

Changes to City-Wide Zoning By-Law

Permit Places of Worship (PoW) in Employment Office Zones (EO)

Background:

At its meeting of March 6th, 2013 the Planning and Growth Committee will hold a statutory meeting to consider the Chief Planner's final report on the new City-Wide Zoning By-law (CZB). The final draft version of the CZB includes revisions to various regulations and definitions for Places of Worship (PoW) including expanding *as-of-right* provisions such as allowing PoWs in Policy areas 3 and 4 of the Commercial Residential zone where they were not permitted in previous versions of the CZB.

Proposed Changes to PoW Provisions Related to EO Zones

It is proposed that:

- PoWs of up to 5,000 m² in gross floor area (gfa) be permitted *as-of-right* along Major streets in Employment Industrial Office (EO) zones;
- The on-site parking requirements for PoW be reduced by 10%; and
- the definition of PoW be broadening to allow for non-worship activities such as: after school programs, soup kitchens, banquet halls, senior centre, daycare and bingo halls; to be operated on the PoW sites.

Potential Impacts on Employment Lands:

The revised provisions would allow PoWs to locate on major streets within Employment Areas zoned EO. In some of these areas, the major streets go through the middle of business parks which have been identified as "core employment lands" in the city's Official Plan. Some of the lands under the new EO zone designation are large strategic employment lands. The lands surrounding new PoW may be destabilize as a result of proximity to these sensitive uses .

The City may experience a reduction in property tax revenue, since PoWs and some related activities are fully or partially exempt, under the Ontario Assessment Act.

PoWs are classified as "Sensitive Uses" by the Ministry of the Environment and can instigate "Environmental Compliance Approvals" that may restrict or prohibit a business from expanding or locating near PoWs, and may increase operating costs due to mitigation requirements.

Changes to the definition of PoWs may result in land use conflicts with nearby employment uses due to non-worship activities being conducted during the business day on the PoW site.

The reduction in the on-site parking requirements for PoWs may increase traffic congestion within business parks if visitors to PoWs have to park on surrounding roads and perhaps nearby parking lots. This parking overflow may disrupt day-to-day business operations of near by businesses.

Comments:

At its February 20 and 21, 2013 meeting, City Council adopted the recommendations included in the "Collaboration for Competitiveness – A Strategic Plan to Accelerate Economic Growth and Job Creation in Toronto", that emphasized the importance of the City's "core employment" lands to Toronto's continued economic competitiveness and growth. In adopting these recommendations City Council has reinforced that one of its key priorities is protecting the City "Core Employment" lands for economic activities.

As part of the Official Plan (OP) review process, City Planning staff commissioned a study of employment uses in the City to identify; evolving land and space needs for various sectors; how the current OP addresses these needs and what changes need to be made. The study outlined several findings and recommendations including the following:

- "The clear message of the study is that there is potential for a large amount of growth in the City's employment over the coming decades, but that this growth will bring increasing competition for a finite land base."
- "The potential growth will only be realized, however, if the current policy focus on more traditional 'Employment Areas' is broadened to include areas in other parts of the City that are expected to generate most employment growth in the future, especially office growth."
- "protecting existing employment sites needs to be an ongoing priority in planning for the City's prosperity and competitiveness."
- The total number of jobs located within the City is projected to increase by 107,000 to 408,000 by 2031.
- The study estimated a potential growth of 70 million square feet of office space within the City by 2041.
- The Study estimated that the city will run out of vacant land suitable for new industrial development between 2031 and 2041, implying that new industrial development will consist of redeveloping existing sites.

There is very limited amount of EO zoned land within the City. Most of the EO zoned land is located within business parks located along the DVP corridor, Dixon Road and Highway 27.

Although there are few properties that would qualify under the proposed CZB to allow PoWs as-of-right, these properties are located in the centre of "Core Employment" areas and could destabilize surrounding employment areas if a sensitive use such as PoW were to be established on the property.

Areas of Concern

Employment lands zoned for EO under the new CZB are located along the DVP corridor south of Highway 401 and north of Overlea Blvd. In Etobicoke the EO zone are dispersed along Dixon Road between Highway 427 and Highway 401. These areas are home to many employers that are part of the City key economic sectors. These lands also house existing, and potential future, office developments that can accommodate the increased office employment forecasted in the Employment Lands Study commissioned by City Planning. The following are the areas of concern that may be destabilized if a sensitive use such as PoW were allowed to locate within a "core employment area":

Consumers Road Business Park

The Consumers Road Business Park is already facing strong pressure from developers considering residential conversion of employment lands. Two strategic areas within the business park would qualify for a PoW use. One of the areas is located east of Yorkland Blvd and may cause a domino effect that may destabilize the entire business part if a sensitive use were allowed to locate on site.

SW Quadrant York Mills Road and Don Mills Road

Two large areas of employment land in the heart of this well established employment area fall under the EO zone and qualify as a possible location for a PoW under the revised CZB. These lands would split this vibrant core employment area in half and could create a domino effect that could essentially destabilize the entire employment area, since a number of businesses could potentially see significant cost increases to establish buffering zones on their sites, in order to comply with legislation governing separation between employment and sensitive uses.

Dixon Road Between Highway 427 and Highway 401

The EO lands that can house PoW activities under the revised CZB are located in the middle of one of the largest core employment areas in the City. Allowing a sensitive use such as PoW on these lands may destabilize one of the largest manufacturing areas in Toronto. Although manufacturing activities can co-exist with office operations, they would not be able to operate near a sensitive use such as PoW without significant costs increases in order to establish legislative buffering zones on their sites.

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Date:	March 1st 2013