



BOUSFIELDS INC.

Project No. 21253

February 9, 2024

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Municipal Services Office – Central Ontario
777 Bay Street, 16th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Attention: Louis Bitonti

Dear Mr. Bitonti:

**Re: City of Toronto Official Plan Amendment No. 653
ERO Posting 019-7731
Ministry Reference 20-OP-238506
1681-1725 Eglinton Avenue East, 20-32 Mobile Drive, 1 Credit Union Drive
Conversion Request 105**

We are the planning consultants for Weins Canada Inc. and PAG Realty 2 Inc., the owners of the lands known as 1681 and 1695 Eglinton Avenue East and 24 and 30 Mobile Drive. The lands are located at the southwest corner of Eglinton Avenue East and Bermondsey Road, diagonally opposite the Sloane Station on the soon-to-be-opened Eglinton Crosstown LRT line.

The employment area conversion request applies to the entire block bounded by Eglinton Avenue East, Bermondsey Road, Mobile Drive and Credit Union Drive, with an area of approximately 3.11 hectares (the “subject site”). The majority of the block is owned by our clients, with existing motor vehicle sales dealerships on each property. The remainder of the block is occupied by a gas station and car wash and single-storey buildings occupied by offices and a place of worship.

The subject site is currently designated *General Employment Areas* and *Core Employment Areas* by the City of Toronto Official Plan, with the *General Employment Areas* designation applying to the Eglinton and Bermondsey frontages and the *Core Employment Areas* designation applying to the southwest corner of the block. An aerial photo of the subject site and the surroundings is attached hereto as **Attachment A**.

The purpose of this letter is to request that the Minister modify Official Plan Amendment No. 653 to redesignate the subject site from its current *Core Employment Areas* and *General Employment Areas* designation to a *Mixed Use Areas* designation.

The subject site is located within the adopted Sloane Major Transit Station Area (“MTSA”), which has been delineated by Toronto City Council in Official Plan Amendment No. 575 and is planned for a minimum density of 160 residents and jobs per hectare (Site and Area Specific Policy 686). OPA 575 is currently before the Minister for approval. The Sloane Station on the Eglinton Crosstown LRT line, which is under construction and nearing completion, is an above-ground station located in the Eglinton Avenue median to the immediate east of Bermondsey Road.

The subject site is located immediately south of an apartment neighbourhood and low-rise residential neighbourhoods further north, which includes a proposed development at 3 Swift Drive comprised of two towers at 31 and 35 storeys joined by a central podium with 857 dwelling units. The area south of Eglinton Avenue East, including the subject site, includes a variety of commercial, office, institutional and industrial uses.

For the reasons set out in this letter, it is our opinion that the subject site should be converted from its current *Core Employment Areas* and *General Employment Areas* designation to a *Mixed Use Areas* designation, with an appropriate Site and Area Specific Policy (see **Attachment B**).

In particular, it is our opinion that the subject site is ideally located and configured to accommodate mixed-use transit-supportive intensification that would support and optimize the significant Provincial investment that has been made in the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, while creating new housing supply that will contribute to the achievement of the City’s Housing Pledge to create 285,000 new housing units by 2031.

Background

On August 3, 2021, we submitted a letter to the City of Toronto on behalf of our client requesting an employment land conversion (see **Attachment C**). The letter set out detailed planning reasons in support of our request. The conversion request was also supported by a Compatibility & Mitigation Study prepared by SLR Consulting (Canada) Ltd., dated July 2021 (the “SLR Study”) (see **Attachment D**).

On March 25, 2022, the Planning and Housing Committee considered a report from City Planning dated March 10, 2022, which attached “preliminary assessments” of employment area conversion requests (Group 3), including a preliminary assessment of our clients’ requested conversion. The Planning and Housing Committee authorized City Planning to use the Preliminary Assessments, attached as Attachment 1 to the March 10, 2022 report, as a basis for consultation.

In Attachment 1, staff's preliminary assessment was that the subject site should be retained as *Employment Areas* and continue to be designated as *Core Employment Areas* and *General Employment Areas*, based on a number of considerations, including "compatibility with surrounding existing and permitted land uses", "ability to provide appropriate buffering and/or separation of employment uses from sensitive land uses, including residential", and "the need for convenient access to schools, local stores, services, and public service facilities required for complete communities".

On April 25, 2022, we met with City Planning staff to discuss staff's preliminary assessment and provided a number of reasons why we believed that that preliminary assessment was flawed.

On July 22, 2022, Toronto City Council adopted Official Plan Amendment No. 591 ("OPA 591"), which amended the Official Plan with respect to Economic Health Policies and Policies for Employment Areas and included changes to land use designations and associated site-specific policies for several employment conversion requests. OPA 591 was subsequently forwarded to the Minister for approval pursuant to Section 26 of the *Planning Act*. OPA 591 was approved without modification by the Minister on December 12, 2023.

City staff subsequently requested our client to pay for a peer review of the SLR Study (the "Cambium Peer Review"). On October 14, 2022, Cambium issued its peer review, which identified nine items that required additional information and concluded that, "until those items are addressed Cambium cannot agree with the conclusion of the Study that the proposed conversion is fully compatible with the surrounding land uses".

City staff reported out on the remaining employment conversion requests in reports dated May 17, 2023 and June 16, 2023, which were considered by Planning and Housing Committee on June 1, 2023 and July 5, 2023, respectively. The report dated May 17, 2023 included a "final assessment" of the requested conversion of the subject site and recommended that the subject site be retained as *Employment Areas* and continue to be designated *Core Employment Areas* and *General Employment Areas*.

In response to the staff recommendation, we submitted a letter dated May 29, 2023, which identified several issues with City staff's final assessment. That letter is included with this letter as **Attachment E**. City staff did not respond to that letter and Planning and Housing Committee adopted the recommendations of the May 17, 2023 staff report, without any substantive changes (including no change with respect to the subject site).

On June 18, 2023, Toronto City Council adopted Official Plan Amendment No. 644 which included four land use designation changes (three to *General Employment*

Areas and one to *Regeneration Areas*) and one associated site and area specific policy. OPA 644 was subsequently forwarded to the Minister for approval pursuant to Section 26 of the *Planning Act*.

On September 6, 2023, Toronto City Council adopted Official Plan Amendment No. 653 which included a number of land use designation changes and associated site and area specific policies for several employment conversion requests. OPA 653 was subsequently forwarded to the Minister for approval pursuant to Section 26 of the *Planning Act*.

Planning Rationale

In our opinion, the redesignation of the subject site from *Core Employment Areas* and *General Employment Areas* to *Mixed Use Areas* would be appropriate in land use planning terms.

In summary, the planning rationale for the request is as follows:

- The subject site is located within a pocket of *Employment Areas* lands south of Eglinton Avenue East that extends south to the hydro corridor and west to the Don Valley. The lands are not designated as a Provincially Significant Employment Zone (PSEZ). Residential/mixed-use development on the subject site would result in improved compatibility with the neighbourhoods to the north of Eglinton Avenue, which are designated *Apartment Neighbourhoods* and *Neighbourhoods*.
- The subject site is located within the Sloane MTSA on the Eglinton Crosstown LRT line, which is targeted for transit-supportive intensification. As sizeable portions of the Sloane MTSA are not anticipated to experience growth (i.e. the low-rise residential areas north of Eglinton Avenue and the employment areas south of Eglinton Avenue towards the hydro corridor), the use of properties fronting on Eglinton Avenue East within the MTSA that can accommodate growth should be optimized.
- Given the existing and planned higher-order transit service, the subject site is considerably underutilized, consisting of single-storey buildings occupied by automotive, commercial and institutional uses, surrounded by large expanses of surface parking and vehicle display and storage areas associated with the motor vehicle sales establishments.

- Intensified mixed-use redevelopment on the subject site, including residential uses, would optimize the use of land and infrastructure along the Eglinton Avenue frontage and establish a compatible land use relationship with the residential neighbourhood to the north of Eglinton. In addition, the requested conversion would allow for transit-supportive mixed-use intensification within walking distance of existing public transit and future higher-order transit.

Detailed reasons are set out in our August 3, 2021 letter (see **Attachment C**).

Since the time of filing our conversion request and staff's preliminary assessment, the following new considerations provide further support for the conversion request:

Planned Transit

- On July 22, 2022, the City adopted Official Plan Amendment No. 575, which delineates the boundaries of the proposed Sloane MTSA. The subject site is located within the MTSA, together with the remainder of the lands west of the Don River, north of the hydro corridor, west of Victoria Park Avenue, and south of Elvaston Drive.

Land Use Compatibility

- SLR Consulting (Canada) Ltd. (SLR) has provided a response letter, dated February 9, 2024, to address the Cambium Peer Review noted above (see **Attachment F**).
- The letter directly responds to the comments included in the Cambium Peer Review and acknowledges that additional compatibility studies may be required as part of future development applications.
- SLR's response letter states that the information provided is adequate to support the proposal to permit non-residential uses on the subject site. The initial recommendation remains unchanged that a mixed use development is anticipated to be compatible with surrounding land uses from an air quality and noise and vibration perspective.

Definition of Employment Areas

- On April 6, 2023, the Province introduced Bill 97 (the *Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023*) and released a new Provincial Planning Statement for public comment. Bill 97 and the Provincial Planning Statement would amend the definitions of an "area of employment" and an "employment

area”, respectively, to exclude areas that predominantly consist of retail, office and institutional uses. Under the revised definitions, it is our opinion that the area bounded by Eglinton Avenue East, Bermondsey Road, the Don Valley and Old Eglinton Avenue, including the subject site, would no longer be an “area of employment”/“employment area”, because it consists almost exclusively of automotive dealerships, offices, places of worship and commercial uses.

Market Conditions for Office Space

- In 2016, a Market Analysis and Economic Strategy report was prepared by urbanMetrics inc. for the City to better understand current economic and employment conditions in the Golden Mile area, located a short distance to the east of the subject site, and recommend strategies to enhance existing employment and job opportunities in the area. With respect to future office space, the report concluded that “...office development exists in only select locations in the GTA. In general, low rents coupled with high development costs make office development challenging in most locations, including the Golden Mile at present.” Notably, through OPA 644, Toronto City Council has proposed to convert all of the remaining *Employment Areas* on the south side of Eglinton Avenue East in the Golden Mile area for future mixed-use redevelopment, including residential uses.
- Since 2016, the demand for office space has significantly declined in the post-COVID-19 era as a result of long-term structural changes in the nature of office work. The City has initiated an Office Space Needs Study to consider the implications of these changes, which is currently in its first phase. Although a background report has not yet been prepared, the project website notes that “increasing office vacancies is a trend impacting large cities across North America as companies adjust to hybrid work following the COVID-19 Pandemic” and that “concurrently, Toronto is experiencing a prolonged housing crisis that has elevated pressures for residential intensification”.

Emerging Mixed Use Context of Immediate Area

- On December 24, 2021, a rezoning application at 3 Swift Drive was submitted to the City which now proposes two towers at 31 and 35 storeys joined by a central podium with 857 dwelling units. A report from Community Planning recommends approval of the rezoning application and was considered at North York Community Council on January 24, 2024 and forwarded to City Council for a decision. At its meeting on February 6, 2024, City Council approved the zoning by-law amendment recommended by Community Planning staff.

- The proposed application represents the first major development in the proposed Sloane MTSA which is planned as a transit-oriented node around the Sloane LRT station. The block context plan submitted in support of the rezoning application at 3 Swift Drive demonstrates mid-rise and high-rise development on the north and south sides of Eglinton Avenue East in the immediate vicinity of Sloane Station to the west of Bermondsey Road / Sloane Avenue. The block context plan submitted in support of the application shows several mid-rise buildings on the south side of Eglinton Avenue East which are presumed to be future office buildings.
- As described above, office development in this area is unlikely, therefore a mix of uses will be required to achieve mid-rise and high-rise buildings and transit-supportive densities on the south side of Eglinton Avenue East within the Sloane MTSA.

Housing Pledge and Housing Action Plan for Toronto

- On October 25, 2022, the Province issued a bulletin on the ERO setting out Municipal Housing Targets based on a Provincial target to build at least 1.5 million new homes by 2031. The 29 fastest growing municipalities have been assigned municipal housing targets and the target for Toronto is 285,000 dwelling units.
- Toronto City Council has recently adopted a housing pledge to achieve or exceed this provincial housing target. Council noted that the target represents an ambitious goal and is a call to action for the City of Toronto, other orders of government and stakeholders to accelerate timelines and get housing built.
- Specifically, Toronto's housing target of 285,000 new homes by 2031 represents a 23 percent increase in Toronto's housing supply within 10 years. To meet this target, an average of 31,050 new homes per year must be completed, which is approximately double the average number of units built annually between 2017 to 2021.
- The subject site, for reasons outlined in this letter, including its location along a major arterial road and within an MTSA, presents an obvious opportunity to accommodate mixed-use development, including residential units, to assist in reaching Toronto's housing target.

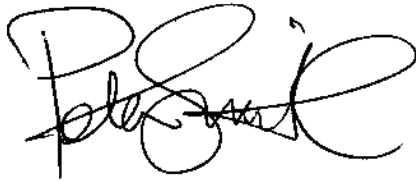
Conclusion

As described in this letter, and in previous communications provided as attachments to this letter, we are of the opinion that the requested employment conversion to permit a mix of residential and non-residential uses appropriately addresses the Province's and City's conversion criteria, will not negatively impact the viability of other employment areas in the vicinity, will support transit-supportive densities in the Sloane MTSA and support public investment in the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, will allow for a mix of uses on an underutilized site, and will help the City achieve its 2031 Housing Pledge targets.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions with respect to this letter or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned (psmith@bousfields.ca) or Daniel Rende (drende@bousfields.ca) of our office.

Yours very truly,

Bousfields Inc.



Peter F. Smith, B.E.S., MCIP, RPP

*cc: Amin Tejani, Weins Canada Inc.
Steven Alizadeh, PAG Realty 2 Inc.
Mark Flowers, Davies Howe LLP*