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# North Richland Hills approves mixed-use rezoning for Smithfield

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NORTH RICHLAND HILLS — The City Council on Monday night approved a major rezoning of the historic Smithfield area that it hopes will lead to a dramatic reinvention over the next generation.

The council agreed unanimously to rezone 278 acres involving scores of property owners to a transit-oriented mixed-use category, eliminating the neighborhood's existing codes of industrial, commercial and single-family.

"This is significant because it is positioning an entire neighborhood, not just a single project," said Scott Polikov, owner of the Gateway Planning Group, which helped draft the code changes.

The city began planning for the changes more than two years ago, eyeing the possibilities of a big-city, unsuburban mix of residential, retail, restaurants and pedestrian-friendly sidewalks.

Anchoring the plans for Smithfield is a train station along the Fort Worth Transportation Authority's planned commuter rail line from southwest Fort Worth through Northeast Tarrant County, scheduled to start service in 2013.

John Pitstick, the city's planning director, said no one wants a "sea of parking" around a train station. Instead, the zoning changes are designed to foster a "sense of place," he said.

City leaders believe that they have seen the success of some limited mixed-use projects in the Hometown NRH development.

The new rules would pull businesses closer to the sidewalk, put parking in the back, narrow streets, enforce some architectural standards, and prohibit drive-throughs and manufacturing.

"We want to encourage mixed-use development to create a sustainable environment," he said.

Existing businesses and buildings in Smithfield would be allowed to continue as they are. However, if they expanded or substantially remodeled, the new rules would kick in.

The city has similar plans for about 180 acres in the Iron Horse area just north of Northeast Loop 820, where officials would also like to place a rail stop.

But those plans have been put on hold while officials work to assuage the concerns of some property owners who don't want the rezoning to affect their ability to sell or develop.

"It could be that we could revise the code to have the flexibility they want but allow the plan to move forward," said Mike Curtis, director of development services.

Getting a train stop in North Richland Hills is far from a done deal, though.

The city does not belong to the T, and its efforts to get a funding mechanism that would allow it to join failed in the Legislature this year.

Also Monday, the council formally and unanimously approved the hire of Mark Hindman as city manager.

Hindman, 48, currently assistant city manager of Mesquite, will succeed Larry Cunningham, 65, who is retiring at the end of September after 12 years at the helm of the city's 535-person staff.