

FILE NUMBER: ZTA 2026-02
REQUEST FOR: Zoning Text Amendment
CASE MANAGER: Adam B. Bailey, AICP, Director of Planning and Development Services

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Planning and Zoning Commission: Monday, July 13, 2026
City Council: Monday, August 3, 2026

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTION

On July 13, 2026, the Planning and Zoning Commission voted 7-0 to approve the proposed zoning text amendment.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Applicant: City of Mesquite
Requested Action: Amend the Mesquite Zoning Ordinance (MZO), Appendix C to the Mesquite City Code, by making certain additions and deletions to the following sections pertaining to drone delivery and autonomous package loading devices:

- Section 3.513 — Drone Delivery (amended to add in-section definitions; revise and expand the drone staging area regulations; establish screening, masonry wall, and fencing standards; add accessory structure standards within drone staging areas; establish development standards for autonomous package loading devices in a new Subsection F; and establish administrative review and administrative adjustment procedures)
- Section 6.102 — Definitions (amended to update the definitions of Drone Delivery—Accessory Use, Drone Delivery Service, and Drone Staging Area). The terms autonomous package loading device and unmanned aircraft are defined within Section 3.513.A rather than in Section 6.102.

Location: Citywide. As a Zoning Text Amendment, this request amends the text of the Mesquite Zoning Ordinance. It does not rezone any property and does not change any zoning district boundary. The amended standards apply to all property within nonresidential zoning districts citywide where a drone delivery use, drone staging area, or autonomous package loading device may be proposed.

CASE SUMMARY

The City of Mesquite proposes Zoning Text Amendment No. 2026-02 to strengthen and clarify the City's regulatory framework for drone delivery. Section 3.513 currently regulates drone delivery services and drone staging areas, but it contains no standards governing autonomous

package loading devices (APLDs) — the freestanding, wall-mounted, pole-mounted, rooftop-mounted, or building-integrated structures from which an unmanned aircraft collects an employee-loaded package. As drone delivery has expanded in Mesquite through partnerships with local businesses, Staff identified gaps in Section 3.513 concerning APLD siting, quantity, structural and electrical safety, pedestrian circulation, emergency access, utility connections, residential separation, and administrative review. Staff also identified opportunities to strengthen the City’s existing drone staging area regulations. This amendment addresses those gaps.

The amendment adds a new Subsection F to Section 3.513 establishing development standards for autonomous package loading devices, addressing permitted use and prohibited districts, a limit of one device per parcel by right and no more than three under any circumstance, building permit and structural engineering requirements, prohibited locations, placement between the building and the rear property line, a fifteen-foot height limit, a fifteen-foot separation from drive-through lanes and loading docks, screening, a one hundred-foot residential setback, permanent utility connections, operational interference, administrative adjustments, abandonment and removal, and nonconforming devices. The amendment also strengthens the drone staging area regulations by requiring that ground-mounted improvements be screened from public view along public rights-of-way by an eight-foot masonry wall with landscaping, allowing decorative iron fencing on sides not facing a right-of-way, prohibiting chain link fencing, establishing standards for accessory structures within a staging area, prohibiting shipping containers and similar prefabricated storage units as accessory structures, and updating the definitions in Section 3.513.A and Section 6.102 to distinguish a drone staging area from an autonomous package loading device.

Autonomous package loading devices are permitted as an accessory use, subject to building permit approval, in any nonresidential zoning district where the associated primary use — a food store, restaurant, retail store, warehouse/distribution facility, or other permitted commercial use with on-premises customer transactions — is permitted. They are prohibited in residential zoning districts. Approval is administered through the building permit process using the standards established in Section 3.513.F, and no public hearing or rezoning is required for an installation that complies with those standards. The Director of Planning and Development Services may approve a limited administrative adjustment under Section 3.513.F.15, supported by written findings retained in the permit file. No administrative adjustment may waive a public-safety standard, authorize placement within a public right-of-way, or increase the maximum number of devices permitted on a parcel.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Industry Context

Drone package delivery has moved from pilot programs to active commercial operation across North Texas. Operators such as Zipline have established partnerships with quick-service restaurants and retailers, using small ground-based structures to receive employee-loaded packages for pickup by unmanned aircraft. Zipline currently operates in Mesquite. Unlike a drone staging area, where the aircraft itself launches, lands, charges, and is stored, an autonomous package loading device is solely a package handoff point: an employee loads it, the aircraft collects the package, and the aircraft departs without docking, charging, or staging at the device. This distinction matters because the two structures present different land use considerations—staging areas raise concerns associated with aircraft operations and storage,

while APLDs raise concerns associated with small accessory structures sited on commercial property near pedestrians, parking, and drive-through facilities.

Because APLDs are typically small, low-impact accessory structures attached to or near an existing commercial building, their primary land use considerations differ from drone staging areas and instead focus on pedestrian and vehicular circulation, proximity to building entrances and drive-through lanes, residential compatibility, structural and electrical safety, and compatibility with surrounding development.

Regulatory Gap

An APLD proposed in Mesquite today is reviewed through the building permit process as an accessory structure, with no zoning standards addressing permitted location, quantity, placement, setbacks, pedestrian circulation, emergency access, residential compatibility, structural safety, utility connections, or long-term operational requirements. The existing drone staging area regulations likewise do not comprehensively address accessory structures within a staging area or require screening of ground-mounted improvements. These gaps create uncertainty for applicants and for City staff, and they increase the potential for inconsistent administration of an active commercial use.

Development of the Proposed Standards

Staff developed the proposed standards through a multi-step process:

- Review of Section 3.513 as applied to active drone delivery operations in Mesquite, including consultation regarding device specifications, siting practices, and operational characteristics.
- Internal review with the Building Inspections Division and Fire Prevention Division to identify structural, electrical, fire protection, accessibility, and life-safety considerations associated with both drone staging areas and autonomous package loading devices.
- Review of the federal regulatory framework, including exclusive federal authority over the navigable airspace and unmanned aircraft operations (49 U.S.C. § 40103; 14 C.F.R. Part 107) and Federal Communications Commission jurisdiction over radio frequency interference, to confirm that the amendment regulates land use and structures rather than aircraft operations or radio communications.
- Evaluation of the operational differences between drone staging areas and autonomous package loading devices to establish distinct development standards appropriate to each use.
- Multiple rounds of internal drafting and cross-departmental review to ensure consistency, enforceability, and accurate cross-references throughout Section 3.513 and Section 6.102.

MESQUITE ZONING ORDINANCE

SEC. 5-308.M. Approval Standards for Zoning Text Amendments. In making their recommendation and decision, the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council shall consider the following standards. The approval of Zoning Text Amendments should be based on a balancing of these standards.

1. The extent to which the proposed amendment promotes the public health, safety, and welfare.

STAFF COMMENTS: The proposed amendment promotes the public health, safety, and welfare by establishing enforceable standards governing the placement, design, construction, and operation of autonomous package loading devices and drone staging areas. Structural and electrical safety are addressed through the building permit, engineering certification, and electrical permit requirements of Section 3.513.F.3 and the permanent utility connection requirements of Section 3.513.F.13. Emergency access, pedestrian circulation, and accessibility are protected by the prohibited locations in Section 3.513.F.4, which keep devices out of fire lanes, accessible routes, means of egress, and required parking, and which preserve a minimum five-foot clear width along pedestrian and accessible routes. Compatibility with adjacent development is addressed through the screening provisions of Section 3.513.F.11, the fifteen-foot height limit of Section 3.513.F.7, and the one hundred-foot residential setback of Section 3.513.F.12. The amendment also strengthens the drone staging area regulations through masonry screening, a prohibition on chain link fencing, and standards governing accessory structures. Together, these standards reduce potential conflicts between drone delivery infrastructure and surrounding development and provide a predictable regulatory framework for applicants and City staff.

2. The consistency of the proposed amendment with the Comprehensive Plan.

STAFF COMMENTS: The amendment is consistent with the Economic Development and Quality of Life elements of the Mesquite Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan supports the growth of innovative commercial activity, and drone delivery — already an active use in Mesquite — is an emerging service model consistent with that direction. The Comprehensive Plan also calls for new and emerging commercial activity to be sited and regulated so that impacts on residential areas and on pedestrian safety are minimized. The prohibited locations of Section 3.513.F.4, the rear-yard placement requirement of Section 3.513.F.6, the screening authority of Section 3.513.F.11, and the one hundred-foot residential setback of Section 3.513.F.12 implement that balance directly.

3. The consistency of the proposed amendment with any adopted land use policies.

STAFF COMMENTS: The amendment is consistent with the City's land use policies directing that accessory commercial structures be sited compatibly with surrounding uses and adequately separated from residential property. By limiting autonomous package loading devices to nonresidential zoning districts, establishing a one hundred-foot residential setback under Section 3.513.F.12, prohibiting front-yard placement under Section 3.513.F.6, and retaining the two hundred-foot residential separation for drone staging areas under Section 3.513.C.4, the amendment applies the City's established approach to siting small-scale accessory structures on commercial property. The amendment does not change the status of drone delivery services or drone staging areas as permitted uses. It supplements that framework with development standards governing autonomous package loading devices and related drone delivery infrastructure.

4. The consistency of the proposed amendment with the intent of this Code.

STAFF COMMENTS: The proposed amendment is consistent with the MZO's overarching intent to regulate land use in a manner that promotes quality development, protects adjacent property values, and ensures compatibility between uses. The amendment is incorporated directly into Section 3.513 (Drone Delivery) as a new Subsection F, consistent with how the MZO organizes use-specific supplementary regulations within a single, self-contained section. This approach ensures that all applicable requirements governing drone delivery — staging areas and APLDs alike — remain readily accessible to applicants, property owners, and City staff in one section of the Code.

5. Whether the proposed amendment corrects an error or omission, updates administrative processes and procedures, adds clarification to existing requirements, or reflects a change in policy.

STAFF COMMENTS: The proposed amendment corrects a regulatory omission by establishing development standards for autonomous package loading devices where none previously existed. It also modernizes the City's drone delivery regulations by strengthening the drone staging area standards, regulating accessory structures within staging areas, adding masonry screening and fencing requirements, updating terminology and definitions, correcting internal cross-references, and establishing administrative review procedures for future drone delivery installations.

6. The extent to which the proposed amendment creates nonconformities.

STAFF COMMENTS: The proposed amendment will create one known nonconformity. Staff has identified a single autonomous package loading device installation in Mesquite that was lawfully established before this amendment and that does not fully conform to the proposed standards. Staff has identified no other installation, including any drone staging area, that would be rendered nonconforming. Upon adoption, the existing device will be a legally nonconforming structure under amended Section 3.513.F.18 (Non-conforming devices) and the nonconforming provisions of the Mesquite Zoning Ordinance. The device may continue to operate, and normal maintenance and like-for-like replacement are expressly permitted so long as the replacement does not increase the height, footprint, or operational clearance of the original installation. The device may not be expanded, relocated, or otherwise replaced without full compliance with Section 3.513.F. This treatment is consistent with the City's standard approach to lawfully established structures that predate a regulatory change.

7. Any other legally sufficient standard under Texas law.

STAFF COMMENTS: The proposed amendment has been reviewed by the City Attorney's Office for consistency with Chapter 211 of the Texas Local Government Code, including the notice and public hearing requirements of Sections 211.006 and 211.007. The amendment regulates the location, design, construction, and screening of structures on private property. It does not regulate

the operation of aircraft in the navigable airspace, which is reserved to the federal government under 49 U.S.C. § 40103 and 14 C.F.R. Part 107, and it does not regulate radio frequency communications, which are within the jurisdiction of the Federal Communications Commission. Section 3.513.F.3 states this limitation expressly, and Section 3.513.F.16 conditions any determination of harmful interference on a finding by an agency having jurisdiction over that subject matter. Staff is aware of no other legally sufficient standard applicable to this amendment that would affect the Commission's recommendation. The proposed amendment has been reviewed by the City Attorney's office for consistency with Texas Local Government Code requirements for zoning text amendments, notice, and public hearing procedures.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed Zoning Text Amendment updates Mesquite's drone delivery regulations to reflect how the use actually operates. Rather than regulating all drone delivery infrastructure in the same manner, the amendment distinguishes a drone staging area — where an aircraft launches, lands, charges, and is stored — from an autonomous package loading device, which serves only as a package handoff point. Each is given standards proportionate to its actual land use impact, and both are consolidated within Section 3.513 so that applicants, property owners, and City staff can locate every applicable requirement in one place.

The amendment allows drone delivery to continue developing in Mesquite while establishing clear standards that protect pedestrian circulation, emergency access, adjacent development, and neighborhood compatibility. Review occurs through the existing building permit process, which keeps the approval path predictable for applicants and administrable for staff, while the administrative adjustment provisions of Section 3.513.F.15 permit narrow, written-findings relief for unusual site conditions and expressly bar relief from any public-safety standard or from the limit on the number of devices per parcel.

Taken together, the revisions establish an integrated regulatory framework governing each principal component of a drone delivery operation: the delivery service itself, the staging area, the accessory structures that serve it, and the autonomous package loading device.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information contained in the application and analysis of the facts of record, Planning Staff concludes that approval of the zoning text amendment request, amending Appendix C to the Mesquite City Code (Mesquite Zoning Ordinance), Section 3.513 (Drone Delivery) and Section 6.102 (Definitions), as set forth in Exhibit A, is **WARRANTED**, as it satisfies all applicable approval standards in Section 5-308.M of the Mesquite Zoning Ordinance.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Exhibit A – Proposed Ordinance Text (MZO §3.513, Drone Delivery, as amended, including new Subsection F, Autonomous Package Loading Devices), as well as MZO §6.102, Definitions, as amended.