

July 19, 2024

By E-Mail to: clerk@toronto.ca

City of Toronto
Planning and Housing Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Attention: John D. Elvidge - Clerk

Dear Mayor Chow and Members of Council:

Re: Toronto City Council Meeting - July 24, 2024
Re: RM20.3 - Committee Reports
Report of the Planning and Housing Committee from Meeting 14 on July 11, 2024
PH 14.1 - Employment Area Land Use Permissions - Decision Report
Proposed Official Plan Amendment 680
Proposed Official Plan Amendment 668
26 Prince Andrew Place - 26 Prince Andrew GP Inc.

We act for 26 Prince Andrew GP Inc., the registered owner of the property located at 26 Prince Andrew Place with respect to these matters. We are writing to express our concerns with respect to the proposed Official Plan Amendments 680 and 668, and their impact on the 26 Prince Andrew property.

The two amendments are being advanced in response to the change in the *Planning Act* definition of “area of employment” that was passed in Bill 97, but which has not yet been proclaimed in effect. The effect of the Provincial change is to focus the definition on the traditional space-extensive employment uses of warehousing and manufacturing. The intention of the change is to ensure that the burdensome requirements of obtaining employment conversions, in order to be able to build residential or mixed use buildings, are not applied in an unduly wide context.

Such excessive application of the requirement for conversions has been increasingly the practice in Toronto - where many properties that have retail or office uses are inappropriately designated as employment. The result has been to significantly frustrate the ability of the marketplace to respond to the significant demand for housing - and the housing supply crisis in Toronto and Ontario grown dramatically, as a result.

The *Planning Act* definition change seeks to put an end to this excessive application of the employment area definition to uses other than manufacturing and warehousing in order to block residential development - which is why it was advanced as part of the Province’s Housing Supply Action Plan.

Proposed Official Plan Amendment 680 Is an Effort to Frustrate Provincial *Planning Act* Changes, and Thereby To Limit the Supply of Housing

The proposed amendment actually responds to the Provincial change by trying to frustrate its intentions. Instead of recognizing that office uses, for example, should be designated as mixed uses designations in the Toronto context (the usual designation applied to most office buildings along major streets and in the core, for example), Official Plan Amendment 680 actually narrows the range of permitted uses, by removing permissions for offices. This is even the case for lands that have only ever had office uses on site.

It is apparent that the principal planning objective of the City is to block conversions and residential development, rather than to actually reflect the planned function of lands, and the economic activities taking place on those lands.

Most Appropriate Response to Change in *Planning Act* Change is to Designate Office Use Sites as What They Actually Are - Mixed Use

Rather than maintaining the employment designation on office sites, while removing the office permission to conform with the *Planning Act* definition, the City should instead conform to the new statutory definition by designating such office sites as Mixed Use Areas - where office is a permitted use. This would be both an accurate reflection of the reality of the planned land use, and would be consistent with provincial intention for the planning of such lands.

26 Prince Andrew Place Is an Illustration of the Inappropriate Impact of Official Plan Amendments 680 and 668 By Removing Office Use Permissions

Our client's property at 26 Prince Andrew Place is a perfect example of the unreasonable impact of the proposed Official Plan Amendment 680 in removing existing permissions for office uses.

The 26 Prince Andrew Place site has historically functioned as office. It was previously the Canadian head office of an education publishing company. It is currently the offices of Elections Ontario. To remove the office use permission and to limit the site to manufacturing and warehousing represents a retrograde step, inconsistent with the historic and current use of the site.

However, no office uses will be permitted at 26 Prince Andrew Place under proposed Official Plan Amendment 680. Only space extensive manufacturing and warehousing will be permitted. Years of marketing the site have demonstrated that there is no interest from potential users for the site as manufacturing or warehousing.

In the event that the site became vacant, it would not be possible for the site be used later by another office user. Typically, when offices have become vacant in this area, they have remained vacant for a considerable period of time before a new office user is found - and in many cases, no such user is found. Under Official Plan Amendment 680, this would bring an end to the possibility of a new office user on the site.

OPA 668 Is Not An Adequate Solution

The City has proposed Official Plan Amendment 668 as a means to continue existing office uses that otherwise will not be permitted after Official Plan Amendment 680 comes into force and removes permission for office uses. However, it is an entirely inadequate instrument to achieve that goal

The proposed draft of Official Plan Amendment 668 uses a potentially very limiting wording: uses “are authorized to continue so long as the use has been lawfully established on the parcel of land before” the new *Planning Act* definition comes into force.

This wording leaves many situations potentially unaddressed. For example, if a previously established office use had ceased to operate on a site for several years, and it was now vacant, would the permission for office use be extinguished despite the saving provisions of Official Plan Amendment 668? Would it be possible to “continue” a use that was not actively underway? What if an office use was functioning in only a portion of the building - would a different office use be able to establish in a vacant portion of the building after the date in the Official Plan Amendment?

The above questions raise serious concerns with the adequacy of both Official Plan Amendments 668 and 680. The more appropriate approach to allowing ongoing permission for office uses is through an application of a Mixed Use Areas designation to the lands on question. Mixed Use Areas is the proper land use designation for office use permissions in Toronto - and it would avoid the risks and uncertainties raised above.

City Should Not Enact Official Plan Amendments 680 and 668 in Their Current Proposed Form - A Mixed Use Areas Designation for Office Sites is the Appropriate Planning Response to the New *Planning Act* Provisions

The City should not enact Official Plan Amendments 680 and 668 in their currently proposed form. The planning objective behind the amendments appears to be to prevent the Provincial *Planning Act* changes from having their intended effect of reducing the incidence of conversion requirement red tape limitations. That is, the amendments are aimed primarily at defeating Provincial efforts to encourage the supply and delivery of new housing. As such, these Official Plans are clearly not consistent with Provincial Policies, and not in conformity with Provincial Plans. As such, they should not be adopted by the City.

In the City’s apparent zeal to prevent residential development, office use permissions are the collateral damage casualty. Office use permissions are being removed by Official Plan Amendment 680, and constrained by Official Plan Amendment 668 - when those office use permissions could otherwise be easily continued through the designation of such office sites as Mixed Use Areas. This should be the proper planning response of the City to the new *Planning Act* provisions.

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It is not a practical approach for the City to respond to the Provincial statutory change by further limiting use permissions, reducing them from what is already permitted. The City of Toronto has pioneered the approach of permitting most office uses in the City by way of a Mixed Uses designation. That is the appropriate response to ensuring that office uses remain a permitted use at 26 Prince Andrew Place.

We would be pleased to discuss this matter with planning staff to ensure a more appropriate and nuanced response to the *Planning Act* changes.

Yours sincerely,

AIRD & BERLIS LLP



Hon. Peter Van Loan P.C., K.C.
Partner

PVL

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