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TOWN OF AURORA, OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT NO. 55 EMPLOYMENT LAND RETENTION STRATEGY

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The communication from Julia Ryan, Goodmans LLP, May 4, 2005, on behalf of Lebovic Enterprises Inc., be received; and**
- 2. The recommendation contained in the following report, April 6, 2005, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Commissioner of Planning and Development Services be authorized to give notice to approve Amendment No. 55 to the Official Plan of the Town of Aurora.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to recommend approval of the Town of Aurora's Official Plan Amendment No. 55 (OPA 55).

3. BACKGROUND

OPA 55 introduces policies to the Town's Official Plan pertaining to the retention of lands designated for employment uses in the Town's employment areas. These areas are shown in Figure 1 below and are referred to as:

- Industrial Parkway South
- Industrial Parkway North
- Aurora East
- Wellington/404
- Magna/Preserve

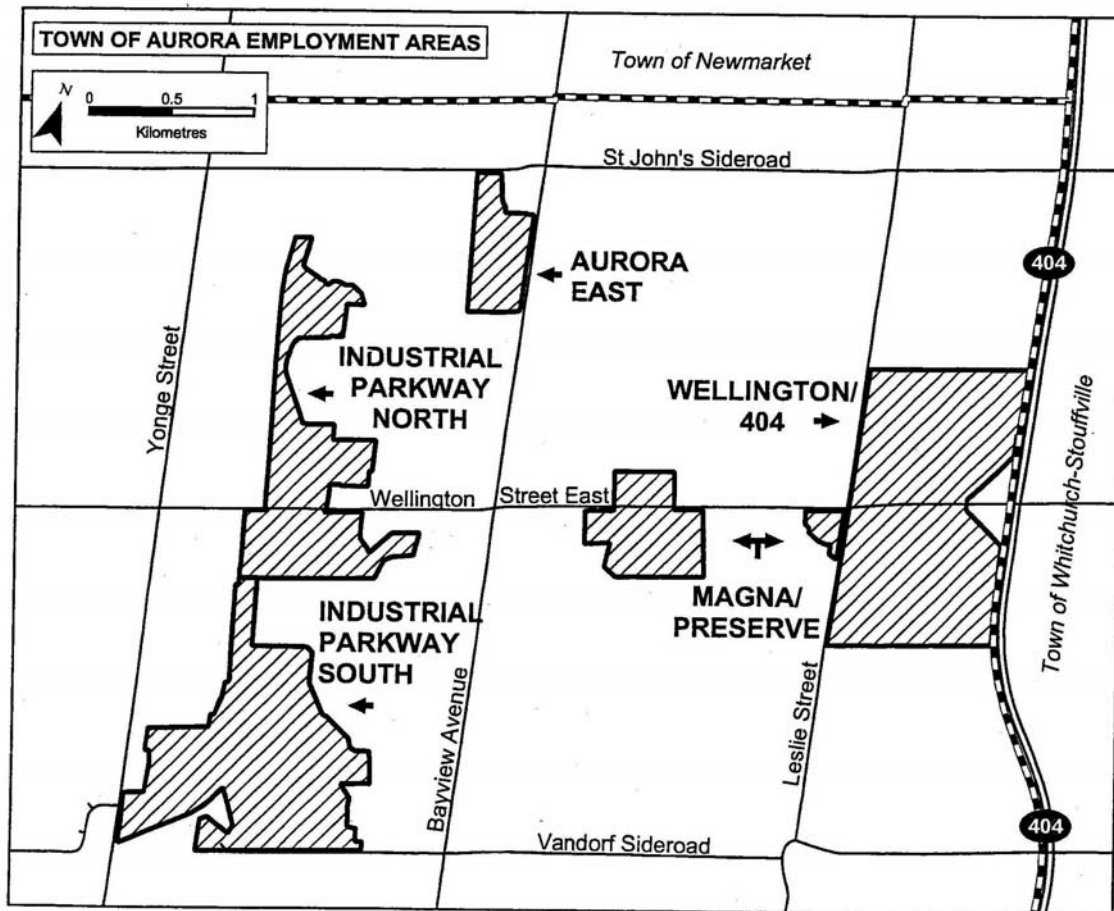
3.1 Description of OPA

OPA 55 introduces policies to be considered within the identified employment areas pertaining to the retention of lands suitable for existing and future employment uses. These policies were derived from the Employment Land Retention Strategy completed by Hemson Consulting Limited in May 2004. The OPA will help the Town:

- Achieve a balance of residential and non-residential land uses in the community.

- Promote a better live-work relationship, thereby reducing resident's need to commute out of the Town to work.
- Provide a greater diversity of property assessment thereby providing more flexibility to respond to market fluctuations.
- Provide for greater long-term net fiscal benefit to the Town.

Figure 1 – Town of Aurora Employment Areas



OPA 55 sets out criteria for the evaluation of site-specific Official Plan Amendments to redesignate the identified employment lands. In support of an Amendment proposal, an applicant must demonstrate that:

- The respective site cannot appropriately be developed for employment uses due to physical development constraints.
- The proposed redesignation would not cause any negative effects on the surrounding existing or future employment uses.
- The proposal is beneficial to the Town and the policies of the Official Plan.
- There will be no fiscal or infrastructure impacts on the Town.

3.2 History

In June 2002 the Town commenced a Five Year Review of the Official Plan. During the review process, an issue was raised pertaining to the increasing pressure to redesignate employment lands to permit other uses. The Town's Final Strategic Directions report dated April 2003, completed as part of the Review, recommended that guidelines and evaluation criteria should be prepared, and policy added to the Official Plan, that must be adhered to when evaluating employment area redesignation proposals. On February 8, 2005, in keeping with this recommendation, the Town of Aurora adopted OPA 55 and forwarded it to the Region for approval.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

An adequate supply of employment lands must be maintained and enhanced to support the demand for this form of development and to sustain the economic competitiveness of York Region. The policies of OPA 55 represent an important step towards preserving and supporting the Town's employment uses in the face of ongoing pressure to redesignate those lands for other uses. Furthermore, OPA 55 has gone through public consultation and is in keeping with current and emerging Provincial and Regional policies with respect to the preservation and development of employment uses.

4.1 Draft Places to Grow Plan

On February 16, 2005 the Province released the draft Places to Grow Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The Draft Plan contains policies that will shape the long-term growth of southern Ontario's urban and urbanizing area that stretches from Clarington to Niagara. The Plan speaks to the importance of retaining employment lands for industrial purposes to support the future economic prosperity of the Province. Specifically, the draft policies related to employment lands speak to the need to preserve industrial lands and discourage their conversion for other uses, especially in the areas of major highways (a key piece of infrastructure needed to support employment uses).

The Plan also speaks to the need for communities to achieve a healthy mix of jobs and housing, with a general target specified of 1 full time job to 3 residents.

Furthermore, the Plan directs local and upper tier Official Plans to use the population and employment forecasts prepared for the Province by Hemson Consulting in January 2005 as a baseline for planning for growth.

The policies of OPA 55 are consistent with the Province's direction set out in the draft Places to Grow Plan.

4.2 Provincial Policy Statement

On March 1, 2005 the Province's 5-year review of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) came into effect. The PPS speaks to the importance of planning for and protecting

employment areas for current and future uses. Employment Areas are defined by the PPS as:

“...those areas designated in an official plan for clusters of business and economic activities including, but not limited to, manufacturing, warehousing, offices and associated retail and ancillary facilities.”

Similar to the Province’s draft Places to Grow Plan, the PPS states that conversion from employment uses may only take place if determined to be appropriate through a comprehensive (official plan) review of employment land needs and supply initiated by a municipality. The PPS also directs municipalities to plan for and protect employment lands with the goal of improving the mix of employment and housing and achieving a jobs/housing balance to shorten commutes and decrease traffic congestion. This approach is also consistent with the draft Places to Grow Plan.

The policies of OPA 55 are consistent with the policies of the revised Provincial Policy Statement.

4.3 Regional Official Plan

A high quality of life depends on economic activity. The policies of Section 3 of the Regional Official Plan (ROP) set out an approach to sustaining the vitality of the Regional economy. It is the objective of the ROP to accommodate a diversity of economic activities, and create and support a range of potential locations for economic development. OPA 55 is consistent with the ROP.

4.4 Retail as an Employment Use

For the first time in Ontario in a broad policy document, the Province’s draft Places to Grow Plan makes a distinction between traditional industrial uses and the rapidly emerging major retail land use category. The Growth Plan states that conversions from employment to major retail uses may only take place if it is determined to be appropriate through a comprehensive (official plan) review of employment land needs and supply initiated by a municipality. The characteristics of traditional employment lands, i.e. generally large, affordable parcels of land, often fully serviced with easy access to major transportation routes, are also considered ideal for major retailers.

Major retail uses in employment areas are generally not permitted by the Town’s Official Plan or Zoning By-law, and OPA 55 does not propose any changes to those permissions. Regional staff support the approach of OPA 55 and the general discouragement of major retailers in the employment areas.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There will be no negative financial impacts on the Region or Town with the approval of OPA 55. Introducing policy that assists in the preservation of employment lands is a positive step towards maintaining balanced assessment in a municipality.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Town of Aurora has adopted OPA 55 and Regional approval would be consistent with the Town's decision.

7. CONCLUSION

Throughout the Region there has been mounting pressure to redesignate employment lands for other purposes. It is vitally important to plan and provide for sufficient employment lands so that existing industries can remain and expand in the community, future economic opportunities can be captured, and changing circumstances can be addressed. For the most part, the ad-hoc conversion of employment lands for other purposes to meet short-term needs, negatively impacts the ability of a municipality to plan for its long-term economic health. Introducing policies to restrict the conversion of employment lands represents good planning. The Town of Aurora's OPA 55 is a positive step towards sustaining the health of the local and Regional economies.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.