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July 10, 2024

By E-Mail

Attn: Nancy Martins
Planning and Housing Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Email: phc@toronto.ca

Dear Members of the Planning and Housing Committee:

**Re: Item 2024.PH14.1 - Employment Area Land Use Permissions - Decision Report – Approval (OPA 680)
Planning and Housing Committee consideration on July 11, 2024**

We represent Rowbry Holdings Limited being the registered owner of the lands municipally known as 1125A, 1131 and 1131A Leslie Street, Toronto (“**Property**”).

On behalf of our client, we have been closely monitoring the City’s proposed response to Bill 97 and the updated definition of *Areas of Employment* that it introduces into the *Planning Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended. We have previously written to Council outlining our concerns with OPA 668 and OPA 680.

Background

The Property is approximately 4.8 acres with significant frontage along Leslie Street. The Property has exceptional access to higher order transit as it is located within 800 metres of the Sunnybrook Park Crosstown station and the Science Centre Crosstown/Ontario Line station.

The Property is part of a larger remnant employment area where a number of conversions have been approved and is currently under utilized with a 1-storey service commercial building and 6-storey office building. Constructed about 40 years ago, the existing buildings no longer meet today’s office space standards, including with respect to layout, design, ceiling heights, and efficiency, which contributes to the declining function of the employment area along Leslie Street.

On July 30, 2021, our client submitted an employment conversion request for the Property, as part of the City’s municipal comprehensive review (#68). The requested conversion would allow for the revitalization of the area and include a mix of residential and non-residential (employment) uses in support of transit infrastructure investment. Despite the clear merits of our conversion

July 10, 2024

Page 2

request and all of the supporting materials provided to staff, City Council did not approve our request and such decision is currently with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Concerns with OPA 680

We are disappointed to have read staff's Decision Report on OPA 680 that continues to ignore our concerns.

As stated in our previous submissions, the intention of the new definition of Areas of Employment is to limit employment areas to traditional manufacturing, warehousing or related uses. Office, retail and institutional uses are not included in this definition for the purposes of exempting lands with such uses from employment protection policies and to allow for the introduction of residential uses to encourage mixed-use development and complete communities without the need for a conversion application. OPA 668 and 680 undermine this objective.

Together with OPA 668, OPA 680 will effectively sterilize the redevelopment potential of the Property by precluding both the replacement of the existing office/retail space and the introduction of residential uses. As a result, these amendments would render office and retail uses on the Property as legal non-conforming and undermine further investment in the Property. At the same time, OPA 680 would preclude the construction of much needed housing in existing employment areas that can accommodate residential and mixed-use development.

At a time when the office market is undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift that will see the long term need for office space decline and require available office space to meet the needs of users in the remote work environment, the City should not be bringing forth policies that hinder the redevelopment of, and reinvestment into, properties with older office buildings that could otherwise be used to deliver complete communities.

For the reasons set out above, we request that this Committee: (1) reject OPA 680, as proposed by staff, and (2) direct staff to reconsider OPA 668 by conducting a detailed review of all existing properties designated *Employment Areas* to determine which of these properties meet the new definition before bringing forth a revised recommendation report.

We ask to be added to the City's mailing list in connection with this matter and be notified of any further decisions made by this Committee or Council.

Yours truly,

AIRD & BERLIS LLP



Maggie Bassani

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cc: Client

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