



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: April 2, 2025
Report Number: SRPBS.25.034

Department: Planning and Building Services
Division: Policy Planning

Subject: **SRPBS.25.034 - Request for Approval -
Municipally-Initiated Official Plan Amendment
on Employment Land Protection**

Purpose:

A request to approve a proposed municipally-initiated Official Plan Amendment to add policies that would authorize the continuation of legally existing excluded uses within the City's designated employment lands.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That the municipally-initiated Official Plan Amendment regarding employment land protections, City file MOPA-24-0002, be approved; and,
- b) That draft Official Plan Amendment 61 attached hereto as Appendix "C" be brought forward to the April 9, 2025 Council meeting for adoption.

Contact Person(s):

- Andrew Crawford, Planner II - Policy, extension 5528
- Phoebe Chow, Manager, Policy, extension 2472
- Maria Flores, Director, Policy Planning, extension 5438
- Gus Galanis, Commissioner, Planning and Building Services, extension 2465

Report Approval:

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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Background:

On October 20, 2024, changes to the *Planning Act* and a new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (“PPS”) came into effect. One of the changes included a revised definition of “area of employment”, which limits uses permitted in designated employment lands to uses such as manufacturing, warehousing, goods movement, and related ancillary uses. This change has the effect of excluding lands containing other employment-generating uses, such as institutional, stand-alone office, and supporting retail or commercial uses (“excluded uses”) from being considered as part of an “area of employment”.

Another change to the *Planning Act* that came into effect concurrently as the above mentioned definition change is municipalities are given the ability to recognize lands that contain legally existing excluded uses to be considered as “area of employment”, provided the municipality’s Official Plan specifically contains policies to do so. Correspondingly, staff have prepared a draft Official Plan Amendment to add such policies that will recognize legally existing excluded uses within designated employment areas.

In this regard, staff prepared a draft municipally-initiated Official Plan Amendment which was considered at a statutory Council Public Meeting held on February 11, 2025, wherein Council received Staff Report SRPBS.25.009 for information purposes and directed that all comments be referred back to staff (refer to Appendix “A”). Additional information and background on the impetus and rationale for this amendment are contained in the previous Staff Report.

Discussion:

Proposed Amendment

The proposed Official Plan Amendment (“OPA”) would add new policies authorizing the continuation of excluded uses, provided these uses were legally established on or prior to October 20, 2024. Specifically, these new policies would be added to the **Employment Area Section 4.8.1.1** and **Employment Corridor Section 4.8.2.1** of the Official Plan. These policies would apply to properties in the corresponding land use designations (refer to the location map in Appendix “B”).

Planning Analysis

Under the *Planning Act* and the PPS, municipalities shall plan for, protect, and preserve employment areas in their Official Plans for current and future needs. Designating employment land ensures the City has an appropriate land supply to accommodate businesses that may be incompatible with sensitive land uses (such as residential or institutional) and are unsuitable elsewhere due to reasons such as size, scale, emissions/nuisances and security.

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Given that Richmond Hill is predominately built-out, with no room to create new “areas of employment” due to the presence of the Oak Ridges Moraine, it is important for the City to protect the viability of its existing employment lands to accommodate the anticipated growth in employment, provide room for existing businesses to expand, and attract new businesses to the City.

As of October 20, 2024, any stand-alone offices, commercial uses, or institutional uses located in designated employment lands are now being considered as excluded uses. Lands containing these excluded uses would not be subject to the same level of protection from employment conversions that are afforded to designated employment lands under the *Planning Act* and PPS policies. Subsection 1(1.1) of the *Planning Act* recognizes this issue and allows for entire clusters of businesses to be considered as an “area of employment”, even if some of those properties contain excluded uses. However, to take advantage of this provision, it requires Official Plan policies to recognize these legally existing excluded uses. The proposed OPA would add these policies to the OP, thereby satisfying the *Planning Act* provision. This would allow for these excluded uses to continue operating and would maintain the overall integrity of the City’s employment lands. In addition, this would allow the City to uphold employment land conversion criteria under the PPS to any future employment land conversion requests. Therefore, the proposed OPA would be consistent with the direction of the *Planning Act* and PPS in terms of protecting employment lands.

Comments

All circulated City departments and external agencies have indicated they have no comments and/or objections with respect to the proposed amendment. A copy of the OPA was circulated to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, which indicated the proposed OPA would be exempt from requiring approval by the Minister. Additionally, no comments have been received from the public with regards to the proposed amendment. Council’s comments were generally supportive of the proposed OPA.

Financial Implications:

The recommendation of this report does not have any financial, staffing or other implications.

Relationship to Strategic Plan 2024-2027:

This OPA relates to Pillar 1, Growing a livable, sustainable community by ensuring that Richmond Hill’s employment lands are protected over the long term, and remain viable to allow for jobs within our local community.

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Attachments:

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. All attachments have been reviewed and made accessible. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

- Appendix A – Extract from Council Public Meeting C#02-25 held on February 11, 2025
- Appendix B – Map of employment lands
- Appendix C – Draft Official Plan Amendment 61

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Report Approval Details

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| Document Title: | SRPBS.25.034 – Request for Approval – Municipally-Initiated Official Plan Amendment on Employment Land Protection.docx |
| Attachments: | - SRPBS.25.034 - Appendix A - Council Extract - AODA.pdf - SRPBS.25.034 - Appendix B - Map of employment lands - AODA.pdf - SRPBS.25.034 - Appendix C - OPA 61 - AODA.pdf |
| Final Approval Date: | Mar 7, 2025 |

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Maria Flores - Mar 7, 2025 - 2:06 PM

Gus Galanis - Mar 7, 2025 - 2:19 PM

Darlene Joslin - Mar 7, 2025 - 4:51 PM