

North Gus Thomasson Corridor District

Why is Mesquite rezoning the Gus Thomasson corridor?

In 2005, the Mesquite City Council approved a neighborhood program called *Addressing Mesquite*. Based on an analysis of several indicators, the City Council identified four priority neighborhoods as starting points for neighborhood revitalization. Casa View Heights was one of those neighborhoods. This neighborhood includes a portion of the Casa View Heights subdivision as well as a portion of the Gus Thomasson corridor. Over the next eighteen months, neighborhood residents and commercial property owners created a neighborhood plan with strategies for improving walkability, reconnecting the residential area to nearby services, preserving character through traditional neighborhood design standards, and revitalizing the struggling Gus Thomasson commercial corridor.

More specifically, a neighborhood land use and zoning strategy within the Casa View Heights Neighborhood Plan asks the City to “create a commercial overlay along Gus Thomasson Road specifying acceptable land uses and design standards.” In other words, this strategy is asking for a rezoning of the Gus Thomasson Road corridor.

The Casa View Heights Neighborhood Plan was adopted by the City Council on April 2, 2007. With the adoption of the neighborhood plan, the City Council directed City Staff to implement the strategies over the next five years.

Also in April 2007, the City Council held a policy retreat and laid out priorities for turning around the visual image of the City, building stronger neighborhoods, and reenergizing aging, distressed commercial corridors. Collectively known as *Project Renewal*, the priorities encourage the Planning Staff to introduce new regulatory tools, such as form-based design codes.

The proposed North Gus Thomasson Corridor District represents the convergence of major community-wide initiatives to revitalize potential infill areas and transform the visual image of the City. For the community and stakeholders, the proposed District will elevate their once-forgotten neighborhood and commercial corridor to a position of prominence in the City’s overall effort to restore Mesquite’s status as a progressive and memorable community in which to live and work.

Was there any public input for the proposed North Gus Thomasson Corridor District (NGTC)?

Yes. A total of five meetings were held in 2008 for the North Gus Thomasson Corridor District: April 28, May 13, June 5, June 19 and October 23. For the April-June corridor meetings, the Casa View Heights residents and all of the property owners that were going to be subject to the rezoning were invited. For the October meeting all of the properties subject to the rezoning, the noticed properties that are within 200 feet of the subject properties and the Casa View Heights residents were invited.

Gus Thomasson Corridor District: Meeting Dates:

Topic	Date
Visioning: Post-it-note Activity	April 29, 2008
Visual Preference Survey	May 13, 2008
Analysis of the Visual Preference Survey	June 5, 2008
North Gus Thomasson Corridor District Presentation	June 19, 2008
North Gus Thomasson Corridor District Presentation	October 23, 2008
Planning and Zoning Commission Public Hearing	October 27, 2008
Planning and Zoning Commission Public Hearing	November 10, 2008
(NEW!) North Gus Thomasson Corridor District Information Presentation	(Date Pending)
City Council Public Hearing	December 15, 2008

To start the visioning process, on April 29, 2008, stakeholders were asked to respond to the following three questions: What are the treasures of the Gus Thomasson corridor; what are the challenges of the Gus Thomasson corridor; and what are your visions for the future of the Gus Thomasson corridor? To

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continue the visioning process, on May 13, 2008, Staff conducted a Visual Preference Survey. Staff uses these two methods for vision planning. Vision planning helps residents and stakeholders become a part of the planning process. These methods help participants articulate and visualize their choices. Staff primarily used the visual preference analysis as the means for allowing neighborhood residents and commercial property owners to articulate their strength of commitment toward pedestrian-orientation, mixed-use, increased density, contextual site design, and improved architectural standards. With that feedback, and using a proven model code as the framework, staff constructed the Gus Thomasson Revitalization Code (GTCRC) in June 2008.

The Planning and Zoning Commission has also held two public hearings for the proposed North Gus Thomasson Corridor District: October 27, 2008, and November 10, 2008.

Where can I find the proposed regulations for the proposed North Gus Thomasson Corridor District?

The basis for regulation in the North Gus Thomasson Corridor District is the Gus Thomasson Corridor Revitalization Code (GTCRC). This code may be found at:
<http://www.cityofmesquite.com/planning/planningdocs.php>

How is the GTCRC different from other City codes?

Building and site development standards are the most important part of the code. The building standards are developed to match what the community wants to see and how they want to look. The building standards address key factors, such as building height, site layout, and building elements. Building height specifies a maximum and minimum height. The GTCRC regulates building height as 2 to 3 stories. Building height is important for creating the sense of an “outdoor room” along the street. If not properly designed, the pedestrian feels less safe. People will walk in an environment only to the extent that they feel comfortable doing so. Site layout standards control where a building should be in relationship to the street as well as adjacent parcels. They also address access, parking, and private frontages. The uses are addressed in general terms. Most residential, lodging, office and retail uses are permitted by right. In order to sell used merchandise, a Conditional Use Permit is required. That is the same requirement under the current Mesquite Zoning Ordinance. Most automotive uses are not permitted. The sale of automotive products would be permitted but new servicing and collision repair services would not be permitted. Furthermore, new warehousing and storage uses are not permitted. These uses do not cater to a pedestrian-oriented, aesthetically pleasing environment. Uses permitted by the GTCRC will help sustain the neighborhood and the corridor. Those uses include neighborhood services, such as: grocery stores, hardware stores, bakeries, dry cleaners, clothing stores, restaurants, and other retail services that are compatible with the neighborhood, as well as civic, membership, education, office and workforce uses. Additionally, most automotive, warehousing and storage use structures cannot be easily adapted for reuse over time. The remainder of the GTCRC includes standards for more beautiful streets (sidewalks, street trees and pedestrian needs), utility standards, architectural standards, landscape standards and lighting standards.

Will I have to put residential uses in my commercial building?

No. The GTCRC promotes the development of residential uses within the corridor. That is because neighborhood-scaled businesses can benefit from greater residential density (i.e., more dwelling units per square mile). The second story of a retail building is an ideal location for new dwellings. The proposed code permits, but does not require, a mix of uses to take place on the same property. The current Mesquite Zoning Ordinance prohibits such an arrangement.

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Why not use the current Mesquite Zoning Ordinance to revitalize the corridor?

The current Mesquite Zoning Ordinance (adopted in 1973) is a collage of 35 years of revisions, patches, and narrowly focused fixes. Yet, in all its complexity, it is inadequate to meet Mesquite's future needs. It requires the unreasonable separation of uses and caters heavily to automobile-oriented development. Both of these characteristics work against the style and type of urban development taking place across the county.

Will the new regulations require me to make changes if I don't plan to change my business or building?

No. The proposed regulations will not require property owners to make improvements or changes simply as a result of the adoption of the GTCRC.

How will the GTCRC treat pre-existing uses and structures that do not comply with the code (nonconformities)?

The GTCRC allows nonconforming uses to continue to exist. The GTCRC also goes one step further to allow nonconforming uses to expand, so long as the expansion conforms to the code. This is in stark contrast to the current Mesquite Zoning Ordinance which does not allow nonconforming uses to expand. The GTCRC also allows nonconforming structures to continue to exist until the property owner chooses to redevelop the site or chooses to do a substantial modification that is valued at 25 percent or more of the replacement cost of the building.

Will my taxes change if my property is located in the proposed North Gus Thomasson Corridor District?

No, taxes will not increase simply as a result of the adoption of the new code. Of course, if you make improvements or modifications to your property then your value may go up and cause your taxes to increase. Also, if the corridor is revitalized over time, as the City and many property owners hope it does, there will be a gradual increase in property values as the area becomes more desirable for development.

Can the City make exceptions to the standards of the GTCRC?

Yes. Just like the current Mesquite Zoning Ordinance, the proposed code cannot possibly anticipate all the peculiarities of land development that occur when such code is applied to specific properties. Variances and Warrants to the form-based standards are very important safety valves that provide flexibility for individuals in special cases. The GTCRC will allow Variances and Warrants, subject to specific criteria to limit when such exceptions are appropriate and to what degree exceptions will be allowed. Requests for Variances, and perhaps for certain other types of exceptions, will also be subject to public notice and public hearing.

Has the GTCRC been revised since the original version?

Yes. Revisions have been made in response to:

- An extensive review of community and stakeholder comments,
- Recommendations from the Planning and Zoning Commission,
- Issues encountered by local planning efforts using similar codes, and
- Lessons learned from projects around the metroplex, state and country.

Are there incentives to help property owners?

The City Council may grant one or more incentives in accordance with adopted policies for neighborhood and economic revitalization, and to the extent permitted by state law. Some of the incentives the City Council has granted for redevelopment projects include:

- Tax abatements

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- The rebate of impact fees
- Installing infrastructure that would have been the responsibility of the developer

Other programs to help business and home owners include:

- **Façade Improvement Program:** This program was developed to enhance the appearance of commercial properties and assist businesses in improving their image. In order to receive any funding from the City of Mesquite, the project must comply with the Community Appearance Manual v. 1.0.
- **Business Recruitment Program:** The City of Mesquite is always recruiting national and regional companies interested in neighborhood locations and/or investments, and local businesses that demonstrate strong growth potential.
- **Low Interest Loan Program:** This program is being developed to offer low-interest financing to viable new and existing businesses and real estate projects including startups, franchises, expansions, or business improvements.

The GTCRC includes new civic areas, streets and trails. Will the City force me to give my land for these amenities?

Absolutely not. The City cannot take land from property owners for streets and civic spaces without permission or compensation. That's the law. If a property owner chooses to redevelop, and the redevelopment creates some need for the amenity, then the City can ask for civic and infrastructure easements during the development review process.

Is the Gus Thomasson Corridor the first location in Mesquite to receive a new revitalization code?

No. A form-based code has already been approved by the City Council for revitalization and infill development of the Truman Heights Neighborhood District. The City has adopted a similar code for 2.2 square miles of greenfield territory within the city limits in Kaufman County. Both of these codes have been recognized by professional organizations for their progressive and forward-looking approach to revitalization and accommodating new growth.

When is the City Council public hearing date?

The public hearing with the City Council, previously scheduled for Monday, November 17, 2008, has been rescheduled for Monday, December 15, 2008, in the City Council Chambers, city Hall, 711 North Galloway Avenue.