



CITY COUNCIL MEMORANDUM

FROM: The Office of the City Manager **DATE:** October 28, 2024
SUBJECT: Discuss Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Staging Area Standards
PRESENTER: Clayton Comstock, Managing Director of Development Services

SUMMARY:

The purpose of this item is to seek City Council feedback and direction regarding the ground operations and land use standards for commercial drone (or Unmanned Aircraft System) delivery sites in North Richland Hills.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

In February 2024, City Council approved Special Use Permits (SUPs) for the Wal-Mart locations on North Tarrant Parkway and Northeast Loop 820 to feature commercial drone delivery ground operations. Customers can order through an online application to have small goods delivered directly to their home by drone. Both SUPs were approved under the “heliport” land use category and as a one-year pilot program. They both expire February 2025.

The intent of this Work Session discussion is to consider possible permanent standards for drone delivery operations and whether the use can be considered accessory and allowed by-right on certain commercial property, whether it would require a Special Use Permit, or whether any possible permissions would be based on scale and scope of the operations.

Staff has been monitoring the progress of the cities of Lewisville and Plano on their permanent ordinances and will present to Council on those two ordinances. Standards that will be discussed include:

- Maximum lot area for drone operations as an accessory use.
- Maximum height of structures associated with drone operations.
- Minimum setbacks from residentially-zoned properties.
- On-site parking reduction allowances
- Screening of open storage and equipment
- Path for variances and relief from standards (i.e. SUP approval)



For background, links can be found below to the February 2024 staff reports for both Wal-Mart Special Use Permits. These staff reports provide context for noise and setbacks from residential uses as well as helpful video links to familiarize Council with drone operations.

- [North Tarrant Parkway Wal-Mart](#)
- [Northeast Loop 820 Wal-Mart](#)

While [Wing Aviation](#) is the only commercial drone delivery operator currently in North Richland Hills and the adjacent communities, [Zipline](#) recently announced they will be operating out of 22 Wal-Marts in the DFW area, and [Flytrex](#) has plans to enter Northeast Tarrant County as well. Other operators with existing or pending FAA approvals include [Drone Up](#) and [Manna](#). Click on any of the links provided to visit that operator's website. It is important to understand each of these operators' drone delivery procedures, because each have taken a slightly different approach. Operations continue to evolve and adapt with new technology, innovations, and in response to local zoning regulations.

PUBLIC INPUT & FLASHVOTE: Since drone operations began at both Wal-Mart locations in April 2024, there has been some resident feedback received regarding actual flight operations, but none regarding ground operations at the "nest" or staging area. Public feedback received was also earlier in operations and has since been reduced significantly. As part of the next steps for the formal adoption of commercial drone delivery staging area (or "hub") standards, the City will send a FlashVote poll to receive resident input as well.

NEXT STEPS: Pending City Council's direction, below is a general timeline for next steps regarding a commercial drone delivery ordinance:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| November 2024: | FlashVote Poll |
| December 2024: | Planning & Zoning Commission Work Session
Drone operator input meetings |
| January 2025: | Draft ordinance posted online for public input |
| February 2025: | Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council public hearings and ordinance adoption |