

# Northeast Tarrant

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## North Richland Hills approves rail-oriented development

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**NORTH RICHLAND HILLS** — The city's plans to join an emerging commuter rail network in Tarrant County may have fizzled in the Legislature, but the City Council is pushing ahead with planning for rail stations and surrounding development in two neighborhoods.

On Monday night, the council unanimously approved changes to the city's comprehensive plan that create "transit-oriented developments" in the Iron Horse and Smithfield areas. Next month, the council is expected to vote on rezoning hundreds of commercial and residential properties within those boundaries.

Before Monday's vote, Mayor Oscar Trevino — a major supporter of a regional rail line that will run from southwest Tarrant County to Dallas/Fort Worth Airport — rebuked the Legislature for failing to pass a bill that would have let communities like North Richland Hills seek voter approval for taxes or fees to fund rail projects. That means the city still has no funding mechanism to join the Fort Worth Transportation Authority.

"We can sit here and bury our heads in sand and play like the Legislature and say, 'We don't need to do anything,'" Trevino said. "Or we can move ahead and be ready when the Legislature decides they will be leaders. [Rail] is the future of this region. We need to be ready when it comes."

For two years, the city and consultants from the Gateway Planning Group have envisioned creating two train stations in North Richland Hills and surrounding them with mixed-use development of retail, apartments and green space akin to Mockingbird Station in Dallas or Addison Circle.

City officials have pursued a plan to rezone almost 500 acres and have drawn up ordinances that would prohibit certain uses, such as drive-throughs, allow others, such as on-street parking, and enforce architectural standards.

The zoning around the Smithfield station would take advantage of the area's historic character, churches and nearby neighborhoods and would feature more shops, cafes and low-density apartments.

City leaders want the Iron Horse station, in a mostly big-box-retail and industrial area just north of Northeast Loop 820, to have denser and taller buildings for residences and businesses.

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