

South of Eastern Strategic Direction – Status Update

Date:	July 10, 2014
To:	Planning and Growth Management Committee
From:	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division
Wards:	Ward 30 and 31
Reference Number:	P:\2014\Cluster B\PLN\PGMC\PG14126 (13 259266 STE 30 OZ)

SUMMARY

In January 2012, Planning and Growth Management Committee requested the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division, to consider developing a planning framework for the South of Eastern Employment District.

In response to this request, the City Planning Division together with the Economic Development and Culture Division is preparing a three-pronged South of Eastern Strategic Direction. The Strategic Direction will address the area's economic potential, the resulting transportation needs and urban design implications.

Staff have commenced the South of Eastern Strategic Direction and have retained a consulting team led by planningAlliance to complete an economic and urban design background study. This report provides a status update on the background study, community consultation that has occurred to date and next steps.

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. Planning and Growth Management Committee receive this report for information.

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report have no financial impact.



DECISION HISTORY

In January 2012, Planning and Growth Management Committee requested the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division, to consider developing a planning framework for the South of Eastern Employment District and to report back. A link to this decision can be found here:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.PG10.15>

In response to City Council's request, staff from the City Planning Division and Economic Development and Culture Division have retained a consulting team to prepare a background study to inform a three-pronged planning framework. The South of Eastern Strategic Direction will address the area's economic potential, the resulting transportation needs, and urban design implications. The Strategic Direction is being coordinated with planning work underway as part of the Port Lands Acceleration Initiative, particularly as it relates to transportation issues through the Port Lands and South of Eastern Transportation and Servicing Master Plan.

STUDY UPDATE

An RFP was issued in September 2013 to select a qualified multi-disciplinary consulting team for the purpose of carrying out the economic development and urban design background study for the South of Eastern Strategic Direction. As the third prong of the Strategic Direction is transportation, the consultant was also asked to provide input to the Port Lands and South of Eastern Transportation and Servicing Master Plan.

The successful proponent was planningAlliance (pA) who partnered with Hemson Consulting Ltd. for the economic development and urban design aspects and Parsons Brinckerhoff to advise on transportation related issues.

A preliminary draft of the background study was submitted by pA to City staff on June 13, 2014. The economic development conclusions note that the South of Eastern area enjoys a number of locational advantages for an employment area such as proximity to Toronto's financial core, the downtown area and the future development along the waterfront. While the city-servicing sector including the City of Toronto municipal yards and Canada Post is likely to remain a major presence, the South of Eastern area will also continue to be an attractive location for Toronto's creative industries because of existing building stock suitable for repurposing and reuse for studios and related offices space. While there are other large sites in the area with development potential, the background economic study noted that due to early discussions and an active planning application, the large redevelopment sites of the former Unilever site at 21 Don Roadway and the lands at 629, 633, and 675 Eastern Avenue will play a pivotal role in determining the future character of the area.

Key to the unlocking of the employment potential will be increasing the transit and transportation capacity of the area, including cycling infrastructure, which is concurrently being assessed as part of the Port Lands and South of Eastern Transportation and Servicing Master Plan.

The future economic opportunities are also closely entwined with urban design. Upon its finalization, the background study will put forward recommendations with respect to the public realm to attract a new generation of employment uses, provides amenities that support employment and sensitively integrates with the existing adjacent neighbourhoods including a public realm vision for revitalizing Eastern Avenue. Staff expect a final background study from the pA consulting team in late August 2014.

CONSULTATION

The study was introduced to the community via an Open House with other planning initiatives including the Port Lands Planning Framework, the Port Lands and South of Eastern Transportation and Servicing Master Plan EA as well as the Film Studio Precinct Plan in November 2013. Since then there have been two public consultation workshops held, on February 18, 2014 and May 27, 2014. In addition, two smaller focused consultation meetings were held. One was a Landowner and Stakeholder Roundtable where several business and property owners met to discuss issues and opportunities for economic development in the area. The second roundtable was with local cycling and pedestrian advocates.

Materials presented at the consultation meetings can be found at:

<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=8f6692540e1c4410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=4b4452cc66061410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>

OTHER PLANNING INITIATIVES

629, 633, and 675 Eastern Avenue

SmartCentres (the landowners) have submitted a rezoning application for this site (File No: 13 195390 STE 30 OZ). The proposal is to maintain approximately 16,535 square metres of existing space for film studio and production purposes and to construct approximately 75,630 square metres of new office/flex space, 7,290 square metres of hotel space, and 14,060 square metres of retail space. The applicant's proposal, submitted in June 2013, identifies 15 existing and new buildings proposed on the site. The Preliminary Staff Report for this application was considered at Toronto and East York Community Council, at its meeting on November 19, 2013. A copy of this report can be found at:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/te/bgrd/backgroundfile-63123.pdf>

The intent of the redevelopment is to foster an employment environment for digital media in support of the studio function that exists on site with hotel, office and retail/services. Revival 629 studios is rebuilding and improving the existing sound stages of the former Toronto Film Studios site at 629 Eastern Avenue and recently announced that the first major visual effects studio Pixomondo Inc. will occupy one of the renovated spaces creating 30 new jobs for Toronto with a potential for expansion.

A community consultation meeting was held January 27, 2014 with approximately 75

members of the public in attendance. There was general support for the revised proposal in particular because of the retention of the studio employment use on the site. Concerns raised included:

- Transportation (preventing access to local streets and general traffic impacts);
- Concerns about how proposed private open space would function;
- Mix of uses – what is the right mix of hotel, retail and office and how can these support the studio use on site;
- Parking – is there sufficient parking on site to support the studio and other uses;
- Transition of built form from the residential character of the north side of Eastern Avenue to the development proposal on the south side; and
- A desire to see more green space as part of the proposal.

The redevelopment of the site presents several technical challenges including but not limited to its location within the flood plain of the Lower Don Special Policy Area (SPA) and connections to the larger transportation network. City staff are working with the applicant to resolve outstanding issues. A revised submission is expected in Fall 2014, based on community feedback, City staff comments, and relevant agencies comments. A subsequent community meeting will be held to present the revised proposal and a final staff report is targeted for early 2015.

Municipal Comprehensive Review

The Municipal Comprehensive Review of Toronto's employment lands was completed and Official Plan Amendment No. 231 was adopted by Council in December 2013. On July 9, 2014 the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing approved, with some modifications the majority of OPA No. 231. A Decision was withheld for policy and land use designations changes applying to lands located within the flood plain of the Lower Don SPA, of which the South of Eastern Employment Area is a part. Any ministerial decision to make changes to the SPA requires approval from both the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Port Lands and South of Eastern Transportation and Servicing Master Plan – EA

In developing the work program for the second phase of the Port Lands Acceleration Initiative, it was determined that coordinating infrastructure planning in the Port Lands and South of Eastern areas would be advantageous. In November 2013, the City of Toronto initiated a Municipal Class EA for portions of the Port Lands (excluding the Lower Don Lands) and the South of Eastern area. This EA is assessing the street, transit and municipal servicing infrastructure in, and between, the two areas. Dillon Consulting has been retained by the City to assist with the undertaking.

The EA is being undertaken as part of an integrated planning study, as provided for under the Municipal Class EA process, with both the Port Lands Planning Framework and South of Eastern Strategic Direction informing the EA, and vice versa. The TSMP will

complete the third prong of the background study providing transportation direction for the area.

NEXT STEPS

The revised consultant's background study, once received, will be posted online and further community feedback will be solicited with a community consultation meeting after the municipal election. Staff are also currently working to convene a second landowners and stakeholders group, one that includes not only local land interests but industry leaders and innovators with respect to the redevelopment of employment lands, film studios and digital media.

Staff will prepare the Strategic Direction relying on the economic development and urban design background study from the pA consulting team, the findings of the TSMP and further consultation, as noted above. A Final Report presenting the South of Eastern Strategic Direction is targeted for Planning and Growth Management Committee and Toronto City Council prior to Summer 2015.

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