

Employment Lands – Municipal Comprehensive Review

The 2005 Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe introduced policies restricting the conversion of employment lands. The Growth Plan policies apply to lands within employment areas but not to those within downtown areas or regeneration areas. For downtown areas and regeneration areas the policies of the PPS apply.

The Growth Plan only permits the conversion of lands within employment areas to non-employment uses at the time of a municipal comprehensive review. A municipal comprehensive review consists of an official plan review or an official plan amendment that has been initiated by a municipality and comprehensively applies the policies of the Growth Plan. The PPS requires a comprehensive review consisting of an official plan amendment that is initiated or adopted by a planning authority. This means that a conversion may be proposed by a private proponent provided that the conversion requirements of the PPS are satisfactorily addressed and an OPA is adopted by the City.

OPA 39 introduced policies into the Official Plan to restrict employment land conversions as per the Growth Plan. The background work to the 5 year review of the Official Plan included the preparation of the “City of Guelph Employment Lands Strategy Phase 2 (2010)” which addresses the municipal comprehensive review requirements of Section 2.2.6.5 of the Growth Plan.

The Employment Lands Strategy Phase 2 concluded that:

- By 2031, there would be a surplus of 44 net hectares (adjusted for conversions) of currently designated employment land.
- The availability of market-ready serviced industrial land within the city is very limited, especially for larger sites.
- The city must maintain a healthy supply (equivalent to 5 years absorption) of designated employment lands to provide sufficient choice by location, access, size and configuration, land use designation, zoning, price, etc.
- 5 sites totalling 28 net hectares are recommended for conversion to non-employment lands. These sites are fragmented or isolated from surrounding employment areas, small in size, poorly configured and have poor marketability for employment lands development.

The Draft Official Plan has been modified to incorporate the recommendations of the Employment Lands Strategy including:

- Updates to the Employment Land Conversion policies in Chapter 3 to include regeneration areas as lands that may be considered for employment land conversion as per the PPS through a comprehensive review. The new policies include a description of lands that would be considered as regeneration areas for the purposes of the employment land conversion policies.
- Modifications to Schedule 2 Land Use Plan to reflect the recommendations for conversion and the recommendations to maintain all current employment designations in the south Guelph area. The previous draft of the Official Plan removed employment designations in south Guelph and placed the lands within a Special Study Area designation.
- Updates to the policies for the Industrial Designation to direct warehousing and transportation/distribution uses to the Built-up Area where convenient access to transportation corridors is available. This supports the achievement of the density targets for the Greenfield area by directing these uses which generate low numbers of employees to areas where the density target does not apply.

The draft Official Plan, through Schedule 2 Land Use Plan and associated policies, confirms that the lands designated for employment uses are required to meet the City's projected employment land needs to the year 2031. Council adoption of Phase 3 of the Official Plan Update will confirm the recommendations of the Employment Lands Strategy Phase 2 and will fulfill the municipal comprehensive review requirements of the Growth Plan. The City will assess the need to review these recommendations at the time of the next 5 year review or through a separate City initiated amendment as part of the Secondary Planning process for the Clair Road/Maltby Road area in accordance with the Provincial Growth Plan.