

ATTACHMENT 2: FINAL ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONVERT LAND DESIGNATED EMPLOYMENT AREAS

FINAL ASSESSMENT OF CONVERSION REQUEST NO. 114

Address: 301 Rockcliffe Boulevard (currently known municipally as 20 Rockcliffe Court)

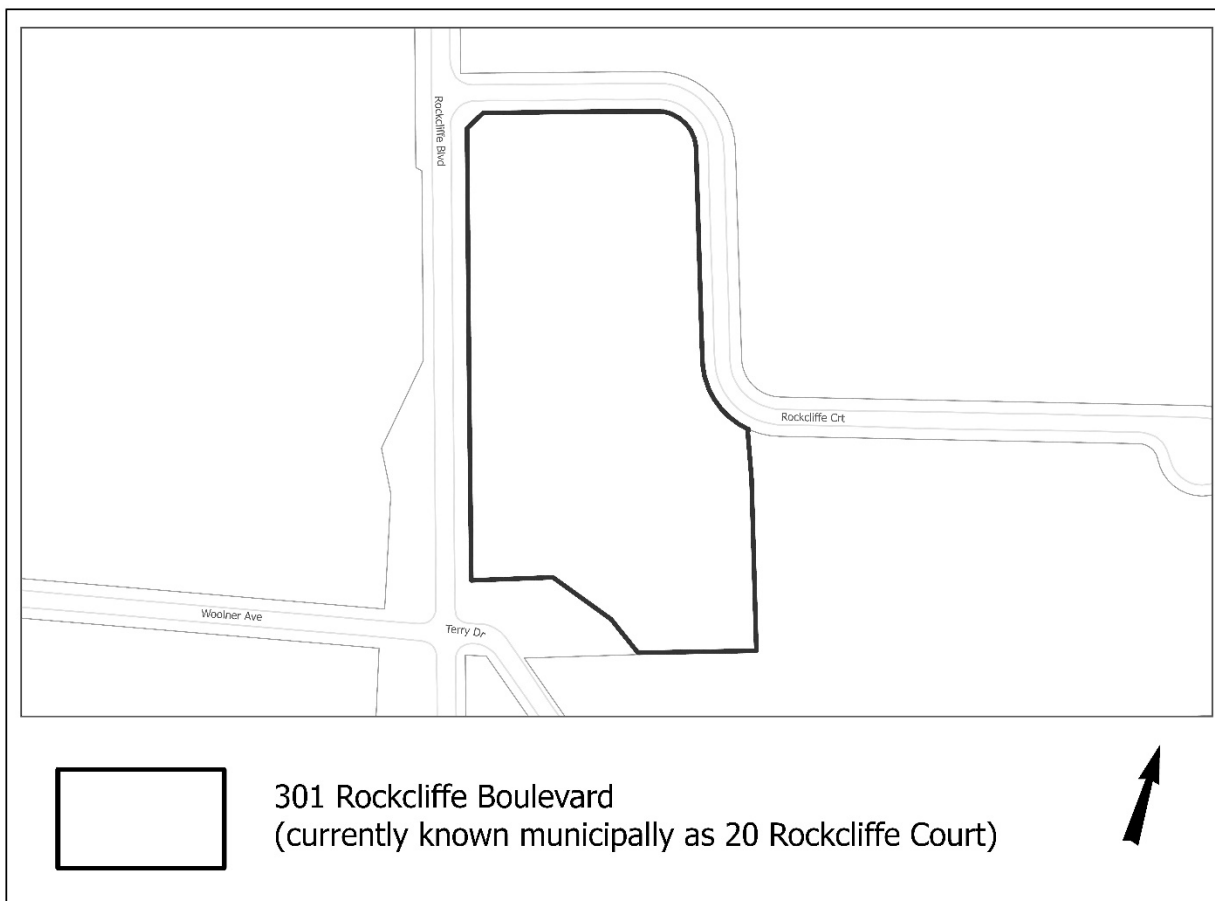
General area: Approximately 800 metres northeast of the intersection of Jane Street and St. Clair Avenue West

Ward: York South-Weston (5)

Owner (Applicant): St. Helens Meat Packers Ltd. (Bousfields Inc)

Site area: Approximately 3.22 hectares (7.96 acres)

Existing uses: Vacant



CONVERSION REQUEST

Proposal: A revised request to redesignate the west part of the lands from *Core Employment Areas* to *Regeneration Areas* to permit residential uses. The original request sought to redesignate the entirety of the lands to *Mixed Use Areas*.

OFFICIAL PLAN AND ZONING FRAMEWORK

Urban Structure: *Employment Areas* (Map 2)

Designation(s): *Core Employment Areas* (Map 14)

Area Specific Policies: 22.5, Special Policy Area (Schedule F) in former City of York Official Plan
Rockcliffe Park: Black Creek Special Policy Area (Map 11) – subject to a City appeal of Toronto Official Plan

Zoning By-law: Prestige Employment Zone (PE) in the former City of York Zoning By-Law No. 1-83

SITE CONTEXT AND ADJACENT USES

North: Black Creek, with various employment uses beyond

South: Hydro corridor and Lavender Creek trail, with low-rise residential uses beyond Terry Drive

East: The City's Rockcliffe Yard (City Parks Operations, Forestry Operations, and Toronto Parking Authority) and open storage yards serving landscaping and construction firms

West: Rockcliffe Middle School (scheduled for closure), with open areas and woodlot beyond

CONVERSION REQUEST CONSIDERATION

The *Planning Act*, the PPS 2020, and the Growth Plan 2020 emphasize the importance of protecting employment lands to ensure a prosperous economic future. The Growth Plan 2020 and Toronto's Official Plan set out the criteria by which the City is to consider the conversion of lands designated *Employment Areas*. Criteria include the requirement to demonstrate a need for the conversion; that the City will maintain sufficient land to meet the 2051 employment forecasts set out in the Growth Plan 2020; the conversion would not adversely affect the overall viability of the employment area; and there is infrastructure and public facilities to accommodate the proposed uses.

The City received approximately 150 requests to convert lands designated *Core Employment Areas* and *General Employment Areas* as part of the City's Official Plan Decision Report – Approval - *Employment Area Conversion Requests* Page 2 of 7

Growth Plan Conformity and Municipal Comprehensive Review (“MCR”). Preliminary Assessments were prepared that provided preliminary issues and staff positions on requests. Planning and Housing Committee authorized the use of over 130 preliminary assessments for the basis of consultation with requestors, neighbouring businesses, major facilities, propane operators, other stakeholders and the public.

Staff reviewed the material provided as part of this conversion request, considered the conclusions of the Peer Review of the Compatibility/Mitigation Study; consulted with the owner/applicant, the Toronto Region Conversation Authority, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR); and conducted a site visit. In response to issues identified in the Preliminary Assessment, the applicant provided additional material for review.

On December 12, 2023, the ward Councillor held a community meeting with area residents to provide an overview of the conversion request and the applicant’s development concept. The public meeting was held in person and attended by approximately 40 participants, City Planning staff, CreateTO staff, Economic Development and Culture staff, the Councillor’s office, and the applicant team.

Members of the public asked questions regarding the *Employment Areas* conversion policies, process, and timing. Questions and comments were also made regarding the sale of the lands. Key concerns raised regarding the conversion request included the potential risk of increased basement flooding resulting from permitting more development in the area. Some members of the public expressed a desire to retain the employment land use designation and facilitate jobs on the lands while others expressed a desire for the environmental restoration of the lands and surrounding area to be dedicated for community uses. Some residents raised concerns with existing truck traffic in the area.

The initial conversion request sought a redesignation of the lands to *Mixed Use Areas* in order to permit residential uses on the entire site. On April 12th, 2024, the applicant revised the request to seek a redesignation of the west part of the lands only to *Regeneration Areas* in order to permit residential uses on the west part of the site. The proposed *Regeneration Areas* designation portion of the lands is approximately 53 per cent of the total lands. The retained *Core Employment Areas* portion of the lands is 50 metres wide where the lands abut Rockcliffe Court and 70 metres wide where the lands abut 100 Rockcliffe Court. Staff considered this revised submission in the assessment of this conversion request. This Final Assessment completes the review of Conversion Request No. 114 and provides staff’s recommendations.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

The lands are located near the centre of the larger Junction-Weston-Dupont employment area, on the east side of Rockcliffe Boulevard within an employment block buffered by a hydro corridor and open space areas. Originally developed along the rail corridor with more traditional, heavy employment uses, this area has transitioned over the years to serve a diverse range of users, ranging from light industrial and auto-related uses to galleries, studios, breweries, and offices. The appeal of the Junction-

Weston-Dupont area has led to over \$500 million in new industrial and commercial buildings and alterations between 2016-2021, and over 436,000 square metres of non-residential floor space in development currently. The Junction-Weston-Dupont employment area had a very low vacancy rate of 1% in 2021, demonstrating a strong demand for space within the area. This is a successful employment area with continued investment and a clustering of employment uses that provides a range of job opportunities for Torontonians.

Employment areas provide opportunities for Torontonians to live and work in the City. Eighty-two percent of the workers in this employment area live in the City, and 24% of those workers reside in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (“NIAs”). NIAs are areas identified as priority for investments to improve the general well-being of residents. This area accommodates a significant source of local jobs.

The existing supply of *Employment Areas* is sufficient to meet the 2051 Provincial employment forecast in Toronto and it is anticipated that the City will meet the employment forecast allocated to the municipality pursuant to the Growth Plan 2020. It should be noted however that while no single conversion request would affect this outcome, multiple conversions could impact Toronto’s ability to meet the Provincial employment forecast. There is no need to convert the *Employment Areas* at 301 Rockcliffe Boulevard from an employment forecast perspective.

The lands represent a large and key location within the employment block set in the centre of the Rockcliffe-Smythe area and are currently vacant. The immediate and surrounding employment context includes the City’s Rockcliffe Yard and open storage yards for landscaping and construction material suppliers located east of the lands, and warehouses and offices located north of the lands beyond Black Creek.

The lands and the surrounding area were occupied by a sewage treatment plant from 1934 until approximately 1998 which operated at a capacity equal to or greater than 10,000 litres per day. A review of the Ministry of Environment’s Certificate of Property Use (“CPU”) for the lands and immediate area dated September 1, 2017, indicates the lands are contaminated and orders Risk Management Measures necessary to prevent, eliminate or ameliorate an Adverse Effect on the Property.

The lands are located in the Black Creek River ravine and within a Special Policy Area (SPA) as per the former City of York Official Plan. The lands are also located in the Rockcliffe Park Black Creek Special Policy Area (SPA) in the Toronto Official Plan, but this is not in effect due to the City’s appeal of the Minister’s decision. An SPA is a part of the community that has historically existed in a floodplain and where development is controlled by Official Plan policies approved by both the Ministers of MMAH and MNRF.

The PPS 2020 requires in Policy 1.3.4 that any change or modification to the land use designations or boundaries that apply to SPA lands must first be approved by both the Ministers of MMAH and MNRF (dual-Ministerial approval) before any subsequent City or provincial approval of changes to the land use designation(s) or SPA boundaries. Therefore, should any SPA lands be converted through a MCR, an approval by the

Minister of Municipal Affairs would be required to follow after the dual-Ministerial approval respecting SPA changes.

MMAH staff confirmed in 2022 that the Official Plan cannot be amended by the City to convert and redesignate lands within a SPA prior to the required dual-Ministerial approval. A site-specific meeting regarding the lands took place between the applicant and MMAH and MNRF staff on October 11th, 2023. Staff received correspondence on October 26th, 2023 from the Ministry of Natural Resources advising that the province does not generally support site-specific Special Policy Area amendments and typically requires any proposed changes to be considered on a comprehensive basis that includes the entire SPA. MNRF staff also noted that the lands would not be suitable to be considered using a protocol similar to the “Protocol Regarding the Lower Don Special Policy Area” given that the Rockcliffe SPA is significantly different in scale, infrastructure investments and broader city-building outcomes than the context under which the Lower Don Protocol was developed. A recent meeting between the City, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), MNRF and MMAH on March 27th, 2024, resulted in the same conclusions regarding the SPA process for these lands.

The City and TRCA have completed the Rockcliffe Riverine Flood Mitigation Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA), which has been approved by the Province. The project area is identified as the most flood vulnerable area in TRCA’s jurisdiction. The EA aims to minimize river flood risks in the Rockcliffe-Smythe area and determines a flood mitigation strategy to address safety on hazardous lands.

The City, in partnership with the TRCA, will carry out the detailed design and construction of the approved flood mitigation project. TRCA has noted that implementation of the remediation works are complex as a result of detailed design challenges and the project is expected to be a long and complicated process. The remediation project is not anticipated to be completed prior to December 31, 2032.

Once implementation of the approved flood mitigation project has been completed, technical data and mapping can then prepared to update the SPA policies and boundaries. The technical data, mapping and updated SPA policies and boundaries could then be submitted to the Province to seek the dual-Ministerial approval required by the PPS.

Staff recommend that the lands be retained as Employment Areas. An approval of a conversion of part of the lands (as proposed) to permit residential and other non-employment uses would be premature, since the Province’s approval of a conversion would need to follow after the dual-Ministerial approval of SPA changes and could not be brought into effect until 2033 at the earliest.

In addition to the location of the lands within the SPA, staff recommend that the lands be retained as *Core Employment Areas* for further reasons as are described below.

The lands are suitably located for *Core Employment Area* uses and should be retained as *Employment Areas*. Employment lands are finite. The low vacancy rate and increasing lease and land values of employment properties has led to a high demand on

a limited supply. The lands are situated within an *Employment Area* and buffered from residential uses to the south by a hydro corridor, open space and Terry Drive. Given the context of the lands and the existing employment uses on the adjacent lands, a residential conversion of the lands would set a precedent for further conversion of lands in this *Employment Area* and have an adverse impact on the City's Rockcliffe Yard.

The Rockcliffe Yard is located directly east of the lands and operates 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. The yard is operated by the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division and includes large areas dedicated for equipment storage and other uses including the outdoor storage of aggregates. In addition, the yard also includes a Toronto Parking Authority machine service and repair centre and a Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) maintenance facility.

City Parks operations for Wards 3, 4 and 5 are provided from the Rockcliffe Yard. Vehicles to and from the yard include trucks and snowplows. The trucks deliver aggregates to the yard where they are stored and also pick up the aggregates from the yard to make deliveries to park locations where required. The snowplows service local parks, community centres and clear local sidewalks and trails. The snowplows travel to and from the yard along Rockcliffe Court and Rockcliffe Boulevard at different times of the night and day subject to snowfall conditions. Rockcliffe Court abuts the lands on both the north and east sides of the proposed development site, and the site fronts onto Rockcliffe Boulevard.

The Toronto Parking Authority facility provides maintenance for all TPA Green P machines and related equipment. Forestry operations from the Rockcliffe Yard serve the entire west district of Etobicoke York which amounts to the majority of 2,122 hectares of parkland in the district.

East of the lands and south of Rockcliffe Yard are three employment uses, businesses that operate as open storage yards to supply landscaping and construction industries. Road access for truck deliveries to and from these businesses is only available along Rockcliffe Court, which abuts that part of the lands proposed to be redesignated to *Regeneration Areas*.

A conversion to introduce residential and other sensitive uses on the west part of the lands may result in complaints related to the operations of the City's yard and the other nearby employment uses even if the eastern part of the lands was retained as an *Employment Area*. The proposed conversion may disrupt the ability of the *Employment Area* to provide a stable and productive operating environment for the City's yard and the businesses located east of the lands.

Employment Areas are characterized by clusters of business and economic activities. Clusters can encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration between businesses. As a result, this can increase productivity and innovation. The lands have the potential to accommodate employment uses similar to, and that are part of a cluster with, surrounding businesses, services and programming. The surrounding businesses supply the landscape construction industry and the City yard provides environmental services across the city. Given the context of the lands and surrounding employment

lands, conversion of these lands would reduce potential to cluster similar and related construction related industries in the immediate area.

A Compatibility/Mitigation (“C/M”) Study was required to support each conversion request and peer reviewed. The Peer Review of the C/M Study to support the initial conversion request determined that required information and assessment was not provided with respect to the following: air quality, complaint history related to operations in the vicinity, traffic noise and discussion on impact on the surrounding *Employment Areas* to confirm compatibility. The Peer Reviewer was not able to confirm that the C/M Study fulfils the City's Terms of Reference for C/M Study requirements. Given the lack of information, the Peer Reviewer could not confirm that the proposed residential conversions are compatible within the existing *Employment Area*. Staff considered these findings, in addition to applying all the Conversion and Removal Policies for *Employment Areas* that also address a range of other issues as described in this Final Assessment. A peer review has not been submitted for the revised proposal.

The lands are not easily accessed and there is no convenient access to higher order transit to the lands that would support the proposed intensification of residential uses at this location. While the lands are serviced by bus transit, the options are limited to daytime service. The lands are located a significant distance to major streets that have more frequent transit service and higher order transit. St. Clair Avenue West is located more than 500 metres south of the lands. Jane Street is located more than 500 metres west of the lands. Eglinton Avenue West and Weston Road are each located more than 1.5 kilometres from the lands, to the north and east of the lands respectively. The lands are located 1.6 kilometres northwest of the planned St. Clair-Old Weston GO Transit/SmartTrack Station.

The proposal for residential uses in this location does not support the achievement of a complete community. Where a conversion request proposes residential uses, the proximity of community services and facilities such as schools, libraries and community centres is one of the considerations examined by staff. The lands are largely isolated from existing and planned community infrastructure. The nearest library is a 1.2 km walking distance and requires crossing a major street. While there are schools in the area, there is no assigned Toronto District School Board elementary school to accommodate the proposed conversion, and other factors had a greater bearing on staff's recommendations, in reading the PPS 2020, Growth Plan 2020 and the Official Plan in their entirety.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff have reviewed Conversion Request No. 114 (301 Rockcliffe Boulevard) against the policies of the PPS 2020, the Growth Plan 2020, and the Official Plan and recommend that the lands be retained as *Employment Areas* and continue to be designated as *Core Employment Areas*.