FROM PRESERVATION TO PRODUCTION: BETTER PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT
OF EMPLOYMENT LANDS IN THE CITY OF TORONTO

By

Jahnavi Ramakrishnan
GrDip, Concordia University, 2014
BA, McGill University, 2011

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines provincial and municipal planning policy related to the Employment Areas land-use designation found in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe intended to protect and preserve the traditional manufacturing sector. While manufacturing jobs have declined in the City of Toronto, employment areas face pressure to preserve existing industrial uses or risk conversion to ‘higher and better uses,’ especially as the City becomes increasingly built-out. Drawing on two case studies of employment areas in the City of Toronto and local and international best practices, this paper aims to propose specific recommendations for better planning and management of these significant lands.

Key Words: employment lands, economic development, urban manufacturing, complete communities

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Introduction

In the 2006 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GPGGH), the Province of Ontario introduced the *employment areas* land-use category. Employment areas are defined as “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” (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2013). While Section 2.2.6 of the GPGGH uses the term “Employment Lands” – a more general and undefined term referring to any lands generating jobs – the subject of this study is the *employment areas* designation whose purpose is to protect existing manufacturing and industrial land uses and encourage employment stability, if not growth, in these specific sectors.

This policy addition is intended to promote Ontario’s economic competitiveness by providing an adequate supply of lands for a diversity of employment types to meet job targets set by the Province of Ontario (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2013: 7). Employment areas policies respond directly to urban economic conditions by trying to intervene in the land market to provide low-cost land to manufacturing and industrial firms that will get outbid by higher value uses (Alonso, 1964) according to ‘structural theories’ of industrial location and urban form (Dempwolf, 2009). At the same time, local jurisdictions recognize the significant wealth-generating capacity of manufacturing and industrial firms, in addition to the generally well-paid nature of their associated jobs that have not historically required difficult-to-attain skills and expertise (Howland, 2010). Thus, it is generally accepted that without policies to protect industrial uses they will be ‘crowded-out’ by residential, and residentially-focused, mixed-use development in growing cities – a generally undesirable planning goal (Wolf-Powers, 2005; Dempwolf, 2009).

While the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) is responsible for the creation of the employment areas land-use designation and accompanying provincial policies and targets, municipalities must then interpret employment targets and designate lands as employment areas in their Official Plans. In the case of Toronto, the City has designated a total of twenty-two Major Employment Areas with a twenty-third category that includes Other Employment Related Lands. *Figure 1* illustrates the general location of these employment areas across the City of Toronto.

Figure 1: Location of Major Employment Areas in the City of Toronto

Source: Malone Given Parsons, 2012

The form and function of these sites is indicative of changing macro-economic circumstances as well as varying spatial and socio-economic conditions. Some of these employment areas still retain important manufacturing, warehousing, and logistical activities that harken back to the heyday of manufacturing in North America and are located near major highways in the largely stable inner suburbs. Other employment areas have mostly transitioned to office and residential uses associated with knowledge-economy jobs that are locating in the growing central city as it becomes denser, provides a mix of uses, and benefits from government reinvestment. In this context of shifting employment patterns, urban planners and policy-makers in ‘global cities’ (Sassen, 2005) in North America have come up against a significant planning problem – how to accommodate growth in knowledge-economy employment uses while preserving, and perhaps even promoting, traditional industrial uses. This tension has ultimately played out in the form of land-use conflicts between industrial firms and sensitive uses, as well

as market pressure for industrial lands to be converted to commercial, residential, and mixed-uses.

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GPGGH) dictates that conversion requests for lands in employment areas can only be addressed within the context of a Municipal Comprehensive Review undertaken every five years (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2013). The City of Toronto has recently come out of this review which led to the adoption of Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 231 on December 18, 2013. OPA 231 aims to introduce *core employment* and *general employment* designations to further clarify allowed uses in employment areas and to resolve several issues with employment areas policy, especially related to conflicts with sensitive uses and mounting conversion requests. While OPA 231 was adopted almost three years ago by City Council, the City is still going through the appeal process at the Ontario Municipal Board¹ related to specific policies and conversion request denials (City of Toronto, 2016a). However, will this recent policy change achieve the desired outcome(s) or is it a stop-gap measure in lieu of a more proactive, forward-thinking vision for employment areas in the City of Toronto? Can the City begin to develop an innovative approach to employment area planning and management through collaboration between land-use planning and economic development practitioners, as well as from the private, public, and non-profit sectors? These are some the central questions of this study.

This study will focus on two specific employment areas in the west end of the City of Toronto: Rexdale and South Etobicoke. It will consider improved methods for the planning and management of employment areas in light of general, municipal-wide conditions, as well as more specific challenges and opportunities of the two case-study areas. The rationale behind choosing these two employment areas is that they still retain their industrial employment heritage and have not been completely transformed by development pressures, although locational advantages of South Etobicoke have initiated conversion pressures. Moreover, these employment areas are in close proximity to local communities that could benefit from the revitalization of these areas, but also represent key regional economic opportunities in terms of their proximity to adjacent municipalities, especially in the case of Rexdale.

¹ The Ontario Municipal Board is an independent, quasi-judicial entity in the Province of Ontario that hears appeals on planning matters under the Planning Act.

This study will be using a variety of secondary data to observe the evolving needs of employment areas as well as the people they serve. This data will be comprised of provincial and municipal policy, employment and economic development data and trends, and best-practices of the planning and management of employment areas in other Canadian jurisdictions as well as international examples.

The intent of this research is to provide municipal policy-makers with some forward-thinking directions to develop improved policies related to employment areas. Ideally, the recommendations that come out of this study can inform future amendments to the Official Plan and/or inform the creation of a comprehensive employment areas policy, or set of policies, that are flexible enough to be useful and effective for long-term planning and management of these lands.

CHAPTER 1: POLICY CONTEXT

This chapter provides a discussion of provincial and municipal policy governing employment areas in Ontario and the City of Toronto, respectively.

PROVINCIAL

According to Subsection 3(1) of the Planning Act (R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13), the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing can periodically issue a Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) to direct land-use planning in the Province of Ontario. All lower-order planning policy documents such as municipal Official Plans and the decisions of any agency, board, or commission, of any level of government, "...shall be consistent with" the PPS (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2015). Between the 1996 and 2005 Provincial Policy Statements, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing expanded its employment policies adding more detailed policy sections and key terms like 'employment' and 'employment areas' (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2014). In the 1996 PPS, the term 'employment' only appears twice and is interpreted in a much broader way to signify generalized work opportunities (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 1996). However, responding to increasing conversions of strategic employment uses to big-box retail (Martel, 2013), the Province of Ontario introduced the *employment areas* land-use designation in the 2005 PPS. These areas are "...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" (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2014: 41). The 2005 PPS also includes provisions to limit the conversion of these areas by requiring a municipality to conduct a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) in order to be able to convert lands in employment areas to another land use. Policy 1.3.2.2 allows for the conversion of these areas provided that "...it has been demonstrated that the land is not required for employment purposes over the long term and that there is a need for the conversion" (Ibid: 13).

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GPGGH) goes into further detail regarding employment areas stating in Section 2.2.6.2:

"Municipalities will promote economic development and competitiveness by –

- a. providing for an appropriate mix of employment uses including industrial, commercial and institutional uses to meet long-term needs
- b. providing opportunities for a diversified economic base, including maintaining a range and choice of suitable sites for employment uses which support a wide range of economic activities and ancillary uses, and take into account the needs of existing and future businesses
- c. planning for, protecting and preserving employment areas for current and future uses
- d. ensuring the necessary infrastructure is provided to support current and forecasted employment needs” (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2013: 7).

In the case of land-use conversions, Policy 2.2.6.5 states:

“Municipalities may permit conversion of lands within employment areas, to non-employment uses, only through a municipal comprehensive review where it has been demonstrated that –

- a. there is a need for the conversion
- b. the municipality will meet the employment forecasts allocated to the municipality pursuant to this Plan
- c. the conversion will not adversely affect the overall viability of the employment area, and achievement of the intensification target, density targets, and other policies of this Plan
- d. there is existing or planned infrastructure to accommodate the proposed conversion
- e. the lands are not required over the long term for the employment purposes for which they are designated
- f. cross-jurisdictional issues have been considered” (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2013: 7).

Furthermore, it’s important to note that the above policy is only applicable to employment areas that are not *downtown* or *regeneration areas*. In the case of downtown and regeneration areas, Policy 1.3.2.2 of the GPGGH still applies, in addition to a more specific policy and planning framework that will be discussed in more detail subsequently. While there are no regeneration areas that are part of, or close to, the Rexdale employment area, the Mimico-Judson regeneration area overlaps with the South Etobicoke employment area.

As opposed to other kinds of employment that are generally encouraged to locate in dense, mixed-use areas (Blais, 2015: 75), Section 2.2.6.9 states that “Municipalities are encouraged to designate and preserve lands within settlement areas in the vicinity of existing major highway interchanges, ports, rail yards and airports as areas for manufacturing, warehousing, and associated retail, office and ancillary facilities, where appropriate” (Ministry of

Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2013: 7). As such, these areas consider the efficient movement of goods as a significant feature, in addition to their inherent nature as wealth-generators and places of employment.

Employment Projections

In addition to these key policy sections, provincial direction on employment areas is accompanied by employment targets that municipalities are required to meet. According to Schedule 3 of the GPGGH, employment forecasts through to 2041 place the total number of jobs in the Greater Golden Horseshoe at approximately 6.27 million (Ministry of Municipal Housing and Affairs, 2013). This number is broken down further by allocating targets to upper-tier and single-tier municipalities in the region. For example, the City of Toronto has an employment forecast of 1.72 million through the year 2041 (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2013).

These projections were completed for the Province by Hemson Consulting Ltd. in 2012 who primarily used labour-force participation rates, unemployment rates, and net in-commuting to arrive at these employment targets (Hemson Consulting Ltd., 2012). They go on to use a historic and sector analysis of four employment categories to determine industry trends as they relate to "...the ability of municipalities in the [Greater Golden Horseshoe] to accommodate different types of employment" (2012: 28). Here, the consultants looked at trends in population-related employment, major office employment, employment lands employment, and rural-based employment, and then distributed shares of these numbers to municipalities based on their associated land-use allocations (2012:18). As noted earlier, although Section 2.2.6 of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe talks about "Employment Lands" as a catch-all term for any lands generating jobs, employment lands have, in practice, become a short-hand for industrial land or business/office parks and this latter connotation is what the consultant's report uses (Blais, 2015: 75).

It is then the responsibility of these lower-order jurisdictions to allocate sufficient land, or preserve existing land, to meet these targets. As it appears, for the next 25 years, municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe will be constrained to planning for employment growth according to very broad land-use categories that don't necessarily capture the industry diversity

within them and more importantly, their diverse land needs (Blais, 2015: 63). Moreover, what happens when industry land needs and spatial contexts change? For example, the Rexdale employment area is in close proximity to residential neighbourhoods in the northwest of the City of Toronto – many of which are deemed *Neighbourhood Improvement Areas* according to the Social Development and Finance division of the City signaling the need for strategic public and private investment to improve socio-economic outcomes (City of Toronto, 2016b). On the other hand, South Etobicoke is beginning to experience population growth pressures in the form of increased residential development surrounding employment areas. How can these changing circumstances catalyze appropriate transformations on these lands that remain true to their intended use but also make sense in their surrounding context?

Some Issues with Provincial Employment Areas Policies

Because employment area policies are contained primarily in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GPGGH), they are outlined in the context of managing and accommodating growth in the number of jobs as it relates to the availability of appropriate land. This discussion of employment growth is quite minimal compared to the emphasis the GPGGH places on accommodating and directing population growth to existing infrastructure and municipal services. The provincial attitude towards employment areas has largely been one of preservation and protection from encroaching land uses associated with population growth; residential development and population-related employment such as retail, local schools and services, and increasingly places of worship. However, there is virtually no direction on how to re-urbanize these lands to support their employment growth function in the face of macro-economic changes and on-the-ground geographic realities. Furthermore, there is no reference to aligning employment areas policies with economic development initiatives under the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment, and Infrastructure. How can municipalities effectively plan for employment growth in their jurisdictions without the ability to package economic development information and incentives with land-use plans the benefit of firms?

Secondly, the GPGGH makes reference to the importance of employment areas as they diversify the land-use mix and support the contemporary planning principle of creating

‘complete communities’². However, there is no elaboration on what exactly the Province means by this; do individual employment areas contribute to the development of complete communities in their surrounding contexts or does the existence of several employment areas in a municipality support the municipality’s function as one large complete community? The principle of complete communities is predicated on a vibrant mix of uses yet, employment areas policies prioritize manufacturing and industrial uses over others. Furthermore, zoning associated with these priority uses has historically called for the separation from sensitive uses. Conversely, if there are structural changes occurring that are reducing the number of priority jobs in these areas, is there potential for employment areas to deter from the goals of complete communities if they do not adapt? Thus, it would be helpful for the Province to clarify exactly how employment areas support complete communities taking into consideration present and projected economic trends.

Thirdly, the policy intent that municipalities will simply take their respective employment projections and designate/preserve land in isolation misses important cross-jurisdictional challenges and opportunities, especially in relation to employment areas like Rexdale which is actually linked to the larger Airport Employment Zone at the junction of the cities of Toronto, Mississauga, and Brampton. Considering the GPGGH is a regional plan, there is very little acknowledgement of the inherently regional nature of employment.

MUNICIPAL

The Official Plan for the City of Toronto is the primary land-use planning document for the municipality and also where conformity takes place between provincial employment areas policy and municipal interpretation and implementation. As mentioned previously, provincial policy makes mention of *employment lands* and *employment areas*, two terms that are not technically synonymous but are taken to mean the same thing in practice. The Official Plan for the City of Toronto (OP) adds another layer of terminology in its use of the term *employment districts*. Section 2.2.4 of the OP states that employment districts “...are large districts comprised exclusively of lands where the Employment Areas land use designation applies” (City of Toronto, 2015a: 2.19). As opposed to the largely preservationist approach that the Province of

² The MMAH defines complete communities as places that “...meet people’s daily needs throughout their lifetime, with convenient access to a mix of jobs, services, community infrastructure, transportation options, housing types, and vibrant public spaces and streets” (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2015b).

Ontario takes towards employment areas, the City of Toronto seems to take a more nuanced position, stating in Policy 1 that:

“Employment Districts shown on Map 2 will be protected and promoted exclusively for economic activity in order to:

- a. maintain and grow the City’s tax base;
- b. attract new and expand existing employment clusters that are key to Toronto’s competitive advantage;
- c. develop quality Employment Districts that are globally competitive locations for national and international business and offer a wide choice of sites for new business;
- d. nurture Toronto’s diverse economic base;
- e. provide a good overall balance between population and employment growth by creating job opportunities for Toronto residents;
- f. provide a range of employment opportunities for Toronto residents that can be reached by means other than the private automobile; and
- g. create and sustain well-paid, stable, safe and fulfilling employment opportunities for all Torontonians” (City of Toronto, 2015a: 2.20).

Policies 2 to 8 in Section 2.2.4 of the OP further elaborate on the fundamental principles of employment district planning in the City in terms of the following broad themes:

- economic diversification and revitalization
- transit connectedness to, and from, employment districts
- road standards for the effective movement of transit vehicles and trucks
- safer design to improve walking and cycling for workers
- development of appropriate buffers and/or separation for those firms that need these measures to minimize conflicts within employment districts and between these districts and adjacent uses and users

(City of Toronto, 2015a: 2.20-2.21)

A notable aspect of the City’s employment districts policies is a key linkage to its associated economic development strategy document: *Collaborating for Competitiveness: A Strategic Plan for Accelerating Economic Growth and Job Creation in Toronto* which was completed in January 2013. Both the OP and this economic development document recognize

that each of their respective goals should work together to achieve economic growth in appropriate locations. Moreover, these two documents are also informed by other municipal initiatives including, but not limited to; the City of Toronto harmonized Zoning By-Law 569-2013, the Development Charges By-law, the Imagination Manufacturing Innovation & Technology (IMIT) program, the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020, and the Workforce Development Strategy (City of Toronto, 2013a: 10).

On the other hand, although the OP makes several references to the regional importance of employment areas, there is little attention paid to the necessity of municipalities collaborating in the realm of regional economic development and planning for employment. This may stem from the lasting power of urban spatial and economic models like Walter Christaller's central place theory (1933) and Charles Tiebout's local government hypothesis (1956) which both conceive of cities as being in constant competition with one another. However, there have been more recent urban network theories such 'central flow theory' (Taylor, 2010) that seek to explain both competitive and collaborative processes that cities undertake with each other (Taylor, 2012). In the context of this paper's two case study employment areas, both Rexdale and South Etobicoke are important employment nodes for the diversification of the City's economy, but also strategically located close to other municipalities as part of a regional economic system. It could be useful for the City to undertake a network analysis of its employment areas to understand how certain employment areas can receive targeted support depending on the kinds of regional economies they are part of.

Official Plan Amendment 231

A discussion of the City of Toronto's employment lands planning and management approach should acknowledge Official Plan Amendment 231 (OPA 231) – an amendment to the Economic Health Policies and, Policies, Designations and Mapping for Employment Areas – which was adopted by City council on December 18, 2013 and approved with some changes by the Province in July 2014 (City of Toronto, 2016a). However, an extensive number of appeals related to conversion requests (178) were submitted to the Province and are now being heard at the Ontario Municipal Board (City of Toronto, 2016a). As of February 20, 2016, only limited sections of OPA 231 have been approved by the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

To fulfill the Planning Act requirement of a municipality reviewing its Official Plan (OP) every five years, the City of Toronto initiated its OP review in 2011 which includes the review of policies related to employment areas. However, because municipalities can only consider conversion of employment area lands if a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) is undertaken, the City of Toronto is carrying out both reviews simultaneously. In order to inform these reviews, the City commissioned an employment uses study led by Malone Given Parsons Ltd. which sought to identify the changing land and space needs of different industries, as well as how the Official Plan addressed these needs including any recommendations for changes to the OP (City of Toronto, 2012a). Following from this report, the City drafted updated policy directions for its employment areas and reviewed these through public consultations led by Lura Consulting and Gladki Planning Associates between January and March 2013 (Lura Consulting, 2013).

The first major change that OPA 231 enacts is a complete replacement of the term *employment districts* with *employment areas* (City of Toronto, 2013b) most likely to harmonize terminology and provide greater clarity around policies. The second major change categorizes employment areas into *core employment* and *general employment* areas to reflect the different uses that would be permitted in these two areas, as well as their physical location; core employment should be located in the interior of an employment area and general employment towards the periphery (City of Toronto, 2013b: 18-19). Core employment areas would allow manufacturing, warehousing, wholesaling, transportation facilities, offices, research and development facilities, utilities, trade schools, media facilities, and vertical agriculture, in addition to limited ancillary uses such as hotels, parks, and small-scale restaurants (City of Toronto, 2013b: 18). General employment areas would allow all the same uses as in core employment with the addition of retail and service, restaurants, fitness centres, and ice arenas (City of Toronto, 2013b: 19). The intent behind this new categorization is to provide a functional buffer area in the form of general employment areas between core employment and sensitive uses (City of Toronto, 2013b).

While virtually all employment areas policies in OPA 231 are under appeal, the changes and additions to the Official Plan represent an attempt at prioritizing traditional manufacturing and industrial uses while also encouraging "...significant value-added employment and assessment" (City of Toronto, 2013b: 20) and the introduction of general improvements related

to public realm, street grid connectivity, traffic mitigation, parking, and the relationship between priority uses and sensitive uses (City of Toronto, 2013b: 18-21). OPA 231 also amends several site and area specific policies to provide more detailed policy direction for certain parcels in employment areas.

Some Issues with OPA 231

The most salient issue with OPA 231 is the fact that very few employment areas policies are currently in full force and effect. The fact that so much of the amendment is under appeal creates a climate of uncertainty around activity in employment areas; how will existing and potential manufacturing and industrial firms effectively locate when municipal regulations are not clear? Furthermore, once the OPA 231 policies have come into full force and effect, the harmonized zoning by-law 569-2013 will then need to be updated to reflect the updated Official Plan. It is extremely unclear when exactly both the OPA 231 policies and the updated zoning by-law will be in full force and effect leading to the possibility of erosion in the growth of manufacturing and industrial firms in employment areas in the City of Toronto.

Another issue is that while the draft employment policies that were presented during the consultations contained proposed provisions to allow places of worship in general employment areas, OPA 231 appears to have left this use out of its main employment areas policies and only provided for them through very specific site and area policies (City of Toronto, 2013b). The presence of places of worship in employment areas came up frequently during consultations; industrial firms said that places of worship represent a sensitive use according to the Province of Ontario and should not be allowed to locate in employment areas, and representatives from faith groups said they wanted more permissions and policy recognition in employment areas (Lura Consulting, 2013). Although it is likely that existing places of worship in employment areas will be treated as legal non-conforming uses and will be protected in their current form, they may not be able to modify their buildings potentially leading to future siting issues. It is surprising that the City has not developed a critical path forward to guide the siting of new places of worship and resolve conflicts between existing places of worship and industrial firms.

Finally, the employment area policies in OPA 231 are very much informed by the Malone Given Parsons consultant's report that the City commissioned, in addition to stakeholder

feedback gained through consultations led by Lura Consulting and Gladki Planning Associates. While the consultant's report did emphasize that the existing industrial land base should be preserved for its export-based wealth-generating capacity, the report was more focused on how the City will accommodate the huge projected growth in office jobs and the resulting office space needs. As a result, the attitude towards the role of manufacturing and industry in urban areas, while cognizant of its benefits, was lacking in its consideration of how to potentially grow this sector. Furthermore, the consultant's report suggested that in a jurisdiction as built-out as the City of Toronto, vacant industrial land supply will likely be absorbed between 2031 and 2041 and any new industrial space production will have to rely on the redevelopment of existing land and buildings (Malone Given Parsons, 2012: xiii). Yet, the City of Toronto does not have a clear long-term strategy for its manufacturing and industrial sector and associated land needs. Moreover, there is very little acknowledgement of whether, and how, this sector's land needs may potentially change over the course of the Growth Plan's timeframe. And thus, OPA 231 employment area policies are really more of 'business-as-usual' mindset when it comes to priority sectors in employment areas. Ultimately, a more nuanced approach to these sectors is needed or else manufacturing and industrial firms will continue to experience land-value and land-use conflicts as higher value uses and/or sensitive uses find themselves in closer proximity to employment areas.

CHAPTER 2: CASE STUDIES

In Chapter 1, *Figure 1* illustrates that employment areas are quite dispersed across the City of Toronto and are generally located close to major arterial roads and highways to facilitate the easy movement of goods. With the rise of automobile use and highway construction in the post-war period, rail networks for goods-movement waned and contributed to a change in siting patterns of manufacturing and industrial uses away from the central city to lower land-value suburbs with highway access (Howland, 2010: 40). As a result, virtually no employment areas exist in the downtown core, and the two areas that do, Liberty Village and South of Eastern, have mostly transitioned to employment that occurs in offices. *Figure 2* depicts the sector mix in each of the twenty-two designated employment areas in the City of Toronto.

Figure 2: Sector Mix in Employment Areas

Source: City of Toronto, 2015b

Although employment areas are governed by similar policies, each area is informed by, and faces, varying spatial and socio-economic conditions. Employment areas located in the downtown core have faced intense conversion pressures to various ‘higher and better uses,’ such as residential and commercial, while employment areas farther away from the city’s central business district (CBD), such as areas in Etobicoke or Scarborough, have not been as affected by these same pressures even though they are still surrounded by urban communities. Moreover, when it comes to the types of employment occurring in these areas, not all employment areas still contain a majority of manufacturing and industrial firms as *Figure 2* demonstrates.

This chapter aims to go into more detail about two key employment districts/areas in the City of Toronto – Rexdale and South Etobicoke – in order to try and arrive at a more focused discussion of policy opportunities and constraints. Both Rexdale and South Etobicoke represent two employment areas that still retain a significant amount of manufacturing employment and are located in the former municipality of Etobicoke in the west-end of the City of Toronto. While Rexdale faces little conversion pressure at this time, South Etobicoke has received the most conversion requests as reported during the Municipal Comprehensive Review employment lands consultations (Lura Consulting, 2013). Thus, focusing on these two areas will offer an interesting foundation to explore best practices and recommendations for employment areas planning and management.

REXDALE EMPLOYMENT DISTRICT

The Rexdale Employment District (Rexdale) is located in the northwest part of the City of Toronto in the former municipality of Etobicoke. The lands that make up this district are bounded by Highway 427 to the west, Highway 401 to the south and east, and Rexdale Blvd. to the north, with Highway 409 running east-west through the middle of this district. *Figure 3* shows the Rexdale within its surrounding context and adjacent to the Lester B. Pearson International Airport and City of Mississauga.

Figure 3: Context Map of Rexdale Employment District

Source: Malone Given Parsons, 2012

Rexdale is also considered to be part of the much larger Airport Employment Zone (AEZ), or Airport Megazone (Blais, 2015), which is a significant employment cluster, though not exclusively made up of employment area land-uses. *Figure 4* shows the AEZ as mapped out by Pamela Blais in her analysis of economic restructuring in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2015). The AEZ is not officially recognized by municipal or provincial policies (Blais, 2015) but represents the second highest concentration of employment in Canada after the City of Toronto's downtown with approximately 300,000 jobs (Blais, 2015). It also spans three

municipalities; the City of Toronto, City of Mississauga, and the City of Brampton. The AEZ includes important sites such as the Airport Corporate Centre in the City of Mississauga (a small portion is located in the City of Toronto) and, Humber College and the Woodbine Entertainment complex in the City of Toronto (Airport Employment Zone Coalition, 2016). Although this study focuses on the spatial boundaries of the Rexdale Employment District, it is important to note its broader significance and cross-jurisdictional nature.

Figure 4: Airport Employment Zone Boundaries

Source: Blais, 2015

Figure 5 demonstrates the new *core* and *general* employment designations that OPA 231 would apply to Rexdale. Most of the district is re-designated as core employment with certain periphery areas proposed as general employment – the northwest corner at Highway 427 and Rexdale Blvd., a tract of land at the southeast corner off of Rexdale Blvd. between Kipling and Islington avenues, and finally a smaller rectangular portion in the southwest at the interchange of highways 427 and 401.

Figure 5: OPA 231 Employment Designations in Rexdale

Source: City of Toronto, 2013b

Figure 6 identifies the zoning categories that apply to Rexdale through the harmonized zoning by-law 569-2013. A common theme during the employment lands consultations was whether the Official Plan's core and general employment designations directly correspond to the above zoning categories (Lura Consulting, 2013). It is unclear whether Rexdale's core employment lands will correspond to the Employment Heavy Industrial (EH) zoning class or whether zoning in Rexdale will further categorize use permissions similar to the current zoning map above.

Figure 6: Zoning in Rexdale Employment District (569-2013)

Source: City of Toronto, 2013c

In terms of scale, this employment district has the second highest number of jobs out of all twenty-two employment districts with approximately 39,860 jobs as demonstrated in *Figure 7*. Rexdale represents 9.8% of all the employment areas jobs in the City (City of Toronto, 2015b). *Figure 7* also shows that Rexdale experienced both positive and negative year-to-year fluctuations in job growth. Overall, the past five years have seen a 0.4% loss in employment and a higher 2.1% loss between 2014 and 2015 – although it is not clear if the higher loss over the last year is indicative of future trends or simply part of long-term fluctuations. The city-wide averages for job growth in all employment areas for those two same time periods are 5.7% and 2.2%, respectively.

Figure 7: Ranking of Employment Areas by Number of Jobs

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2010-2015		2014-2015	
							Net Change	% Change	Net Change	% Change
1. South Etobicoke	40,960	39,820	40,390	41,080	41,040	41,840	880	2.1%	800	1.9%
2. Rexdale	40,000	38,940	39,510	40,790	40,730	39,860	-140	-0.4%	-870	-2.1%
3. Highway 400 Corridor	31,470	32,810	33,540	32,490	32,430	32,720	1,250	4.0%	290	0.9%
4. Dufferin Keele North	31,540	32,430	31,080	30,350	30,850	30,980	-560	-1.8%	130	0.4%
5. Tapscott/Marshalling Yard	30,420	30,950	30,960	31,440	30,900	30,440	20	0.1%	-460	-1.5%
6. Dufferin Keele South	23,990	24,610	25,100	26,400	27,100	26,620	2,630	11.0%	-480	-1.8%
7. Duncan Mills	17,900	17,560	18,580	19,090	19,110	20,200	2,300	12.8%	1,090	5.7%
8. South West Scarborough	18,020	18,990	18,670	19,030	19,240	20,000	1,980	11.0%	760	4.0%
9. Consumers Road	19,040	18,140	17,490	17,660	18,080	19,690	650	3.4%	1,610	8.9%
10. Scarborough Highway 401 Corridor	16,080	16,670	16,820	16,990	17,210	17,120	1,040	6.5%	-90	-0.5%
11. North West Etobicoke	12,810	12,820	13,010	13,450	14,320	15,580	2,770	21.6%	1,260	8.8%
12. Don Mills	11,910	11,390	11,990	11,550	11,140	14,290	2,380	20.0%	3,150	28.3%
13. West Central Scarborough	15,490	15,360	14,730	14,270	13,790	14,010	-1,480	-9.6%	220	1.6%
14. Steeles & Victoria Park	12,420	12,500	13,270	13,020	12,360	12,600	180	1.4%	240	1.9%
15. Liberty	7,550	8,140	8,300	9,450	11,240	9,780	2,230	29.5%	-1,460	-13.0%
16. Milliken	7,070	7,430	7,300	7,550	8,030	7,650	580	8.2%	-380	-4.7%
17. Overlea	6,270	6,090	6,220	6,150	6,370	6,770	500	8.0%	400	6.3%
18. Laird	4,680	4,550	4,390	4,960	5,620	5,560	880	18.8%	-60	-1.1%
19. South of Eastern	4,650	4,000	3,970	4,280	4,190	5,330	680	14.6%	1,140	27.2%
20. Weston Road/Mount Dennis	1,730	1,650	1,850	1,940	2,520	2,410	680	39.3%	-110	-4.4%
21. South East Scarborough	970	920	980	980	970	990	20	2.1%	20	2.1%
22. Airport Corporate Centre	1,040	1,140	1,230	890	900	880	-160	-15.4%	-20	-2.2%
23. Other Employment Related Lands	29,540	28,780	29,480	29,720	30,610	32,100	2,560	8.7%	1,490	4.9%
All Employment Areas	385,550	385,690	388,860	393,530	398,750	407,420	21,870	5.7%	8,670	2.2%
Rest of the City	912,750	908,270	942,710	970,020	985,640	1,014,860	102,110	11.2%	29,220	3.0%
City Total	1,298,300	1,293,960	1,331,570	1,363,550	1,384,390	1,422,280	123,980	9.5%	37,890	2.7%

Source: City of Toronto, 2015b

Figure 8 provides information on land areas, job densities, and land value assessment for property tax purposes for all twenty-two employment areas. Rexdale is the largest in land area with approximately 1,245 net hectares and 5.4% vacant land – less than the 8.6% vacant land average for all employment areas that are more industrial in nature (Malone Given Parsons, 2012). Assuming Rexdale has the same amount of occupied land area in 2015 as it did in 2011 – 1,178 hectares – its job density would be approximately 33.8 jobs per occupied hectare which is on the lower end when ranked against Toronto's other industrial employment areas (See Figure 8). The average job density for industrial employment areas in 2011 was approximately 58.4 jobs per occupied hectare.

Figure 8: Land Areas, Job Densities, and Assessed Values of Employment Districts

Geography	Gross Land Area (ha)	Net Land Area (ha)	Vacant Land Area (ha)	% Vacant	Occupied Land Area (ha)	Jobs	Jobs/Gross (ha)	Jobs/Net Occupied (ha)	Assessed Value	% Contribution to City's Non-Res Assessment
Employment District - Industrial										
ED - Liberty	70	49	10	21.0%	38	8,137	115.9	211.9	\$411,077,322	0.51%
ED - South Etobicoke	1,254	987	70	7.1%	917	38,852	31.0	42.4	\$2,228,769,352	2.76%
ED - Airport Corporate Centre	26	24	9	37.9%	15	1,141	44.2	75.6	\$69,126,273	0.09%
ED - South of Eastern	77	69	11	15.3%	59	3,915	50.6	66.9	\$208,160,890	0.26%
ED - Weston Road Junction	65	59	31	52.9%	28	1,653	25.4	59.5	\$99,807,498	0.12%
ED - Tapscott Marshalling Yard	1,139	935	175	18.7%	760	30,745	27.0	40.4	\$1,990,122,017	2.47%
ED - Milliken	208	178	44	24.6%	135	7,425	35.7	55.2	\$550,079,449	0.68%
ED - West Central Scarborough	345	281	7	2.3%	275	15,516	44.9	56.5	\$884,501,102	1.10%
ED - South West Scarborough	469	409	47	11.4%	362	18,984	40.5	52.4	\$1,089,554,205	1.35%
ED - Dufferin Keele North	706	587	21	3.5%	566	33,092	46.9	58.4	\$1,622,319,518	2.01%
ED - Dufferin Keele South	744	651	18	2.7%	634	24,899	33.5	39.3	\$1,145,701,504	1.42%
ED - Scarborough HWY 401 Corridor	372	303	13	4.4%	289	16,669	44.8	57.6	\$1,062,696,995	1.32%
ED - South East Scarborough	123	99	9	9.1%	90	916	7.5	10.2	\$93,478,308	0.12%
ED - North West Etobicoke	438	371	42	11.4%	328	12,767	29.2	38.9	\$977,860,030	1.21%
ED - DVPC Leaside Office Park	152	122	5	4.4%	116	6,402	42.2	55.1	\$292,027,941	0.36%
ED - Rexdale	1,604	1,245	67	5.4%	1,178	38,849	24.2	33.0	\$2,738,281,079	3.40%
ED - DVPC Leaside Industrial Park	114	100	16	16.2%	84	4,546	39.7	54.4	\$385,869,278	0.48%
ED - HWY 400 Corridor	1,024	767	30	3.9%	737	32,435	31.7	44.0	\$2,166,732,602	2.69%
Subtotal	8,929	7,235	625	8.6%	6,611	296,943	33.3	44.9	\$18,016,165,363	22.34%
Employment District - Business Park										
ED - DVPC Consumers Road	86	79	9	10.8%	70	18,142	210.4	258.1	\$598,882,123	0.74%
ED - DVPC Don Mills	135	115	1	1.0%	114	11,385	84.3	99.9	\$426,262,501	0.53%
ED - DVPC Lesmil	163	139	5	3.9%	134	17,604	108.1	131.7	\$547,454,845	0.68%
ED - Woodbine / Steeles / VP	155	139	2	1.7%	137	12,500	80.9	91.4	\$602,396,925	0.75%
Subtotal	539	472	18	3.7%	455	59,631	110.7	131.1	\$2,174,996,394	2.70%

Source: Malone Given Parsons, 2012

In 2011, Rexdale had an industrial space inventory of 31.7 million square feet with 1,386 establishments (Malone Given Parsons, 2012). The Malone Given Parsons 2012 consultant's report quotes an Etobicoke-wide industrial vacancy rate at 8.2% and a \$4.34 per square foot industrial rental rate. The updated numbers from Q4 of 2015 would be an Etobicoke-wide vacancy rate of 3.7% and an overall weighted average net rent asking price of \$4.55 per square foot (Cushman and Wakefield, 2016) – this improvement can likely be attributed to the uptake in Ontario's manufacturing sector caused by increased demand from the United States and a weaker Canadian dollar (Cushman and Wakefield, 2016). However, the city-wide industrial vacancy rate in Q4 of 2015 was 2.9% with a city-wide weighted average net rent asking price of \$4.89 (Cushman and Wakefield, 2016).

In terms of employment sectors, *office* (35%), *manufacturing* (31%) and *service* (18%) make up the three largest employment sectors in Rexdale (City of Toronto, 2015b). Since 2014, office employment dropped by 3.3% in Rexdale compared with 3.5% growth in office employment across all employment areas (City of Toronto, 2015b). Manufacturing employment also declined in Rexdale during this same time period by 2.1% compared to 0.7% decline in manufacturing across all employment areas (City of Toronto, 2015b). On the other hand, the service sector has remained stable in Rexdale since 2014 experiencing a very modest 0.1% growth (City of Toronto, 2015b).

Figure 9 illustrates the high number of employees of the Rexdale Employment District that live in the surrounding neighbourhoods. In particular, Rexdale is in close proximity to several Neighbourhood Improvements Areas (NIAs) identified by the Social Development, Finance and Administration division at the City of Toronto and illustrated in Figure 10. The NIAs were identified in 2014 because of low Neighbourhood Equity Scores and were chosen to

Figure 9: Place of Residence for Rexdale Employees

Source: Malone Given Parsons, 2012

be prioritized for infrastructure and social service investment – these NIAs replaced the older Priority Neighbourhood Areas illustrated in *Figure 9*.

Figure 10: 2014 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas in the City of Toronto

Source: City of Toronto, 2014a

Discussion

With the identification of the Airport Megazone or Airport Employment Zone (AEZ) in Pamela Blais' work, the significance of Rexdale is brought into relief as part of a multi-jurisdictional regional economy, as opposed to an arbitrarily-bounded space on the western border of the City of Toronto. If the whole AEZ has an employment base of approximately 300,000 jobs, then in 2015 Rexdale made up about 13% of those jobs with almost 40,000 jobs. Yet, municipal, and even regional, policies do not recognize the AEZ and there are no secondary plans or specific economic development goals for Rexdale to support its function as part of this larger employment node. Most striking is the observation that 93% of employees in the AEZ

drive to work (Blais, 2015) potentially challenging the assumption proposed in *Figure 9* that employees who live close to Rexdale are using public and active transportation over automobile use. Not only does this cause traffic congestion for the movement of people around, and through, the AEZ, but is likely adversely affecting the movement of goods by manufacturing and industrial firms located around Pearson International Airport – one of the most congested areas in the region (Urban Strategies, 2016).

The fact that Rexdale is in such close proximity to employment areas in the Region of Peel may render it more susceptible to land value differentials and more favourable tax and regulatory environments outside of the City of Toronto (Malone Given Parsons, 2012; Canadian Urban Institute, 2011). While changes in manufacturing and industrial job and firm numbers are often attributed to structural factors like offshoring and global currency fluctuations, there is less attention paid to the potential ways that the Rexdale Employment District may be losing manufacturing and industrial firms to neighbouring municipalities – there is already evidence of this happening with the City of Toronto’s loss of office space to Greater Toronto Area municipalities (Malone Given Parsons, 2012; Canadian Urban Institute, 2011).

A concern for this employment district is the relatively low job density. Given that Rexdale’s vacant land area is not significantly high, this may be a signal that existing firms are not employing as many people compared to other employment areas in the City. Moreover, while the Toronto Employment Survey tracked higher-than-average job losses in the office and manufacturing sectors in Rexdale since 2014, it does not specify whether these losses are a result of the loss of firms or job cuts by existing firms. It is not clear whether the City wishes to bolster its manufacturing sector in Rexdale or simply allow it to decline by attrition in favour of office space. Nevertheless, the decrease in the employment base of both sectors is a point that needs further study.

Finally, as *Figure 9* and *Figure 10* illustrate, there may be misalignment between the Rexdale Employment District’s ability to provide economic benefits to its surrounding communities given that several are considered Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). It is generally accepted that one of the key benefits of the manufacturing sector is its ability to offer decently paid jobs to a lower-skilled labour force (Dempwolf, 2009; Howland, 2010; New York City Council, 2014; Leigh & Hoelzel, 2012). However, if this sector contracts, what kinds of jobs can/do former employees move on to? Furthermore, as all sectors in the Greater Golden

Horseshoe transition to high value-added, knowledge-intensive, creative and executive activities (Blais, 2015), land-use and economic development policies must acknowledge this shift and evaluate whether employment areas like Rexdale are truly fulfilling their intended policy goals through a simplistic industrial preservation approach. Without an understanding of how priority sectors can be revitalized and enhanced, it is entirely possible that residents in NIAs in the northwest of the City may continue to be economically left behind while living near the largest employment area in the City of Toronto.

SOUTH ETOBICOKE EMPLOYMENT DISTRICT

The South Etobicoke Employment District (South Etobicoke) is located in the southwest part of the City of Toronto in the former municipality of Etobicoke. The lands that make up this district are bounded by Highway 427 to the west and Royal York Blvd. to the east, Dundas St. to the north and Lakeshore Blvd. to the south. While not spatially connected to the waterfront, *Figure 11* shows this area in close proximity to Lake Ontario and can be considered part of the inner ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe with direct access to the Gardiner Expressway.

Figure 11: Context Map of South Etobicoke Employment District

Source: Malone Given Parsons, 2012

Figure 12: Mimico-Judson Regeneration Area Boundaries

Source: City of Toronto (2016d).

It should be noted that a small triangular portion of South Etobicoke known as the Mimico-Judson triangle was re-designated from *employment area* to *regeneration area*³ through OPA 231. Figure 12 shows the boundaries of this area which includes the Mimico GO rail station and is made up of the area directly adjacent to the station as well as a smaller portion to the west that is separated by Royal York Ave. According to the proposed Secondary Plan for this area, the desire to revitalize Mimico-Judson was based on four principles: maintaining and enhancing business development, intensifying the area to accommodate population and employment growth and taking advantage of transit investments, preserving the function of the

³ *Regeneration Area* is a land-use designation found in the City of Toronto Official Plan that identifies an area for its revitalization potential – “Regeneration Areas are unique areas of the City that present an opportunity to attract investment, re-use buildings, encourage new construction and bring life to streets” (City of Toronto, 2014b).

Willowbrook Rail Maintenance Facility, and developing a complete and connected community (City of Toronto, 2016d). While the secondary plan emphasizes the need for sensitive revitalization so as not to disrupt the primary economic function of the area, it will be important to monitor how this re-designation affects the South Etobicoke employment area.

Figure 13 depicts the new *core* and *general* employment designations that OPA 231 would apply to South Etobicoke. Unlike Rexdale, South Etobicoke has a few *mixed use* areas, in addition to the Mimico-Judson *regeneration area* mentioned above, effectively located in between the district in the southeast area.

Figure 13: OPA 231 Employment Designations in South Etobicoke

Source: City of Toronto, 2013b

Figure 14 shows the zoning categories currently applicable to South Etobicoke through the harmonized zoning by-law 569-2013. According to Figure 14, South Etobicoke is exclusively comprised of Employment Industrial (E) lands, even though OPA 231 seeks to re-designate certain areas as *mixed use* and *regeneration areas*. Furthermore, there are certain lands in Figure 13 that do not appear to have a zoning category in Figure 14 due to their status as lands under the former Etobicoke zoning code. Thus, again, it is not clear how the new Official Plan designations and zoning categories will work together.

Figure 14: Zoning in South Etobicoke Employment District (569-2013)

Source: City of Toronto, 2013c

South Etobicoke ranks the highest in terms of size of employment base with 41,840 jobs in 2015 as demonstrated in *Figure 7* and represents 10.3% of employment in all the employment areas in the City (City of Toronto, 2015b). *Figure 7* also shows that, unlike the Rexdale Employment District, employment in South Etobicoke grew by 2.1% since 2010, and since 2014 has grown by 1.9%. Once again, the city-wide averages for job growth in all employment areas for those two same time periods are 5.7% and 2.2%, respectively.

This district is the third largest in terms of land area with approximately 987 net hectares in 2011. 7.1% of South Etobicoke's net hectares are vacant, which is closer to the 8.6% vacant land average amongst industrial employment areas as shown in *Figure 8* (Malone Given Parsons, 2012). If South Etobicoke had the same amount of occupied land area in 2015 as it did in 2011 – 917 hectares – its job density would be approximately 45.6 jobs per hectare – more than 10 jobs more per hectare than Rexdale, but still less than the average job density for industrial employment areas in 2011 (58.4 jobs per occupied hectare).

In 2011, South Etobicoke had 32.7 million square feet of industrial space – the largest inventory of this kind of space out of all employment areas – and 1,605 establishments (Malone Given Parsons, 2012). This area also has a relatively high proportion of industrial space with a ceiling clear height of over 24'; 15% of the inventory has these higher ceiling heights compared to 11.6% which is the City average (Malone Given Parsons, 2012). Whether this characteristic is a driver of industrial firm location and success in South Etobicoke should be explored in terms of what kinds of needs manufacturing and industrial firms have compared to the land and building stock in employment areas.

Manufacturing (34%), *office* (30%), and *service* (16%) are the three largest sectors in this district although, since 2012 there has been a significant increase in the *institutional* sector from 720 to 1,630 jobs – a 126% increase (City of Toronto, 2015b). However, the Toronto Employment Survey does not specify whether this job growth is attributed to internal growth in a limited amount of firms or the proliferation of firms themselves. Since 2014, manufacturing jobs have grown by 4.2% and the office employment base has declined by 2.3% in South Etobicoke compared to city-wide averages of 0.7% decline in manufacturing and 3.3% growth in the office sector (City of Toronto, 2015b).

Figure 15 shows the place of residence for employees of the South Etobicoke District. Although there are no Neighbourhood Improvement Areas significantly close to South

Etobicoke, it appears as though this district economically supports a high concentration of nearby residents.

Figure 15: Place of Residence for South Etobicoke Employees

Source: Malone Given Parsons, 2012

The South Etobicoke Employment District faces the highest conversion pressures out of all the employment districts in the City of Toronto (Lura Consulting, 2013). As was mentioned by City staff during the Municipal Comprehensive Review consultations, the properties along the Gardiner Expressway in Etobicoke represent the highest concentration of conversion requests in the whole City (Lura Consulting, 2013). *Figure 16* identifies the 25 conversion requests received by the City of Toronto as of February 14, 2014 (including the two parcels that make up the Mimico-Judson Triangle). The high number of conversion requests could be attributed to existing and planned transit connecting the area to downtown Toronto. In this context, it is even more imperative that the re-designation of the Mimico-Judson Triangle will not create intensified

pressure for conversions away from the core employment that contributes to the wealth-generation of this employment district.

Figure 16: Conversion Requests in South Etobicoke as of February 14, 2014

Source: City of Toronto, 2014c

In consultations with the South Etobicoke Industrial Employees Association (SEIEA) in 2013, the presence of sensitive uses in the district was a primary concern (Lura Consulting, 2013). *Figure 17* lists the number of places of worship in industrial employment districts. Although South Etobicoke does not appear to have as many places of worship as other employment districts, such as Rexdale, this land-use conflict was a common theme for this district. Specifically, SEIEA representatives were concerned that the existence of sensitive uses limits the ability of industrial firms to obtain a Certificate of Approval (known as an Environmental Compliance Approval since 2011) from the provincial Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC). According to SEIEA, if sensitive uses such as places of worship, daycares, retirement homes, residential uses, etc. are located within 500 metres of an industrial firm applying for this environmental approval, an acoustic study must be completed and firms are required to reorganize their operations to conform to noise restrictions at

various times of the day (Lura Consulting, 2013). SEIEA representatives also noted that noise mitigation equipment and consultant studies are very expensive and do not necessarily guarantee an approval from MOECC (Lura Consulting, 2013).

Figure 17: Number of Places of Worship in Employment Industrial Districts

#	Employment District Name	1993	1998	2003	2008
1	North West Etobicoke	4	9	10	17
2	Rexdale	8	11	20	29
3	South Etobicoke	5	8	10	10
4	Highway 400 Corridor	15	30	42	71
5	Weston Road/ Junction	0	0	1	5
6a	Liberty	0	0	0	0
6b	South of Eastern	1	1	0	0
7	Dufferin Keele North	9	16	18	21
8	Dufferin Keele South	7	17	18	32
9	Don Valley Parkway Corridor	3	15	17	30
10	Milliken	5	11	11	10
11	Tapscott/ Marshalling Yard	6	13	18	33
12	Scarborough Highway 401 Corridor	5	6	16	21
13	West Central Scarborough	3	4	9	17
14	South West Scarborough	0	0	6	13
15	South East Scarborough	0	0	0	1
16	Airport Corporate Centre	0	0	0	1
-	Totals	71	141	196	311

Source: Stein, 2010

Finally, there is a significant presence of retail uses along The Queensway (Malone Given Parsons, 2012) – a major arterial road that cuts through the middle South Etobicoke continuing into The City of Mississauga in the west, and becoming Queen St. and continuing into downtown Toronto in the east. *Figure 11* illustrates the portion of The Queensway that is located in the South Etobicoke Employment District between Kipling Avenue and Highway 427. One of the recommendations embedded in the Malone Given Parsons consultant’s report in 2012 was to clarify Official Plan Section 4.6, Policy 3 related to the approval of large-scale, stand-alone retail or “power centres” on major arterials in employment areas. It was suggested that as-of-right permissions be granted to retail and associated uses along arterial roads provided that these arterials form the boundary of the employment areas (Malone Given Parsons, 2012: 5-24). Interestingly, The Queensway does not form a boundary between this employment area and the

surrounding residential areas, yet OPA 231 policies shown in *Figure 13* have re-designated most lands fronting The Queensway as *general employment*.

Discussion

Based on the economic metrics provided, it would appear as though the South Etobicoke Employment District is ‘healthier’ from the perspective of the policy intent of the *employment areas* land-use designation; job density is higher in South Etobicoke, the manufacturing sector has grown over the last year, and there is even a stakeholder group to protect the interests of priority sectors in the form of the South Etobicoke Industrial Employees Association (SEIEA). At the same time, there are no provisions for monitoring or evaluating the economic health of employment areas embedded in the policy so it is difficult to fully understand whether these areas are performing effectively without a robust benchmarking framework.

Despite its success, the proposed re-designation of land-use in OPA 231 will introduce a variety of activities into this district that have the potential to destabilize the priority sectors of manufacturing and industrial activities. Of particular concern is how the City will fulfill the goal of intensifying around the Mimico-GO station without drawing excessive conversion pressure to the lands within the boundaries of the employment area – from a developer’s perspective, it may be easier to redevelop the larger parcels in the employment area due to size and price advantages as opposed to the single-family residential lots that are located in close proximity to the South Etobicoke Employment District and Mimico-Judson regeneration area (*Figure 11 & Figure 13*). While current zoning and land-use policy would not permit conversion to higher-value commercial or residential uses, as the City continues to build-out current policies may increasingly be challenged and the City should develop a critical path forward to establish a clear approach to addressing such a scenario.

The land-use conflicts between industrial firms and sensitive uses that SEIEA brought up in the consultations is important to study further as they are currently negatively affecting industrial firms where they are located as-of-right. The synchronization of provincial and municipal policies should be a priority so that manufacturing and industrial firms are not caught between different orders of government, as is this case with obtaining a Certificate of Approval as mentioned previously. If the City is seriously about promoting its employment areas for

manufacturing and industrial uses, then it may need to consider a relocation strategy for sensitive uses, such as places of worship, even if it means a relocation to *general employment areas* within the larger employment area.

The presence of retail along The Queensway presents an interesting case of the tension between priority uses and large-format retail uses in employment areas. On the one hand, the economic characteristics of retail are more skewed toward serving local populations as opposed to the export-based function of manufacturing and industrial uses, which could disqualify large-format retail from locating in employment areas by some interpretations (Wood Bull LLP, 2010). Conversely, large-format retail can have warehouse-type functions as well as space and land requirements that align with the offerings in employment areas – where else can large-format retail locate as-of-right in the City of Toronto if not in employment areas, or at least on their peripheries? We are also seeing the retail sector transition to more e-commerce activity which provides the kind of export-based wealth-generation opportunities characteristic of the manufacturing sector. Therefore, as the form of retail evolves, employment areas policies may also have to adapt.

CHAPTER 3: ISSUE IDENTIFICATION AND BEST PRACTICES

Chapter 3 aims to summarize some of the main challenges at the core of employment areas planning and management in the City of Toronto as discussed through the case studies in Chapter 2, and to explore selected best practices to address these challenges.

BUILDING FLEXIBLE, LONG-TERM POLICIES

One of the key takeaways from looking at the case study employment districts in more detail is that while employment areas policies are meant to create a standardized land-use planning framework, no two employment areas are exactly the same – even within the same jurisdiction. The specificities of the Rexdale and South Etobicoke districts demonstrate that policy-makers can no longer treat employment districts as areas in isolation, but must take their surrounding contexts – economic, spatial, and social – into consideration if these geographic spaces are meant to be sustained into the future. The creation of site and area specific policies is intended to account for this to a certain extent, but these measures are often reactive to pre-existing conditions on the ground and fail to take the whole employment district and its surrounding context into consideration. Moreover, as macro-economic changes affect activity in employment areas on the ground, it is important for policy-makers to opt for clarity in their approach to employment areas – whether that means redefining them to more closely reflect industrial character, or broadening the definition to represent new economies.

Southeast Quadrant Plan, Portland Oregon

What is unique about Portland’s SE Quadrant Plan is that it is effectively a master-planning document for a primarily industrial employment area of its Central City. The plan intends to “...increase the number of jobs per acre and new industrial types in the Central City, while preserving traditional industrial uses, activating increasing accessibility to the waterfront, improving fish and wildlife habitat, providing parking solutions and managing increased activity in this emerging area of economic creativity and growth” (City of Portland, 2015: i). The plan delineates a vision, goals, policies, and actions specific to this employment area with long-range

performance targets to guide activity. Pursuing the creation of detailed plans for employment areas can provide a more focused direction for their development while also mobilizing relevant policies, programs, incentives, investments, and stakeholders to collaborate to enhance these areas.

Innovation Districts

The utility of thinking about innovation in employment areas, or thinking about innovation districts,⁴ is that it forces local economic development actors out of a conventional mindset that often hovers between consumption-oriented development (e.g. housing, convention centres, casinos, retail, etc.) and trying to simply replicate other technology hub success stories like Silicon Valley (Katz and Wagner, 2014). This study draws on the definition of innovation put forth by Katz and Wagner for The Brookings Institute that combines physicality, economics, and networks. They say: “...an *innovation ecosystem* [is] a synergistic relationship between people, firms, and place (the physical geography of the district) that facilitates idea generation and accelerates commercialization” (2014: 2). It is important to note that innovation districts are not meant to function the same way in different places, but to leverage the unique assets of their specific locations (Katz and Wagner, 2014).

Innovation districts have more or less fallen into three general models: “anchor-plus,” “re-imagined urban areas,” and “urbanized science park” (Katz and Wagner, 2014: 2-4). The anchor-plus model generally represents heavily mixed-use areas that have developed around universities and health centres in downtowns or mid-towns (Katz and Wagner, 2014) – also known as the ‘eds and meds’ sector. Re-imagined urban areas are historic waterfronts and ports that are located close to downtowns and are undergoing rapid transformation often in the context of high-value uses outbidding long-standing industrial and warehousing firms (Wolf-Powers, 2005). Finally, urbanized science parks are generally located in suburban/exurban locations where office buildings in isolated, car-oriented environments are enhanced through public realm improvements and an intensity of uses such as retail, residential, and higher-order transit (Katz and Wagner, 2014).

⁴ The Brookings Institute defines innovation districts as “...geographic areas where leading-edge anchor institutions and companies cluster and connect with start-ups, business incubators, and accelerators (Katz & Wagner, 2014: 1).

What is most salient about the rise of these innovation districts, is the way in which land-use planning and economic development must work together to enable urban areas to remain economically sustainable given changing macro-economic circumstances. Thus, it is not as much about identifying potential ‘anchor-plus’ or ‘urbanized science park’ areas in a municipality, but fostering the kind of collaboration amongst stakeholders that can spur innovation in any employment-focused area, even if that area is more industrial in nature. As such, Katz and Wagner identify five strategies based on the reflections of innovation district practitioners: building a collaborative leadership network, setting a vision for growth, pursuing talent and technology, promoting inclusive growth, and ensuring access to capital (2014: 14-21).

Partners in Project Green

Partners in Project Green is a partnership between the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) working to transform the employment areas around Lester B. Pearson International Airport into the *Pearson Eco-Business Zone* – an area that roughly mirrors the Airport Employment Zone (AEZ) discussed earlier. This initiative is supported by the cities of Toronto, Mississauga, and Brampton who have pooled their data to help achieve the short and long-term goals of the *Pearson Eco-Business Zone*; to work with existing firms in the study area to transition to eco-friendly operations that are also financially beneficial and, to become a preferred destination for clean-tech companies to locate and demonstrate eco-business leadership (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, 2008: 9). This inter-jurisdictional project represents a progressive step toward creating an identity and marketing approach to the employment areas around the airport that necessitates collaboration between municipalities, government bodies, and the business community. Similar to the South Etobicoke Industrial Employees Association, the City can consider encouraging Rexdale and other employment areas to establish industry associations or ‘employment area associations’ made up of a broad base of representation to promote the site for the retention and expansion of employment.

IMPLEMENTING POLICY

Many municipalities are experimenting with creative ways to guide the development of employment areas through the use of best practices, zoning updates and design guidelines, and non-profit developers. A central challenge that many of these cities seem to be experiencing is the need to preserve and protect the functions of the manufacturing sector that generally requires separation from other uses, and the growth of other sectors that do not need the same kind of separation, including lighter industrial uses, such as artisanal manufacturing (City of Portland 2015; New York City Council 2014).

Employment Lands Implementation Plan

The City of Waterloo has developed two related documents; a *Best Practices for Higher Density Employment Lands* (2009a) and an *Implementation Plan for City-Owned Employment Lands* (2009b) to meet employment growth targets for greenfield sites as stipulated in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. When read together, these documents combine a series of background studies and best-practice research to arrive at ‘recommended development steps’ for city-owned employment sites (2009b). In particular, one recommendation in Waterloo’s implementation plan is to create an inventory of surplus, underutilized, and/or vacant and abandoned lands in order to bring awareness to re-urbanization opportunities for the development community coupled with an inventory of best practices for re-urbanization projects (2009b: 21). As of now, the City of Toronto does not appear to have very clear development goals for employment areas, other than a somewhat vague desire to preserve existing manufacturing and industrial uses while promoting new kinds of employment on these lands.

Zoning Updates and Design Guidelines

The City of Portland has an Employment Opportunity Subarea (EOS) zoning overlay that was adopted in 2006 to increase employment densities on industrial zoned lands without compromising the ability of existing industrial firms to continue operations (2015: VI-7). The overlay allows for a broader range of industrial uses than the original industrial zoning, such as

industrial offices. The City notes that during the “Great Recession” between 2007 and 2010, 1,000 new jobs were created in the EOS overlay area contributing to a 7% annual growth rate (2015). Based on this success, Portland is considering applying the EOS overlay to all IG1 areas with IG1 industrial zoning (2015: VI-7).

Some municipalities have approached industrial areas through a form-based code, or design-based approach, to resolve potential conflicts between uses. San Francisco has developed Industrial Area Design Guidelines to improve “...personal safety, comfort, pride and opportunity” (City and County of San Francisco, 2001: 5). Other jurisdictions have stated that requiring excessive building design requirements for aesthetic purposes can discourage industrial development (Metro Vancouver, 2012). However, there is an opportunity for municipalities to explore updating their zoning and/or design guidelines to better suit the needs of manufacturing and industrial firms while serving other goals they may have – such as accommodating truck, car, and active transportation through employment areas, or improving connectivity between employment areas and their surrounding contexts.

Non-Profit Industrial Developers

While the crowding out of industrial firms is often framed in terms of unsanctioned uses in employment areas like commercial and residential, as the economy shifts to high value-added activities, land-value bidding may begin to occur between industrial uses and so-called compatible uses in employment areas, such as high-value R&D or any other use that generally yields higher profits and can therefore afford to pay more for land. Regardless of what may be the cause of land-value destabilization in employment areas it is a likely scenario as the City of Toronto continues to build out.

Non-profit industrial developers like the Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Centre (GMDC) in Brooklyn, New York have emerged as a way to provide affordable space with stable rents to small and mid-sized urban manufacturers. Moreover, these entities are familiar with the building and land needs of manufacturing firms and own and manage their buildings as opposed to selling them upon completion (The Pratt Centre for Community Development, 2014). While non-profit developers are mission-driven, they still have many, if not all, of the same risks as conventional for-profit developers which suggests that the policy and regulatory environment

should try to minimize risk and maximize certainty if such entities are to be successful. However, pursuing a non-profit approach to the redevelopment of industrial areas can work to stabilize land value for manufacturing uses while also introducing new kinds of employment activity in employment areas.

EVALUATING EMPLOYMENT AREAS POLICY

The employment areas land-use designation is interesting in its very apparent attempt to influence the land market by providing a regulated space for specific types of employment. As opposed to letting the market regulate uses on its own, employment areas policy is predicated on the normative view that manufacturing and industrial uses must continue to operate in urban areas even though they are not considered the ‘highest and best use’ for a conventional parcel of land. And yet, there is no established method to evaluate whether this policy is successful. Despite the obvious connection to local economic development, neither does the Economic Development & Culture Division at the City of Toronto recognize employment areas as significant sites to promote and enhance, nor does the City Planning Division collect much detailed information on these areas to know whether they are functioning effectively. The Toronto Employment Survey attempts to shed some light on the activity occurring in employment areas every year but again, readers of this information can only really compare employment areas to each other in the absence of any benchmarking or clear goals.

Innovation District Audit Tool

One example of policy evaluation is the creation of an audit tool. In response to the rise of ‘innovation districts’ in the United States, The Brookings Institute, in partnership with MASS Economics and Project for Public Spaces, recently launched a draft audit tool to evaluate innovation districts due to what they see as a large variation in understanding of the term and its application (Wagner and Storrington, 2016). The audit tool is based on the following five metrics and guiding questions:

- Critical mass
 - *“Does the innovation district have a concentration, or density, of assets that collectively begin to attract and retain people, a range of activities, and financing?”*
- Competitive advantage
 - *“Is the innovation district leveraging and aligning its distinctive assets, including historic strengths, to grow firms in the district, city, and region?”*
- Diversity and inclusion
 - *“Is the innovation district a diverse and inclusive place that provides broad opportunity for...residents?”*
- Quality of place
 - *“Does the innovation district have a strong quality of place and quality experiences, which attract other assets, accelerate outcomes, and increase interactions?”*
- Culture and collaboration
 - *“Is the innovation district connecting the dots between people, institutions, and other actors, economic clusters, and place – creating synergies at multiple scales and platforms?”*

(The Brookings Institute and Project for Public Spaces, 2016)

While these metrics and guiding questions are not meant to be universally applicable, what is noteworthy about this approach is the important relationship between the conception of an innovation district and the necessity of being able to assess whether districts are achieving intended goals. Furthermore, having an audit tool and associated data collection affords policy-makers a greater ability to make evidence-based land-use planning decisions.

CHAPTER 4: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of municipal and provincial policy, case study analysis, and best practice research, the following recommendations provide elements of a potential high-level strategy to improve current planning and management of employment lands in the City of Toronto:

1. *The City of Toronto should consider conducting a targeted study of each employment area to better understand challenges and opportunities.*

While the Toronto Employment Survey provides an annual snapshot of employment activity in each of the twenty-two employment areas, it would be beneficial to gain a more detailed understanding of the dynamics of each employment area in terms of land-use characteristics as they interact with employment activity, as well as their surrounding contexts. This would help municipal policy-makers be better able to target incentives, programs, and land-use tools to achieve intended goals for individual employment areas. Encouraging better integration between planning and economic development departments is a key enabling action. Preliminary studies may likely lead to the development of a clearer policy vision for employment areas and potential tools for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of these areas.

2. *The City of Toronto should consider adopting an innovation approach to employment areas in order to enhance the operations of existing firms and to attract new firms.*

The current approach to employment areas leans more towards a preservationist mentality while also acknowledging that these areas must intensify to meet provincially-mandated employment targets. The City should decide how it will address the declining, yet still significant, role that traditional manufacturing plays in urban areas while also accommodating growth in new economy industries. The City could consider an “innovation zone overlay” for its *general employment* lands that could prioritize projects

that involve the mobilization of diverse stakeholders and creative partnerships, such as non-profit industrial developers, to invest in strategic demonstration projects to encourage more employment opportunities in these areas.

3. *The City of Toronto should pursue a solution to land-use conflicts between industrial firms and sensitive uses*

Conflicts between sensitive uses and priority sectors in employment areas remain a key concern for the current and future vitality of employment areas. There is no clear roadmap for how to deal with this issue but the City should work with the Province to pursue a solution to this land-use conflict. Possible solutions could involve a long-term relocation strategy or land swap for sensitive uses that currently sit on *core employment* lands and/or incentives for sensitive uses to locate outside of employment areas.

4. *The City of Toronto should consider developing secondary plans for employment areas*

Once the City has decided how it would like to proceed with employment area planning, the development of secondary plans for employment areas can provide a cohesive vision to guide development on these lands. This land-use planning document should reference all relevant municipal and provincial policies, zoning, financial incentives, etc. to provide a clear development framework improving certainty for stakeholders.

Major metropolitan cities across North America have experienced similar trends of de-industrialization over the past several decades and the rise of more knowledge-intensive, higher-value sectors. As we know, the shifting North American economy plays out in urban areas in the form of changes in land-use dynamics; growth in high-density office buildings, re-urbanization of downtown cores that support a preference for walkable, mixed-use settings by ‘new economy’ industries and slow job decline in large foot-print, single-storey manufacturing spaces. Thus, municipalities like the City of Toronto are faced with the challenge of preserving important manufacturing jobs located in large, low-rise buildings in employment areas while also contending with pressure from ‘higher and better uses.’

This paper has attempted to draw out some current challenges with existing provincial and municipal policy related to employment areas related to the Rexdale and South Etobicoke Employment Districts in the City of Toronto. Ultimately, more clarity is needed between official plan policies, zoning, and economic development tools to define how exactly the City of Toronto intends to treat its employment areas for the long term. The recommendations put forth in this study aim to propose a more proactive approach to planning and managing employment areas not only to fulfill the employment targets found in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, but to also benefit the economic health of the City and region.

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