” of the RT district and should remain intact.
- The area east of Plano Parkway, south of 14th Street should retain the current PD-202-RT zoning.
- The area east of Bradshaw, north of the railroad tracks, west of Plano Parkway and south of 14th Street, is appropriate for additional residential development. However, during our discussions, these specific property owners were not present. Given the lack of input from the property owners, the Commission does

not recommend a city-initiated rezoning or amendment to the Future Land Use Plan at this time.

Research/Technology Center Zoning District Regulations:

During the discussion of the Research/Technology Center zoning district, several issues related to the existing RT district development regulations emerged. The main issues centered on concerns that certain regulations unnecessarily restrict development in the area. The Zoning Ordinance states that “the RT district is intended to create a low density, employment center consisting of office, research and development facilities, and limited assembly operations. RT districts should generally accommodate several users in a campus environment.” The Commission determined that this is still a valid intent and evaluated the district regulations based on this guidance.

The Commission determined that certain regulations such as the prohibition of open storage and delivery vehicles, limitations on the number of dock doors, and limitations on the gross floor area for office/showroom warehouse uses are critical to the intent and character of the RT district and should not be changed. The Commission identified areas of the ordinance that appear to be adding substantial cost or unnecessary restrictions to development and redevelopment of RT properties without providing commensurate benefit to the district. The Commission therefore supports modifying the RT regulations as described below.

Landscaping Requirements

The RT district currently requires that “A minimum of 20% of the total lot area shall be landscaping.” This requirement contributes positively to the overall look and feel of the RT district. However, it does require a significant amount of land be dedicated to landscaping which raises the cost of development and, in some cases, can inhibit redevelopment of a site. The standard nonresidential landscaping requirements, as defined in Section 3.1200 (Landscaping) of the Zoning Ordinance would be less restrictive while still requiring a significant amount of landscaping in support of the overall look and feel of the RT district. Additionally, a substantial portion of the properties in the RT district are subject to the regulations in Section 4.700 (190 Tollway/Plano Parkway Overlay District) which contains landscape requirements that further enhance these properties.

The Commission recommends removing the unique provisions for landscaping in the RT zoning district and replacing them with the standard nonresidential landscaping regulations as required elsewhere throughout the city.

Parking

The RT district requires that “In order to accommodate future changes in use, approved site plans shall include adequate land area to increase parking to the minimum requirements for office development (one space per 300 square feet) for 75% of the gross floor area of any building.” This requirement is sometimes problematic, especially for sites that were initially developed under light industrial regulations that are now seeking to redevelop under RT requirements. This

provision does help to keep options open for future reuse of sites for office and other uses with higher parking requirements, but the net result may be that it is too restrictive to be useful for the district. The Commission supports removing this requirement from the RT zoning district.

Restaurants in RT

A freestanding (sole use and occupant) restaurant/cafeteria is permitted in an RT district when it is built as part of a larger development and constitutes no more than 10% of that development, it has a minimum of 5,000 square feet of gross floor area, and no drive-in window. It has been noted on several occasions that there are a limited number of restaurants in the immediate vicinity of the RT district to serve the employees working in the area; however, there are many within a few miles, including those in downtown Plano, near Collin Creek mall and an increasing number in the State Highway 190 corridor. It is difficult to determine if the lack of restaurants is due to the regulations or perhaps a result of lack of appropriate sites with sufficient traffic and visibility for restaurant uses.

The Commission recommends removing the 10% restriction because the change would not adversely impact the district and it would open up the possibility for a freestanding restaurant to develop without being part of a larger project. The Commission supports retaining the 5,000 square foot minimum size and restriction on no drive-in windows. This change is the same modification that was made to the Regional Employment district last year.

Action from City Council

The Commission is requesting that the Council consider the Commission's recommendations regarding the Research/Technology Center district and provide direction. If the Council concurs and gives direction to do so, the Commission and staff are ready to proceed with the amendments to the district.

Sincerely,



Christopher J. Caso, AICP
Chair, City of Plano Planning & Zoning Commission

