



# South Lamar Neighborhood Association

February 29, 2016

Mayor Adler and City Council Members

City of Austin -  
301 W. Second Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Case C14-2015-0047 2303-2311 Thornton Road

Dear Mayor Adler and City Council Members,

We are updating our backup submission based on meetings with staff this past week regarding the City staff regarding the infrastructure capacity of Thornton Road and its application to Case C14-2015-0047 2303-2311 Thornton Road. We have updated the relevant sections of our prior document for review. The applicant's request for CS-VMU is without precedent. The staff recommendation of CS-MU was derived without a regard for the "cumulative effects" upon the "neighborhood's natural and manmade infrastructure" and the safety of the neighborhood's residents, nor does it reflect the form of the current neighborhood character being SF-3 and MF-2.

The zoning history of Thornton Road shows that the existing CS zoning is an anachronism and has been able to co-exist because the businesses involved, the existing artist community at Thornton Road Studios, a junkyard, and various other uses, had a very low impact. Historically, prior requests for zoning changes were denied because of lack of infrastructure.

An additional development is in process on this street and the remaining CS properties are also planning redevelopment. It is important that the City Council consider the impact of the total development potential in any actions.

An action taken at the staff applicant recommendations would provide a plan for the cumulative effects of development to authorize 7300 vehicle trips per day on this street, which is rated to have a threshold of 1800 vpd and add further risks to an unsafe environment.

We still believe that the proposed development does not accurately assess the "cumulative effects of increasing density" and the impact of this development on other neighborhood infrastructure.

Sincerely,



Kim Johnson  
President South Lamar Neighborhood Association

Cc: SLNA Thornton Road Working Group

## 2303-2311 Thornton Road Background

## 1. South Lamar Mitigation Plan Review

As we presented at the Planning Commission meeting, the South Lamar Neighborhood Mitigation Plan<sup>1</sup>, the South Lamar Mitigation Plan included a requirement to address the effects of infill development on several issues. The October 3 staff memo highlights goals including:

- “address the challenges created by many years of development on a site-by-site basis, lacking water detention and exacerbated by recent infill developments where inadequate infrastructure exists”
- “anticipate the cumulative effects of increasing density on a neighborhood’s natural and manmade infrastructure”
- “incorporate methods to define and protect a neighborhood’s character, infrastructure and safety and provide commensurate mitigation requirements to better manage density and its associated costs.

This proposed zoning change fails on all measures. The applicant proposal for VMU along with current construction would represent a 348% increase in the number of residential units on this dead end street that is already overburdened and at times impassable. By proposing a solution that is designed for a transit corridor, the applicant seeks to establish a precedent for transit corridor density in any environment rather than a solution compatible neighboring properties.

The staff recommendation also fails to address the core issue of *anticipating* the cumulative effects of increasing density and protecting the neighborhood's character and infrastructure. South Lamar Neighborhood has worked successfully to implement affordable housing along the Lamar transit corridor including the 107-unit Foundation Communities Bluebonnet Studios project at Lamar and Del Curto. Development here must match the infrastructure.

**2. Thornton Road Description and Existing Density– It is a Local Road acting as a Collector**

The applicant's presentation to Planning Commission incorrectly describes the property as being located at Thornton and Oltorf. The property is 0.21 miles from the intersection of Oltorf and Thornton. Thornton Road has a total length of 2700' or .51 miles. The road dead ends at Oltorf on the north and provides limited access to other Local Roads via Bridgeway and Waterloo Trail on the south. The property is 0.21 miles from the nearest bus stop for the 331 bus route, and 0.41 miles to the 3/803 and 0.6 miles to the 5 bus stop. Figure 1 shows the overview of Thornton Road.

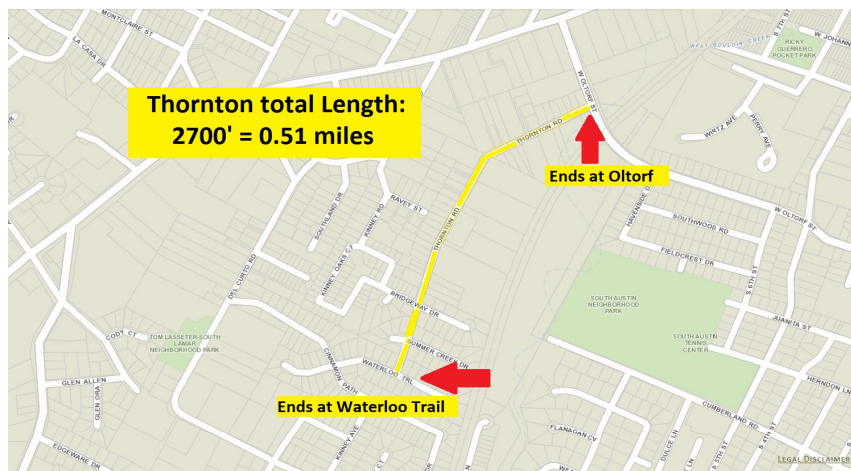


Figure 1

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum to Mayor and Council From Gregory I Guernsey October 3, 2014  
[www.southlamar.org](http://www.southlamar.org) Austin, TX 78704 Page 2 of 20

Thornton Road is currently home to 136 residences located in 79 properties with a predominant zoning of SF-3. The estimated size of the properties bordering Thornton Road is 29.8 acres. Current projects under construction will add 104 units increasing the residential units by 76%. The following Table 1 shows the present characteristics.

Zoning	Properties	Acreage
SF3	63	13.54
SF-4B-CO	2	1.490
SF-6	3	0.326
MF-2	3	6.280
MF-3	1	0.330
CS	6	7.870

Table 1

The characteristics above are graphically presented in Figure 2 The current 6 CS properties are located 1000 feet into the core of the neighborhood and surrounded by residential properties. Historically these properties were listed as Residential A per Austin City Code or the equivalent of SF-3. Section 8 provides a brief history of Thornton Road zoning cases.

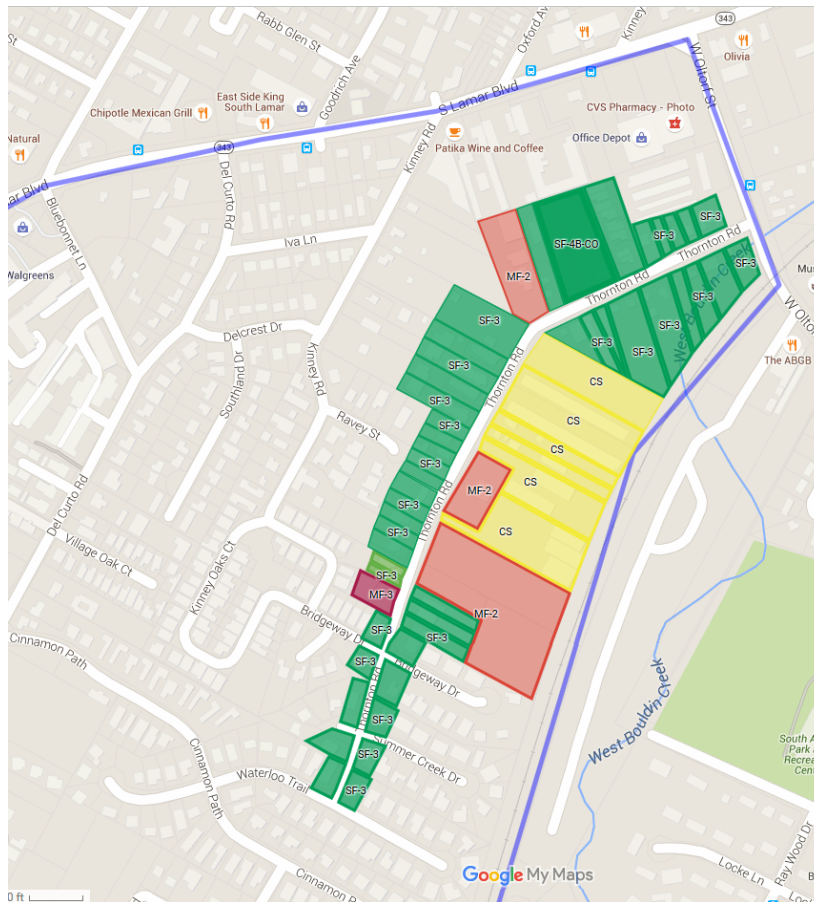


Figure 2

### 3. Lack of Precedent for VMU

The applicant recommends VMU on non-designated transit corridors and presents two cases where this has happened in the Rundberg Revitalization area. Neither example is relevant. SLNA has supported VMU on the Lamar Transportation corridor as well as congregate living such as the present Bluebonnet Studios project providing 107 permanent supportive housing units at Lamar and Del Curto.

Our belief is that VMU should be located on Core Transit Corridors per §4.3 of Austin Land Development Code. It should be noted that SLNA has NOT “opted-in” to any additional VMU exceptions as allowed by section 4.3.2.A.3 at any time.

The precedent of VMU on this street would present the option for a 580% increase in total dwelling units if universally applied, with no potential for infrastructure improvement such as road widening or additional connectivity.

In addition to not being on a transit corridor, the location is poorly served by bus transportation. The closest bus stop for the 331 is 0.21 miles from the property and does not connect to downtown. The 3 and 803 can be reached in just under 0.5 miles and the 5 can be reached in 0.6 miles.

### 4 Traffic Analyses and Limitation of Proposed Solutions Revised

Thornton Road is currently over capacity. The Traffic Study<sup>2</sup> suggests that the volume of traffic on the road is currently equal to that of a Collector Street according to the City of Austin. The Traffic Study continues with the following statement on page 1 (Item C17 page 4 of 30); “However, the existing roadway width (approximately 28’ to 30’) and right-of-way width (varies 50’ to 60’) is closer to that of a Local Street....Vehicles park along both sides of Thornton Road essentially narrowing the street to one travel lane.” The photos below show the state of the road Saturday January 16, 2016.



Figure 3 Thornton Just South of Oltorf January 16, 2016

The study further indicates that current daily volume over threshold is 830 vpd leading to a service level of F.

<sup>2</sup> The Traffic Study references the Thornton Traffic Study dated November 25, 2015 attached as backup to Planning Commission Item C17 pages 1 through 30.

While the applicant and staff recommendation includes a plan for an additional traffic lane, there is no discussion of the impacts of the additional volume on the remainder of the road, which will remain undersized and overburdened. The current bottleneck will move 200 feet, not be solved. Figure 4 shows the same street on the same day. The present volume on Thornton Road is exacerbated by overflow parking from Austin Beer Garden Brewing Company (ABGB). The pictures below are from a video from a recent Saturday promotion. The overflow parking stretched from Thornton to and past the subject property. Throughout this area, the traffic was essentially limited to one lane except for the no parking zone at the curve.



Figure 4. Approximately 2211 Thornton Road January 16

Even given this congestion at north end of Thornton and Oltorf, The Traffic Study does not address the impact of increased traffic on alternative routes that are in use shown in red. Residents and businesses on the subject property normally avoid the Thornton Oltorf intersection. The traffic analysis and future plans should address the traffic considerations for these developments and future developments on other streets that are not Collectors.

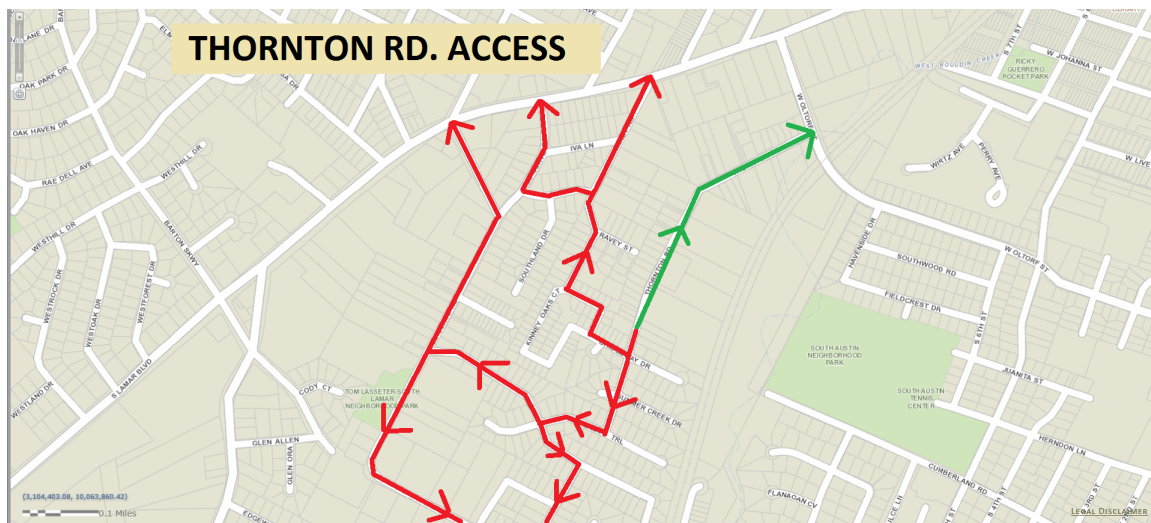


Figure 5 Existing Traffic Patterns for Thornton Road

The staff recommendation includes a plan for widening the road to include a left turn lane for northbound traffic on Oltorf with a pedestrian signal near the 331 bus stop. The road-widening plan with pedestrian signal would produce no net benefit to users other than accelerating right turn traffic according to the traffic study. The service level for the intersection would remain the same grade F as it is today in 2017. In addition, the pedestrian signal would encourage additional parking for new “Enchanted Forest” entertainment complex planned on the north side of Oltorf. No engineering has been attempted to analyze the potential path of the road widening and easements, or utility relocation that would be required to accomplish the road widening at Oltorf.

The applicant proposal suggests installation of a signal at Thornton and Oltorf as part of a condition of VMU designation. The traffic signalization is a recent proposal and has not been analyzed from a cost standpoint. The traffic signal would meet only one of 9 potential warrants for signal installation, would require coordination with the railroad signal, increase the interruption to traffic along Oltorf which is already significantly disrupted by train traffic 28 times on an average day. It is unclear that this proposal meets the City of Austin requirements for signal installation.

Additional information on traffic is found on the following YouTube links

[https://youtu.be/a9Ut9ccL0\\_I](https://youtu.be/a9Ut9ccL0_I)

<https://youtu.be/xS0IT2tLIXw>

## 5. Watershed Impacts Revised

The watershed impacts from this development and the recently released Del Curto Storm Drain Improvements – Phase 1B plan need further clarification. The subject property is at the West Bouldin Creek confluence that is the central draining point for the Del Curto area as shown by Exhibit 10 of the Study. As the study indicates, “80 acres of the Del Curto neighborhood drain to this parcel”. This exhibit shows the connection of the existing inadequate infrastructure as it meets the property. The connection point of all drainage lines is at the north corner of the property in red. The property development will place additional burdens upon downstream neighbors unless the Phase 1 B plan is implemented. As the City notes easement acquisition is required from these neighbors to support the entire plan.

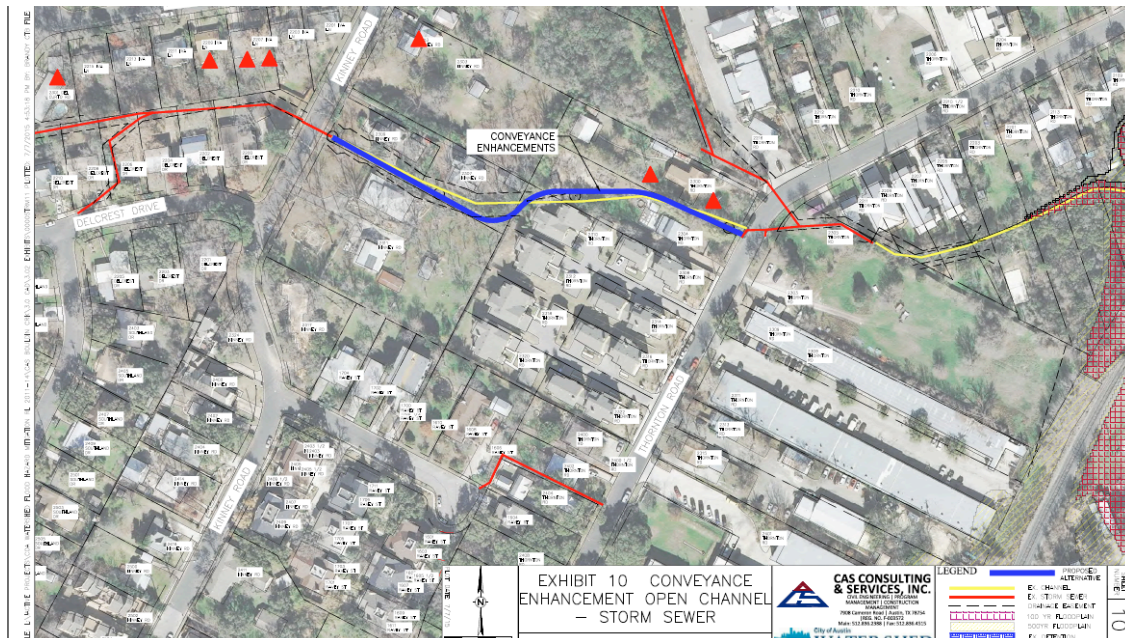


Figure 6 Drainage of Del Curto Watershed to Subject Property

Watershed comments should specifically address the necessary easements as well as ensure that any solution will not negatively impact the homes to the north of the subject property on Thornton Road from either drainage or upstream flows as described in project 15. The timetable for implementation should be finalized to ensure that the full capacity of the system will be available. The pictures of past flooding attached show the potential impact of not having the system fully in place.

### All Sub-Projects



Figure 7 Phase 1B Sub- Project Map

The following picture shows the impact of flooding on Oltorf at the railroad track north of the subject property on October 30 2015.



Figure 9 Oltorf Flooding 10-30-15 Photo Courtesy of Peter Williams

The following picture shows the impact of flooding on Bridgeway on October 30, 2015, South of the subject property.



Figure 10

## 6. Cumulative Development Effects and Mitigation Tools Revised

As noted in Section 1 the South Lamar Mitigation plan objectives include “Develop recommendations for enhanced tools that will better anticipate the cumulative effects of increasing density on a neighborhood’s natural and manmade infrastructure”. The current analysis by the Transportation department did include a review if existing plans on file. The staff recommendation includes a provision for anticipated traffic for the 104 unit PSW Thornton Apartments under construction. This information was analyzed in connection with the Rough Proportionality policy. This analysis does not provide the staff with tools to go beyond past applications and determine true cumulative effects of development on this street, nor does it provide a capacity-planning tool that recognizes existing entitlements. As noted in section 4 no other improvements to this road are proposed to remove the overall bottleneck from the current volume.

As noted in section 1, the area is predominantly Single Family with MF-2 in certain locations. While this analysis looks only CS properties up zoned to MU, the analysis should also consider additional infill development allowed under SF-3 or current CS requirements. The most logical assumptions for CS property analysis based on the applicant and staff recommendations would be that:

- A. More Development will occur and will likely occur in the current CS areas
- B. The precedent from this case will guide the future development.

At our regular meeting on February 18, 2016, The SLNA membership received a preliminary proposal for development at 2413 Thornton Road. Two options were presented. The first was a 75,000 square foot building generating an estimated 850 trips per day and the second is an 80 unit multi-family generating an estimated 526 trips per day. In addition, the present owners of the CS properties have indicated that they are planning to sell.

The following table shows the cumulative effects of all current CS properties being built out at varying densities compared to the current residences on Thornton. 104 units will come on line from PSW Thornton at 2505 Thornton.

<b>Assumed Density</b>	<b>Additional Units</b>	<b>EOY 2015 Units</b>	<b>% Increase</b>
Baseline 2016	104	136	76%
Baseline with Applicant	212 + 104 = 316	136	232%
Baseline with Staff Rec	156 + 104 = 260	136	191%
Calculation of Cumulative Development Effects for all CS at Varying Densities			
VMU 60/ac	473 + 104 = 577	136	424%
Staff 44/ac	347 + 104 = 453	136	331%
MF-2 23/ac	181 + 104 = 285	136	209%

Table 2

The following table shows the cumulative effects of transportation based on "full development

<b>Assumed Density</b>	<b>Est VPD</b>	<b>Threshold</b>	<b>Excess Volume</b>	<b>% Above Threshold</b>
Baseline 2016	2630	1800	830	146%
Planned 2017	3463	1800	1663	192%
2017 with applicant	4000	1800	2200	222%
Baseline with Staff Rec	N/A			
6.64 VPD per unit Calculation of Cumulative Development Effects for all CS Properties at Varying Densities				
VMU 60/ac	3463 + 3832 = 7295	1800	5495	405%
Staff 44/ac	3463 + 3007 = 6470	1800	4670	359%
MF-2 23/ac	3463 + 1728 = 5191	1800	3391	288%

Table 3

## 7 Neighborhood Character

The subject property is currently home to the Thornton Road Studios and a collection of small businesses that are low impact commercial establishments. We believe that maintaining the small businesses and artists in the Austin community is vital to our neighborhood character and the character of Austin. The Thornton Road Studios presentation will be provided as a separate attachment. Thornton Road Studios includes award-winning artists that work and live in the neighborhood.

## 8 Thornton Road History Revised

Thornton Road has a 55 year history of Planning Commission and City Council voting **against** intensive zoning because:

- **Neighborhood is residential in character**
- **Thornton Road has inadequate width and limited connectivity**
- **Subject tracts are long distance from the thoroughfare (Oltorf)**
- **Neighborhood is geographically isolated - no access across railroad**
- **Potential flooding hazards from West Bouldin Creek**

*"I cannot figure any street system which would not work severe hardship on any of the residences in the area."* - Planning Commission Minutes Feb 14, 1961

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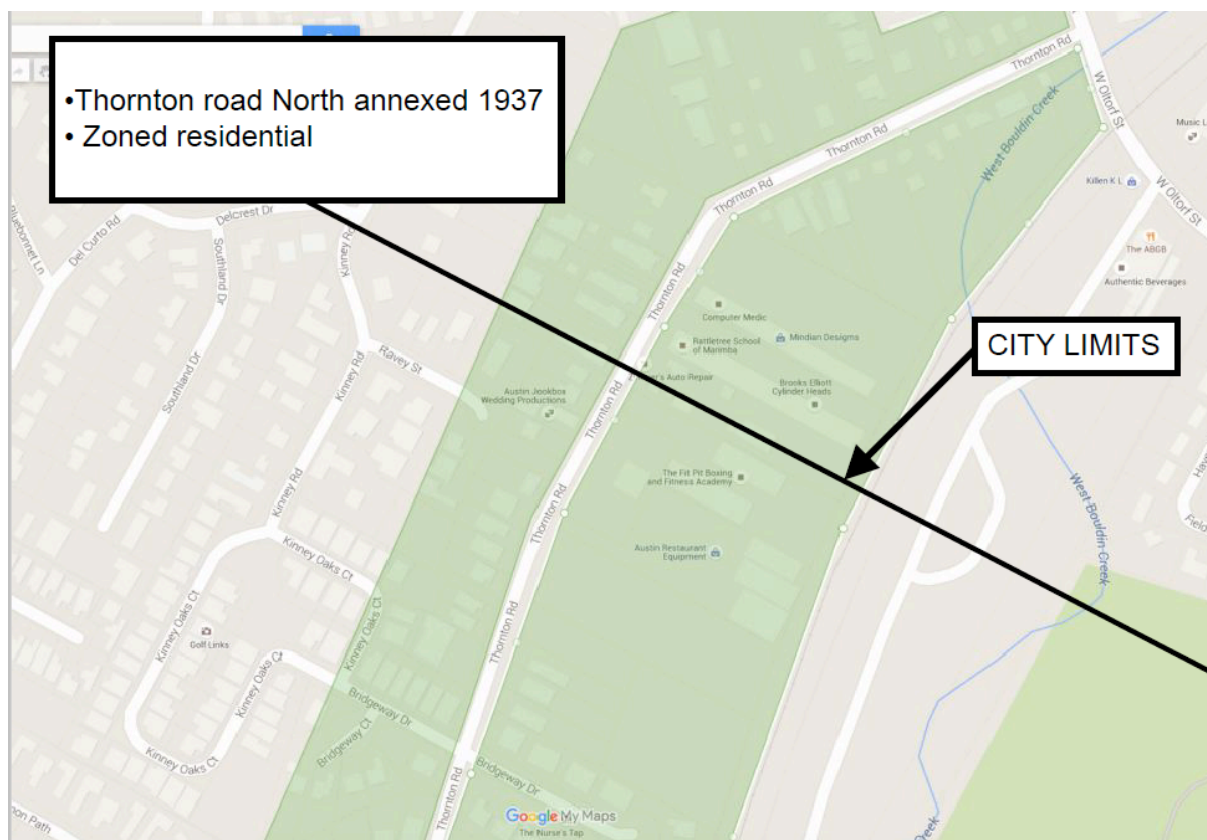


Figure 11 Thornton Road 1937

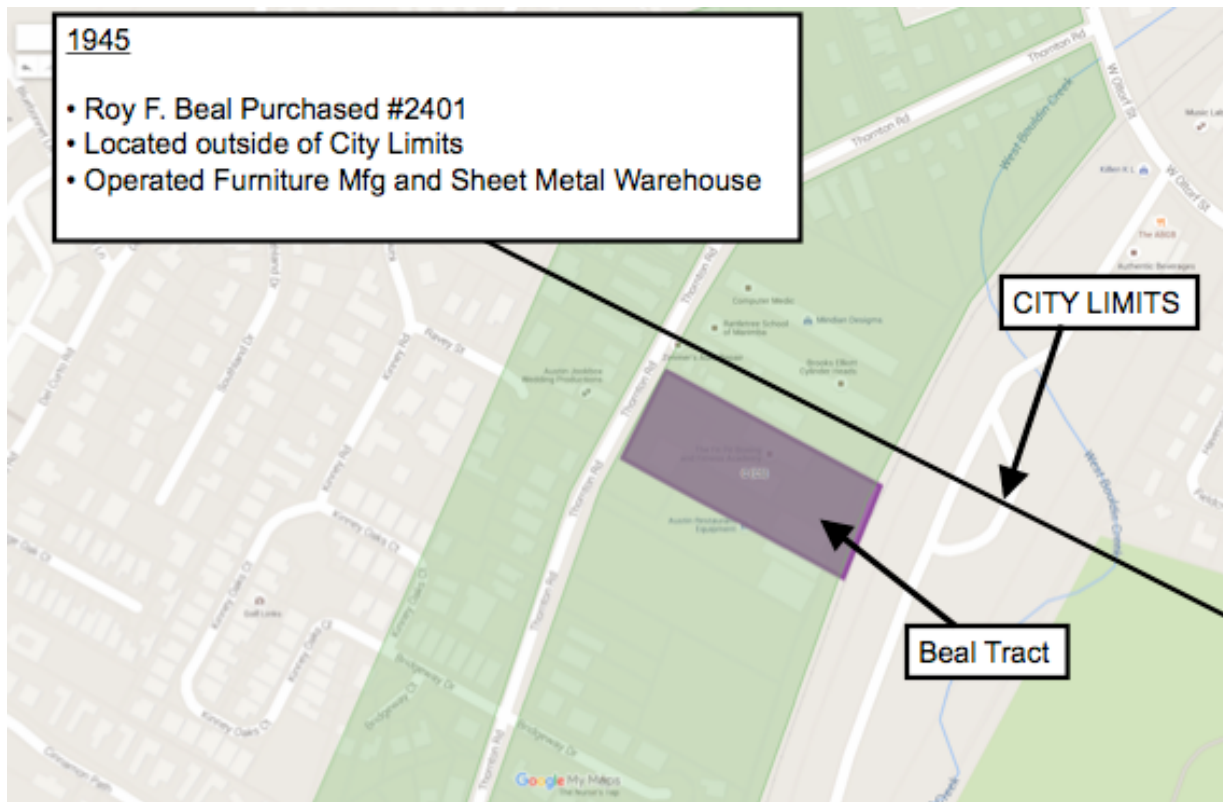


Figure 12 Thornton Road 1945



Figure 13 Thornton Road 1952

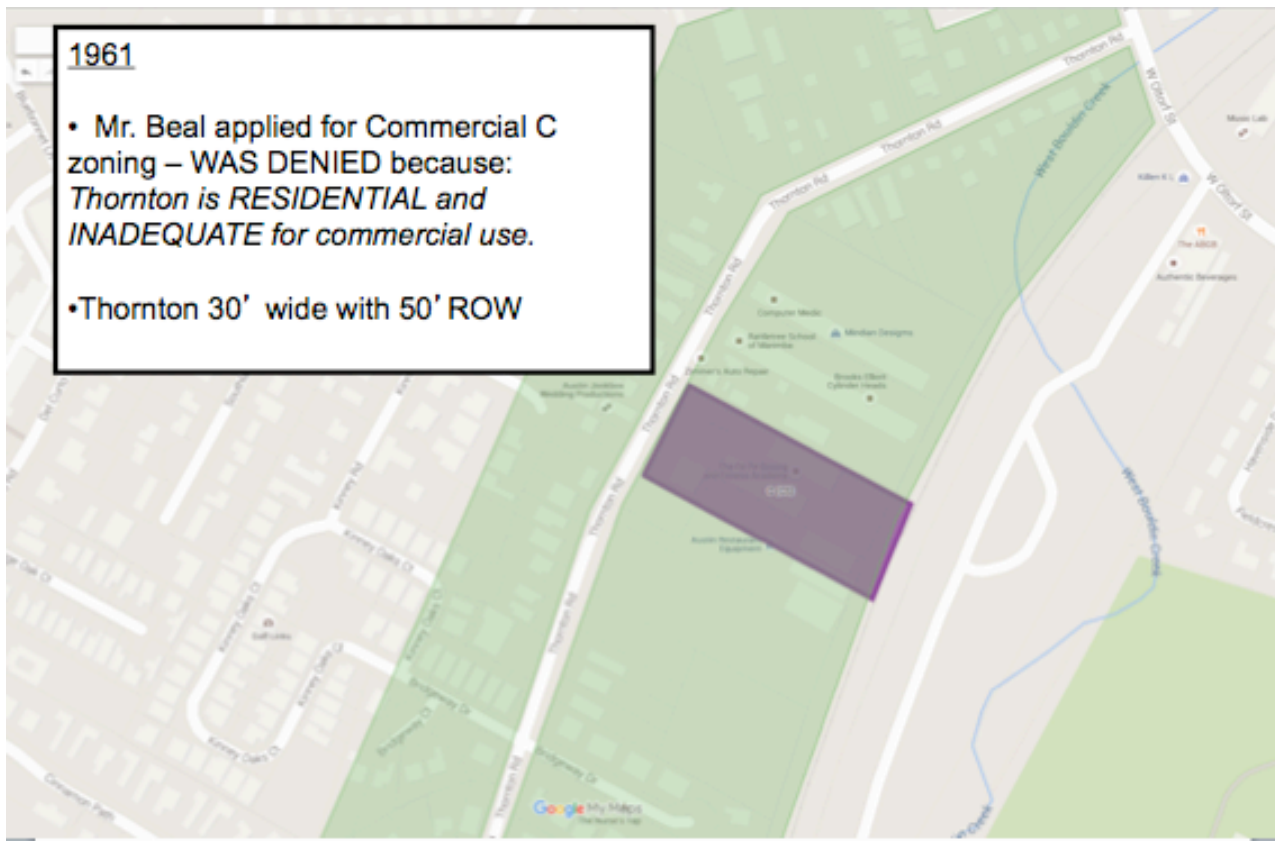


Figure 14 Thornton Road 1961

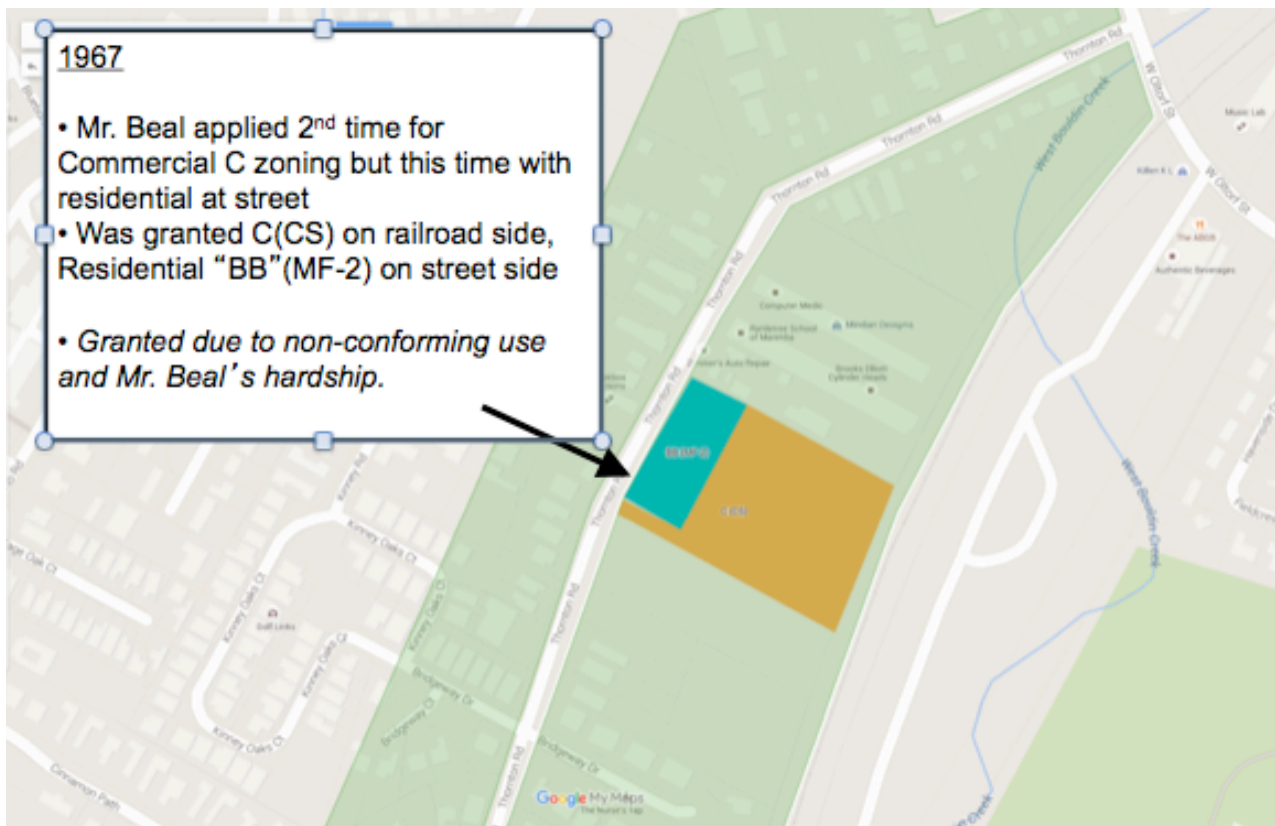


Figure 15 Thornton Road 1967

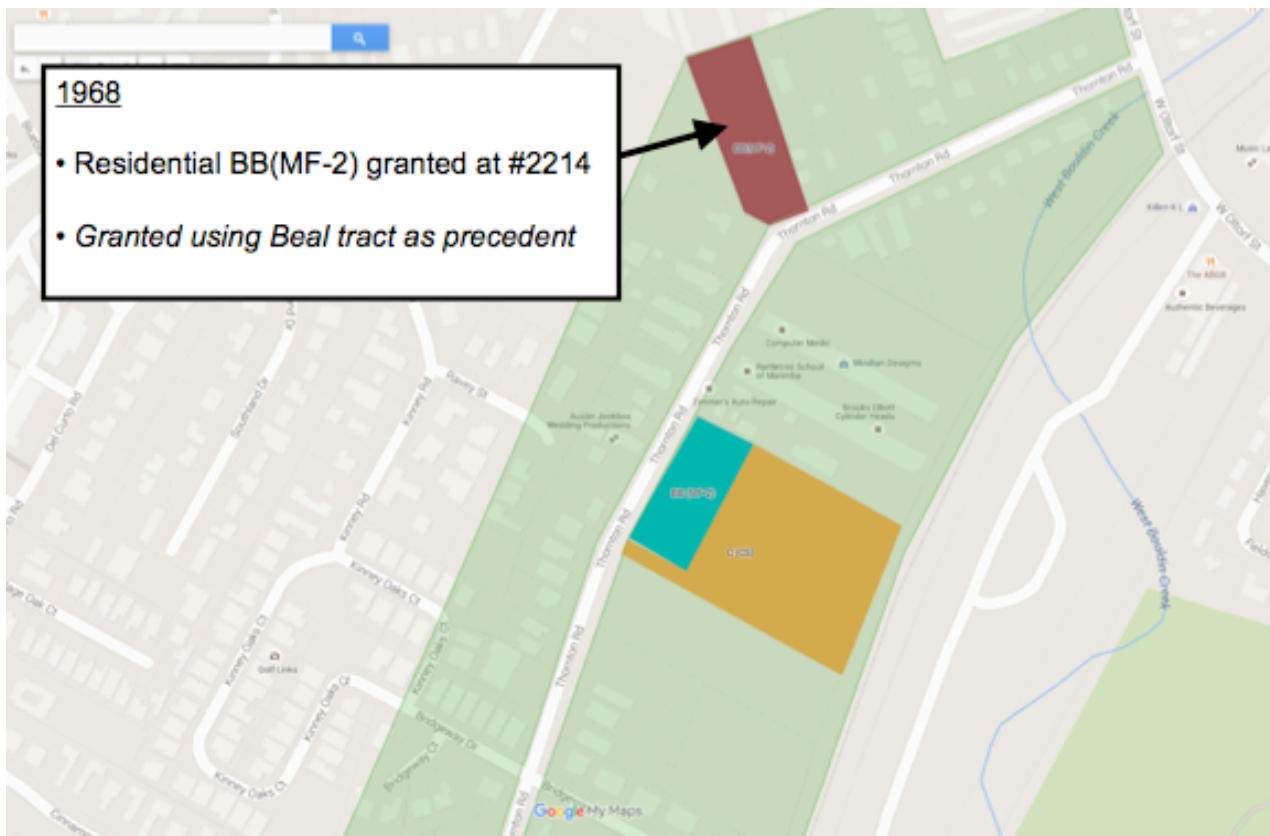


Figure 16 Thornton Road 1968

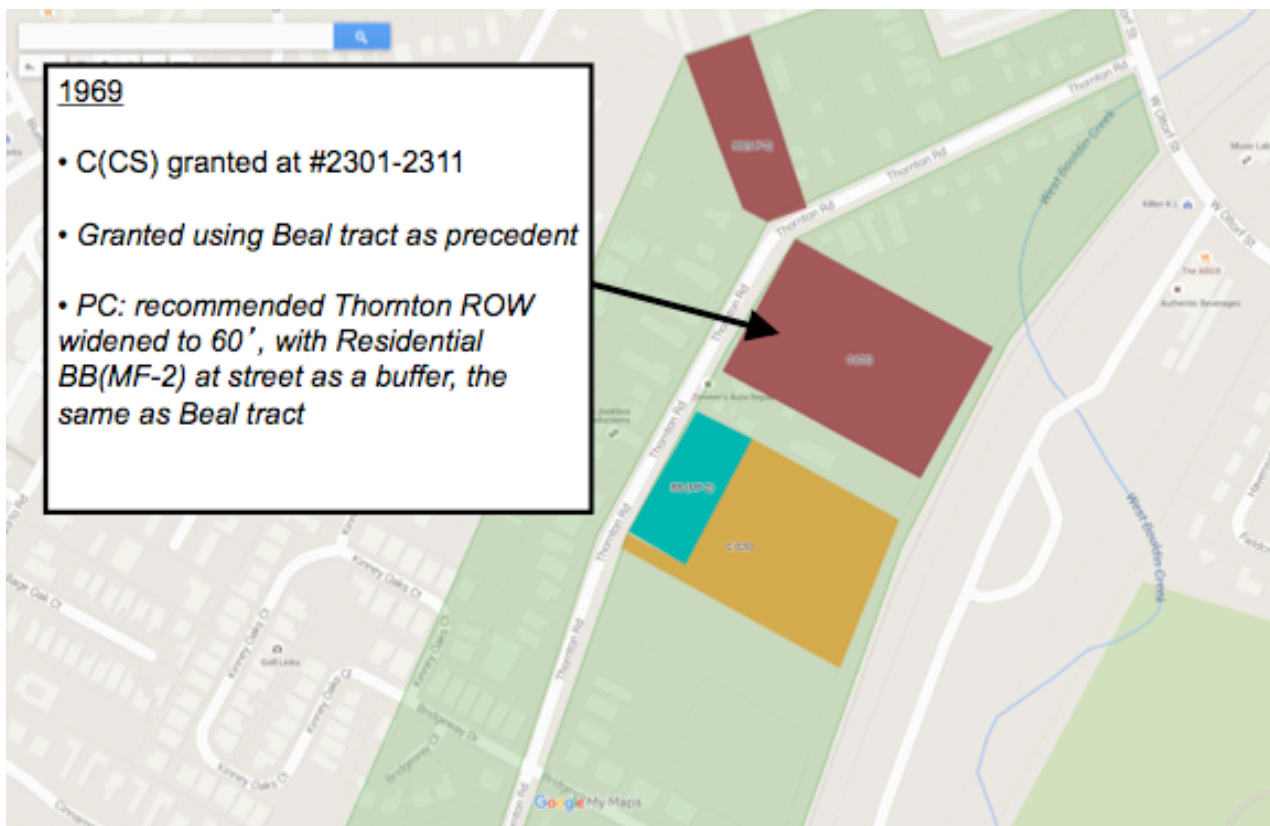


Figure 17 Thornton Road 1969a



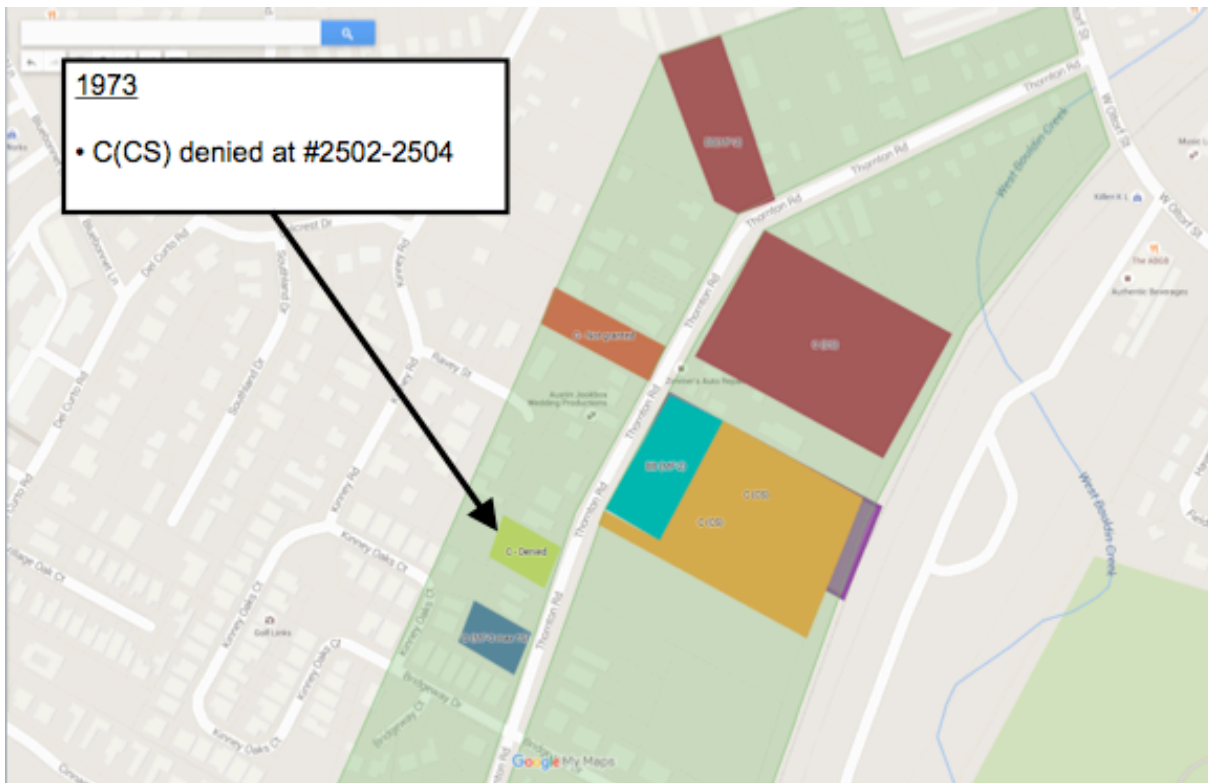


Figure 20 Thornton Road 1973



Figure 21 Thornton Road 1974



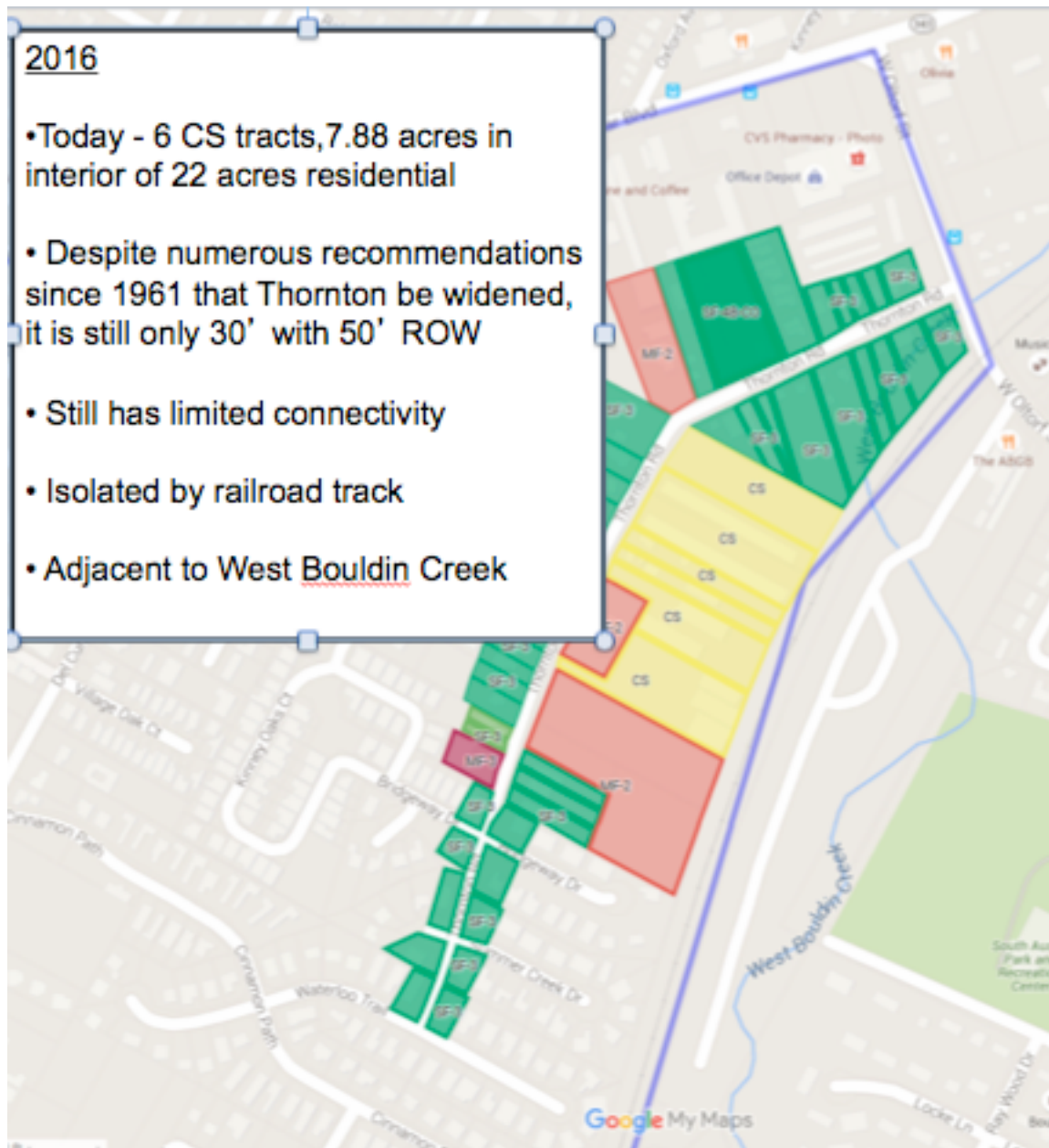


Figure 23 Thornton Road 2016 a

### Thornton has extremely limited connectivity

Thornton crosses 3 streets - all are short w/ limited connectivity

1) Bridgeway Drive extends 735', ends at Kinney Court circle to the west, ends at RR to east

2) Summer Creek Drive extends 514' - ends at cul-de-sac to west, RR to east

3) Waterloo Trail extends 1350', 1/4 mile - ends at cul-de-sac to west, RR to east, crosses Cinnamon Path which extends 1950', 1/3 mile - ends at Del Curto to west, RR to east

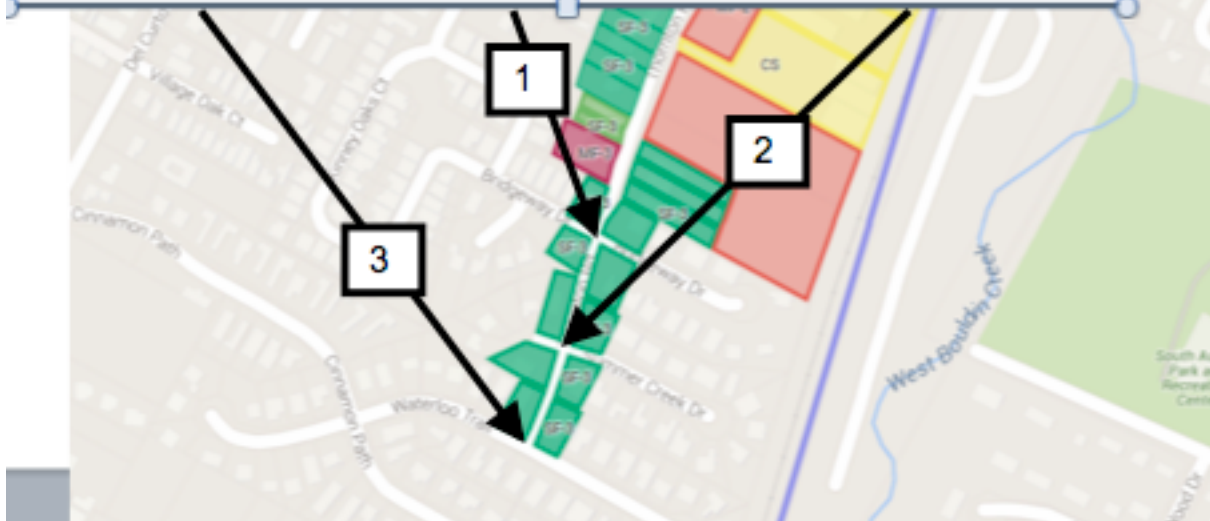


Figure 24 Thornton Road 2016b

## Appendix A Formerly Section 8 - Thornton Road History Notes

There are currently six commercial properties on Thornton which were zoned commercial in 3 separate zoning cases:

- 1 July 21, 1967: 2401-2413 Thornton
- 2 Nov 6, 1969: 2301-2311 Thornton
- 3 Mar 7, 1974: 2313-2315 Thornton

Note that in the final CS zoning, the planning commissioner recommended that "this tract should be more restrictive in its use", and Thornton should be widened to 60'.

The first commercial uses on Thornton Road were around 1955 at #2401 which was then just outside the city limits. City limits extended only through #2315 at that time.

Around 1960, the city annexed the remaining southern section of Thornton Road.

Here is the history with some highlighted quotes from the meeting minutes discussing the problems of Thornton Road. There are pertinent quotes in the planning commission minutes for which links are provided.

Apr 6, 1961

First zoning request for Commercial in interior of Thornton which was not granted  
City Council heard the application for zoning from "A" residential to "C" commercial at 2317-2409 Thornton ([Roy F. Beal, E.F. Evans Company](#)) and 2519-2707 Thornton (H.G. Linscomb) which was NOT RECOMMENDED by the Planning Commission with the following notes:

*The Planning Commission had studied these cases at length, and the problem of the zoning was a street problem. Mr. Beal's operations (E.F. Evans - sheet metal company) are under a non-conforming use, and are of an industrial of commercial type that is permitted under "C". Mr Linscomb (property at the south dead end of Thornton) has 6-1/2 acres and wants to put a contractor's office and equipment yard with some warehouses that will store only durable goods. He explained that about 25 acres would be earmarked for commercial uses. Discussion of former zoning, and dedication for right-of-way boulevard was held. Mr. Linscomb state he would give whatever they wanted as a reasonable amount. The Director of Planning stated the Railroad Company had indicated it would dedicate a right-of-way provided someone else developed it; and he pointed out certain problems concerning the dedicated thoroughfare stating it would be necessary to rechannel the creek; concerning the development of Lightsey Lane in connection with the residential subdivision of South Terrace in which houses are under construction; concerning Thornton Road which is not opened on the ground on the Lindsey Tract; and concerning the early development of the entire area as residential with houses selling on three sides and the commercial area in the middle, away from the thoroughfare. He stated ultimately there would be a public responsibility to develop the streets in a large commercial area; in the meantime the residential developers are required to develop the street, put in the utilities and handle the drainage. Councilman Bechtol discussed the traffic flow, and state it would be up to the applicants to work that out and that the I&GN Railroad to join in it, and asked Mr. O'Quinn to contact the railroad and work this out. Mayor Pro-tem Palmer stated the Council would make a personal inspection of the area.*

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=41208>

Discussion at Planning Commission 2/14/61:

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=215317>

AND ON 3/14/61 where they voted to DENY:

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=215318>

This case stayed pending for years, finally denied after no response from applicant:

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=38206>

July 27, 1967

1st successful zoning on Thornton #2401

[2401-2411 Thornton from "A" residence to "BB" residence \(street side\) and 4 acres 2401-2413 Thornton \(adjacent to railroad tracks\) from "A" to "C"](#)

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=38224>

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=39039>

Planning Commission minutes:

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=215219>

Nov 6, 1969

[Council approves 2nd CS zoning in interior of Thornton](#)

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=38488>

[2301-2311](#) Thornton from "A" residence district to "C" commercial district

Planning Commission minutes:

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=215286>

Apr 9, 1970

Council heard 2316-2318 Thornton from "A" to "C", NOT recommended by Planning Commission which recommended "BB" instead.

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=24632>

Jan 7, 1970

Council approved 2512-2514 from "A" to "B" w/ restrictive covenant to limit of 15 units. Planning Commission did not recommend change to "B" but instead recommended "BB" which was less intensive - **"because of the limited access to this interior area from Oltorf Street and not wishing to set a precedent for more intensive zoning"**. Restrictive covenant of 15 units and subject to 5' right-of-way

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=24553>

Mar 8, 1973

Council DENIED 2502-2504 Thornton from "A" to "C" but APPROVED "A" to "BB" which is what Planning Commission recommended "BB", explaining: **"Thornton Road is a dead-end street extending southerly off of Oltorf. It is an area developed prior to annexation and many of the uses there now are still single family. Recent zonings cover very deep lots, fronting on Thornton Road; and there is a warehouse fronting on the railroad track. Three zoning requests had been zoned "BB" residence and "B" residence and the fourth request was recommended for denial of the "C" Commercial zoning, but recommended for (low density- hence "BB") apartment zoning."**

[Mar 7, 1974](#)

3rd successful commercial zoning case

Council approved 2313-2315 Thornton from "A" to "C"

Planning Commission recommended the change **subject to 1/2 the r-o-w (5') to increase Thornton Road to 60'**. Planning commission comments: **"this was an older area in South Austin on a very long dead-end street and was predominantly residential. The previous requests for "C" Commercial, which had been granted, had either been dismissed because of incompleteness of requirements or their not being used for "C" purposes. He added that it was the opinion of the staff that rather than continue to zone "C", this tract should be more restrictive in its use."**

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/document.cfm?id=27013>

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=27345>