

WEST VAUGHAN EMPLOYMENT AREA SECONDARY PLAN

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Part 1: Background to the Secondary Plan

1.1 Introduction and Background

In 2002, OPA 600 designated lands east of Highway 50 and west of the Woodbridge and Kleinburg-Nashville communities for employment uses. This employment area is referred to as the Vaughan Enterprise Zone. While the southern part of this employment area has developed, the lands north of Langstaff Road, known as the West Vaughan Employment Area (the WVEA) have not proceeded because of uncertainty around the proposed Highway 427 extension. As the preferred alignment for the Highway 427 extension has been identified through the Environmental Assessment process, further planning and development of these lands can now be undertaken.

In 2007 the City initiated Vaughan Tomorrow, a comprehensive growth management strategy. A key outcome of this strategy is the new Official Plan, which will guide growth and development for the entire city and will ensure conformity with the province's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including the Growth Plan's 2031 population and employment projections. Given that the Highway 427 Extension Environmental Assessment process was near completion and identified a preferred highway alignment, it was decided that this was an appropriate time to initiate the Secondary Plan for the West Vaughan Employment Area (WVEA) as part of the growth management process.

As part of the Official Plan development process, a series of background reports were prepared to provide land use planning direction. Hemson Consulting prepared an background report entitled "Housing Analysis and Employment Land Needs", April 2010, that shows the WVEA lands are necessary for the City to meet its 2031 employment forecasts. The new Official Plan continues to recognize the WVEA as a key component of the City's designated employment land supply.

While the new Official Plan provides the base policies for these and other employment lands, this Secondary Plan will provide further detail for the WVEA, including direction regarding land use, built form and urban design, and other planning considerations.

1.2 Area Description and Context

The WVEA comprises 975 gross hectares and is the northerly extension of the employment area known as the Vaughan Enterprise Zone. The Secondary Plan comprises lands north of Langstaff Road, between Huntington Road and Highway 27, extending north to Major Mackenzie between the Intermodal Facility and the CP MacTier Rail Subdivision and, the lands between Highway 50 and the hydro corridor between Major Mackenzie and Nashville Road. Block 64, bounded by Highway 50, Huntington Road and Langstaff Road, is not included in the WVEA because it has already been planned through a separate Block Planning process. Most of Block 65 is not included because it has already been developed with the Intermodal Facility and associated employment uses.

The lands to the south of the WVEA include existing and planned employment uses that form the southern portion of the Vaughan Enterprise Zone. To the east is the residential community of Woodbridge, including a newly designated residential area immediately east of the rail line between Major Mackenzie and Rutherford Road. To the north is the Kleinburg-Nashville community, including the recently planned Nashville Heights area.

The CP Intermodal Facility lies immediately west of the WVEA. The CP Intermodal Facility is connected by a spur line to the CP MacTier Subdivision which generally runs north-south along the eastern boundary of the WVEA. The CP Intermodal Facility is the largest rail-truck terminal in the CPR network and via the MacTier Subdivision, provides service across the country and North America, and has an annual lift capacity of 664,000 containers.

Immediately west of the WVEA and the Intermodal Facility is the City of Brampton. The area south of Castlemore Road (the extension of Rutherford Road in Brampton) is designated as a new residential community in the Bram East area with a concentrated Business Corridor at Castlemore Road and Highway 50. It is intended that the Business Corridor be developed for office uses. North of Castlemore Road is Brampton's planned Highway 427 Industrial Zone, which extends to that City's northern boundary at Mayfield Road (between Kirby and Nashville Roads in Vaughan). These lands are still rural in nature but planning for the Industrial Zone has recently begun.

Today, the WVEA consists mainly of rural/agricultural uses with some small-scale non-agricultural uses which have been permitted through site specific amendments such as a truck terminal and recycling facility. The WVEA is traversed by the Natural Heritage Network including tributaries of the Humber River. A high-voltage hydro transmission corridor runs generally from the south east to the north west of the WVEA. The Lorna Jackson Transformer station is located south of Rutherford Road, on the west side of the hydro corridor.

1.3 Current Initiatives

Two important initiatives are currently underway, independent of but related to the WVEA Secondary Plan process, that will significantly improve the viability of the WVEA as an employment location of choice.

427 Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment

Currently, Zenway Boulevard, just north of Highway 7, forms the northern terminus of Highway 427 corridor. The 427 Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment (the 427 Corridor EA) has identified a technically preferred route for the extension of Highway 427 to a new terminus at Major Mackenzie Drive. The assessment is near completion and the technically preferred alternative was submitted in January 2010 to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment for review and approval. A timeline for commencement of construction has not been determined for this initiative and it has not been identified by the Province.

Western Vaughan Transportation Improvements Individual Environmental Assessment

The Region of York is currently undertaking a study to identify improvements to the regional road system in Vaughan west of Highway 400. This process, which includes the WVEA in its study area, has identified a number of potential transportation improvements that may have an impact on the WVEA. The current findings propose a series of improvements to parts of Major Mackenzie Drive, Rutherford Road and Highway 27, including expanding to 6 lanes of traffic to accommodate additional vehicular traffic, two high-occupancy vehicle lanes, bicycle lanes and sidewalks. The environmental assessment is also assessing the potential to eliminate the jog in Major Mackenzie Drive at Highway 27.

1.4 Policy Framework

A number of policies provide direction for the development of this Secondary Plan.

Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

The Province of Ontario's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (the Growth Plan) provides specific direction for the identification and protection of employment lands. The Growth Plan also establishes specific density targets to be achieved in employment (and non-employment) areas. The WVEA Secondary Plan conforms to the Growth Plan.

York Region Official Plan

The York Region Official Plan was adopted by Regional Council in December 2009. Figure 2 of the Regional Official Plan identifies the WVEA as "strategic employment lands", which are to be protected for employment use. The WVEA Secondary Plan conforms to the Regional Official Plan.

Draft Vaughan Official Plan

The Draft Vaughan Official Plan identifies the WVEA as Employment Area on Schedule 1 Urban Structure. It further states that a secondary plan must be completed for the lands to address area specific needs.

The Draft Official Plan includes two land use designations appropriate for application to the WVEA: General Employment and Prestige Employment. The General Employment designation is intended to accommodate employment uses such as industrial, manufacturing and warehousing that due to their need for outside storage and their possibility of producing noise, odour or other emissions are not compatible with other uses and therefore cannot be accommodated within other designations. The Prestige Employment designation is intended to accommodate light industrial, manufacturing and warehousing uses that do not produce noxious emissions and that do not require outside storage. The Prestige Employment designation also often acts as an interface and buffer between other, more sensitive, community areas of the City and the heavy industrial areas of the General Employment designation.

In order to protect designated employment lands for employment uses that are not compatible with other areas of the City, the Draft Official Plan also has significant restrictions on the amount of non-employment uses that are permitted. Retail and office uses that are ancillary to a primary industrial, manufacturing and warehousing use are permitted with certain size restrictions. Retail and office uses that are not directly related to an otherwise permitted employment use are only permitted in Prestige Employment areas subject to size and in the case of retail, locational constraints. Retail uses in particular are only permitted if they are small in scale and intended to serve the daily needs of the employees and visitors of the area businesses.

The WVEA Secondary Plan implements the policies of the Draft Vaughan Official Plan and provides additional direction for the effective development of the WVEA lands.

1.5 WVEA Planning Goals

A series of planning goals were developed to guide the preparation of the Secondary Plan. The objectives provide a means for directing development in the WVEA to maximize its potential for employment activity.

In the GTA and City-Wide contexts, the WVEA provides a distinct product

The WVEA provides a distinct product within the context of the employment areas in Vaughan and across the GTA. Large tracts of greenfield employment land are increasingly rare in the context of the GTA-wide employment land supply. Within Vaughan the new Highway 427 Corridor provides an additional supply of large sites with excellent highway access. The employment area at the centre of the City, primarily east of Highway 400 and north of Highway 7, is built out and constricted from expansion by surrounding development. The new Highway 400 North Employment Area provides a larger proportion of prestige development sites and sites for office campus-type development which will garner high land values. Only the WVEA can accommodate both the prestige development and a significant supply of lands for land-intensive industrial, manufacturing and warehousing uses that require large parcels, excellent transportation facilities and relatively lower land costs.

The CP Intermodal Facility is an asset to be leveraged

The CP Rail Intermodal Facility located just east of Highway 50 between Rutherford Road and Major Mackenzie Drive is the main intermodal facility in the GTA and one of only two such facilities in Ontario. Over 20 trains per day with up to 24 cars per train depart the Intermodal facility for points across North America providing significant logistics and shipping service to many GTA companies. While the Intermodal facility is heavily used, the City of Vaughan sees little economic benefit from users located elsewhere in the GTA who pick up or drop off goods at the facility. Lands in the WVEA surrounding the Intermodal facility provide the opportunity to attract businesses that may make use of the Intermodal facility to cut down truck-to-train transportation time, while creating jobs and tax revenue for Vaughan.

A Variety of Parcel Sizes will Make the WVEA Attractive and Adaptable

Large parcel sizes mean that the WVEA will retain the ability to attract a wide variety of users, especially those in the growing warehousing sector that require large, flat sites, and those which like the existing Sears and Fast Freight warehouses, take advantage of proximity to the Intermodal Terminal. While the Secondary Plan does not propose minimum lot sizes, the proposed block pattern anticipates retaining larger sites and discourages future additions to the local road network that would facilitate significant subdivision of the lands.

High Quality Urban Design That Maintains Affordability

Employment areas are the places where major investors in the City and contributors to its tax base may choose to locate, and so should appear attractive. The WVEA will develop with urban design characteristics that make it attractive among employment areas offering a more pleasant experience for employees and visitors alike, without creating a set of requirements that would unduly impede its attractiveness as a highly attractive and accessible location in the GTA.

Sustainable Design Principles from the Beginning

Design of sites and buildings that pay close attention to water, energy and land efficiency are more environmentally sustainable. It is always more economical to build such measures in from the planning stages. Simple but effective approaches to green design will be required and more extensive ones will be strongly encouraged. The public realm will also contribute to sustainable active transportation by being transit and pedestrian friendly.

1.6 Opportunities and Constraints

The WVEA includes various features, including large infrastructure corridors and natural heritage features, each of which act as both constraints and opportunities. The major features are:

- The CP rail line, which also serves the adjacent Intermodal Facility;
- A major high voltage electricity corridor (the hydro corridor);
- The Highway 427 extension; and
- Elements of the Natural Heritage Network.

While each of these features may attract businesses to the WVEA by providing improved access, attractive locations, or opportunities for a trail network, they also create challenges for organizing the development of the area. For example, the highest visibility parcels where Prestige Employment designations are typically applied are generally those parcels lining a 400 series highway. In the WVEA, the Highway 427 extension has been aligned to fit between the hydro corridor and Rainbow Creek tributary. As a result, through most of the WVEA, the closest parcels to the 427 Extension are actually separated from it by either the hydro corridor or the Natural Heritage Network. The Highway 427 extension corridor, hydro corridor, extensive Natural Heritage Network and local topography also present significant constraints and challenges to establishing an efficient road network.

1.7 WVEA Policy Objectives

Transportation

The WVEA's existing transportation infrastructure is limited primarily to arterial streets with few connections through the concession blocks. This is a legacy of its former and current use for primarily agricultural activities. The transportation network providing access to and through the area will be significantly improved as a result of the extension of Highway 427 to Major Mackenzie and the proposed improvements to the major arterial roads that bound the area. Through this Secondary Plan, a new local street network will be developed to connect to the arterial roads and provide efficient access to the highway network thereby reducing the need for local traffic to travel extensively on area arterials.

The Secondary Plan identifies a minimum basic network providing “primary” north-south and east west connections. Additional “secondary” roads are also identified to provide access to potential smaller-lot areas which may not support large parcels because of topographic or natural heritage constraints. The need for these “secondary” roads may be reviewed at the block plan stage, subject to transportation analysis and justification, when a more detailed understanding of development potential is known. Implementation of the proposed local street network will require structures to appropriately cross the valley system and rail corridor.

Furthermore, expanded bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, both in terms of sidewalks, on street bike lanes and off-street trails consistent with the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, will significantly enhance transportation options within the WVEA.

GO Transit is investigating opportunities to provide peak period commuter service to Bolton in CP MacTier subdivision rail corridor which may result in a station in the WVEA, or nearby. At such times as further details are known about potential GO commuter rail service, additional studies should be undertaken to identify appropriate station locations, or re-examine land use permissions in the vicinity of the station.

Environment

A large network of tributaries of the Humber River forms the basis of the Natural Heritage Network in the WVEA, which also includes wetlands and woodlands. These natural heritage resources provide a variety of ecosystem functions that should be preserved and enhanced through new development, as stated in Volume 1 of the Official Plan. The presence of natural features should be characterized as an asset to the area providing attractive settings for business and enabling the City’s trail network. Impacts on the Natural Heritage Network as a whole, and on any specific local features, will be minimized through on-site environmental enhancement, especially through naturalized stormwater management and landscaping. Other urban design and built form initiatives, such as green roofs, on-site green energy generation, and other means, could provide further environmental enhancement benefitting both the natural environment and businesses. The detailed development limits against all natural heritage features and hazards will be determined at the Block Plan stage.

As a new employment area, the WVEA can be positioned in the marketplace to support eco-industrial networks. Eco-industrial networks are clusters of industries which develop synergistic relationships to maximize resource efficiency and therefore improve both financial and environmental performance. In many cases, the waste products of one operation is found to be the input for an business. This could also be extended to waste energy such as heat in the form of hot water or steam. The design of eco-industrial areas often also incorporates sustainable physical design approaches including high standards for stormwater infiltration, on-site alternative energy production, district-energy or co-generation. Both the potential for production efficiencies and the more attractive and sustainable physical form of the eco-industrial area often attract green industries which feel such a location is supportive of their overall ethos.

Parks

Parkland will be provided in the WVEA to enhance the attractiveness of the area as a setting for business, and will serve the social and recreational needs of area employees, visitors and nearby residents. Where possible, new parkland will be directed to areas adjacent to existing open spaces, including the hydro corridor, natural heritage and or cultural heritage resources and existing and planned trails. It is the objective of the City to secure, at a minimum, one District Park of approximately 10 ha in the WVEA east of the Highway 427 corridor. Alternatively, the City may seek one smaller District Park and one Neighbourhood Park. These parks would be acquired by the City through the combined parkland dedication requirements of the whole Secondary Plan area and would be secured through landowner agreements.

Cultural Heritage

As a result of its agricultural history, this area of Vaughan contains a number of cultural heritage resources that should be recognized and conserved, including resources designated under the Ontario Heritage Act and also resources listed on the City's Heritage Register. Existing structures should be retained on a site, and opportunities for adaptive reuse explored. Existing cultural and built heritage features and landscapes should be conserved and integrated within the overall design strategy and structure of any area development. As development occurs in the WVEA additional properties and lands may be evaluated for cultural heritage significance according to the processes provided for in Volume 1.

Land Use

The new Vaughan Official Plan includes two land use designations appropriate for the WVEA. The General Employment designation accommodates industrial, manufacturing and warehousing uses that are often incompatible with other uses due to noise, emissions, outdoor storage and other factors. The Prestige Employment designation accommodates limited office uses as well as light industrial, manufacturing and warehousing uses that do not produce significant noise and emissions and do not require outside storage. These uses are located in highly visible and accessible areas, often act as buffers around General Employment areas, and are subject to higher built form and urban design criteria.

To protect lands for employment uses, the new Official Plan restricts non-employment uses in designated Employment Areas, such as the WVEA. Some small-scale, employment-supportive retail uses are permitted to serve the daily needs of employees and visitors to the area businesses, subject to locational constraints. Retail-commercial clusters are planned for or exist to the immediate north and south of the WVEA, which will serve the main retail needs businesses within the WVEA and surrounding communities, by offering a wider range of retail activity than is permitted in the Employment Area.