

# ConsumersNext Phase 1 Report

October 21, 2015



Prepared by:

R.E. Millward & Associates | DTAH | HDR | Fabian Papa & Partners | Swerhun Facilitation

# 1 Executive Summary

## Study Background and Process

Recent changes to permitted uses within the Consumers Road Business Park and areas around the Sheppard Avenue East and Victoria Park Avenue intersection signal the potential for an increase in development, including significant new residential and employment intensification. To manage the growth, support employment uses, and direct investments into broader community improvements, the City of Toronto is undertaking a study of the area called ConsumersNext.

ConsumersNext will set out a new planning framework to support continued employment investment and intensification in the Consumers Road Business Park, as well as residential uses, community facilities, a street and block plan, and public realm improvements to serve local resident and working populations.

Contributing to the ‘big picture’ of ConsumersNext, the City is undertaking a number of initiatives to ensure a cohesive vision for the Study Area, which includes a planning study, an economic potential study and a community services and facilities (CS&F) study.

### Phase 1 Process

#### Background Research

- Policy Review
- Building Block Analysis
- Precedent Study

#### Engagement

- Community Meetings (x2)
- LAC and TAC (TMP TAC)
- Design Review Panel

#### SWOT Analysis

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

#### Guiding Principles

- Define and Enhance Places
- Connect and Move
- Support and Promote Business

ConsumersNext is to be conducted in four phases:

1. Understand the Study Area and Establish a Vision
2. Test and Confirm Ideas
3. Finalize Design and Develop the Plan
4. Implementation

## The ConsumersNext Study Area

The ConsumersNext Planning Study Area (the Study Area) encompasses the Consumers Road Business Park, bounded by Sheppard Avenue East to the north, Victoria Park Avenue to the east, and Highways 401 and 404 to the south and west; it also includes certain parcels north of Sheppard Avenue East and east of Victoria Park Avenue. The parcels of land to the north of Sheppard Avenue East and east of Victoria Park have been included in the Study Area by virtue of their Mixed Use land use designations.

The Study Area provides a place of work to over 18,000 employees, and is one of Toronto’s most concentrated areas of office jobs. The area is also the location of significant residential growth, with over 4,500 residential units approved, under construction, or occupied in the past ten years. A soft site analysis indicates there is much potential for redevelopment, as the parcels are large in size, can be easily assembled, include a large amount of surface parking and are situated near existing developments of high density.

As development continues, meeting the needs of residents and workers requires strategic investment to provide options for active transportation, public spaces and community services.



The ConsumersNext Study Area

## Policy Context

There are a number of policy documents that shape the direction of ConsumersNext, including provincial policies and legislation, the City of Toronto Official Plan, the zoning by-law as well as various municipal guidelines.

Understanding this framework provides a foundation for identifying changes that may be necessary to facilitate land use, built form, transportation and infrastructure goals resulting from ConsumersNext.

Recently, the City of Toronto undertook a Municipal Comprehensive Review of its Official Plan, which included a review of Toronto's designated *Employment Areas* (Official Plan Amendment 231). As part of OPA 231, the ConsumersNext Study Area lands previously designated *Employment Areas* fronting on the south side of Sheppard Avenue East and west side of Victoria Park Avenue were redesignated to *Mixed Use Areas*. Lands within the business park were redesignated to *General Employment Areas* which provides for a wider range of non-residential uses.

In addition, Site and Area Specific Policy 386 (SASP 386) was developed for the Consumers Road Business Park to ensure no loss of employment space and to provide amenities to workers in the area such as restaurants, recreation, entertainment, retail and services more readily accessible to workers. It further allows additional residential and commercial development along Sheppard Avenue East and Victoria Park Avenue.

The current zoning in force does not reflect the policy intent of the Official Plan land use designations and will need to be updated to reflect the emerging policy direction.

## Building Block Analysis

ConsumersNext includes an analysis of six building blocks – public places, built form, transportation choices, opportunities for business growth, community services and facilities and water infrastructure - Phase 1 involves an examination of their existing conditions, opportunities and constraints. It is important to note that while the building blocks are examined separately, they are closely interrelated and must ultimately be considered altogether.

The existing conditions analysis is summarized below:

### Public Places

- There are no parks and few trees in the Study Area;
- The public realm is unwelcoming and unattractive;

### Built Form

- Land parcels are large with significant portion of land dedicated to surface parking;
- Buildings have little relationship to the street;

### Transportation Choices

- The street network is not well connected;
- Heavy transit use but no transit priority on Sheppard Ave East;
- The pedestrian and cycling environment lacks safety measures and is unwelcoming;
- Traffic congestion at Yorkland Rd at Sheppard Ave East and Consumers Rd at Victoria Park Ave;

### Opportunities for Business Growth

- 89% of employees in the business park work in an office and the majority of the businesses have less than 25 employees;
- The business park continues to attract new businesses, with 135 new businesses locating in the park since 2012;

### Community Services and Facilities

- While there is a diversity of community services and facilities within the CS&F Study Area, including two new community centres outside of the Planning Study Area, there is also a lack of subsidized child care spaces, affordable and accessible community space and parks and open spaces;

### Water Infrastructure

- Large impervious surface areas, including parking lots and building rooftops, negatively impact stormwater management.

## Engagement

In addition to the background research, stakeholders and community members were invited to share their experiences of the Study Area and provide feedback on the study process. This included:



- employee pop up consultations within the Business Park;
- two community meetings held in June and September 2015,
- a local advisory committee (LAC) meeting held in September;
- a technical advisory committee (TAC) and TMP TAC meeting held in September; and
- a presentation to the City’s Design Review Panel.

### SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis

While opportunities and constraints of the business park are discussed throughout the building block analysis in Section 5, the SWOT analysis in Section 7 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the Study Area as well as the opportunities and threats for redevelopment. The SWOT analysis identifies a wide range of opportunities for ConsumersNext, including: public realm improvements, denser built form and appropriately scaled streets and blocks, new street connections, improved access to amenities, sustainable water management solutions, provision of new parks, open spaces and additional community services.

### Best Practices - Precedent Analysis

In addition to the research of the Study Area itself, the study team conducted a review of other business parks that have or are currently entering a process of urbanization, as introduced in Section 8, with the detailed report included in Appendix 4. Although their circumstances are not always transferable, there are a number of themes to the lessons learned from other business parks, including: introducing a finer grain of pedestrian friendly streets; using built form to better define public spaces; and incorporating amenities to support commercial, retail, and residential uses.

### Guiding Principles

Based on the background research, engagement and SWOT analysis, the study team developed six objectives and three guiding principles to best represent the vision of ConsumersNext, as illustrated below and discussed further in Section 9.

## Guiding Principles

Building Block	Objective
	Create green, safe and attractive public places with a range of social and recreation activities.
	Promote a rich and varied urban built form that supports the existing and planned land uses, with new amenities and appropriate transitions.
	Improve mobility by providing greater transportation choices.
	Retain a strong employment base and provide opportunities for business in the area.
	Improve and provide new Community Services and Facilities;
	Support infrastructure, including stormwater management and energy efficient designs.

Define and Enhance Places & Liveability

Connect and Move

Support and Promote Business