
Subject: Employment Policies Update: Project Initiation Report

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, October 9, 2019

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That a copy of PDS 35-2019 **BE CIRCULATED** to all Local Municipalities and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to advise Council of the initiation of an Amendment to the existing Regional Official Plan (OP) to update the OP's employment policies.
- The 2019 *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan)* came in to effect in May 2019. It introduced significant changes to the treatment of employment lands and areas, including the ability to convert lands in an employment area prior to the completion of the Region's new OP. Under the former *Growth Plan*, conversions could only happen at the time of the Region's new OP.
- The Region must have up-to-date OP policies to address conversion applications and other new employment permissions introduced in the 2019 *Growth Plan*. A pro-active approach is needed to ensure the Region is prepared for applicants seeking approvals under the new employment policies.
- The 2019 *Growth Plan* now specifically permits employment area designations in advance of passing of a new official plan.
- Staff are assessing existing employment policies contained in Chapter 4 of the OP, and related definitions and Schedules, to see what needs updating. Staff will return to PEDC with a recommended Official Plan Amendment to conform to the 2019 *Growth Plan* employment policies.

Financial Considerations

The cost of the work associated with this Amendment is included within the Planning and Development Services council approved 2019 operating budget.

Analysis

The 2019 *Growth Plan* changed or added several new employment policies. Some of these changes are a significant departure from past practice. The Region should take a proactive approach to ensure that its OP is up-to-date with the current policies, particularly since decisions of Council must conform to the *Growth Plan*.

Key employment changes include:

- New policies that permit a private landowner to convert lands in employment areas in advance of the completion of the Region's new OP;
- Revisions to the meaning of the terms employment lands and employment areas, and removing the concept of prime employment areas;
- Introduction of the concept of a Provincially Significant Employment Zone;
- Introduction of policies for land use changes for employment lands (outside of employment areas) where a similar number of jobs remain accommodated on site;
- New permission for a settlement area boundary expansion up to 40 Ha before the new OP is adopted, for any land uses, including employment;

As previously noted, the Region's existing OP is not reflective of these policies. Updating the OP is a requirement of the *Growth Plan* and, importantly, is needed to provide a fair, predictable and competitive business environment for employment lands. The 2019 *Growth Plan* specifically permit employment area designations in advance of the passing of whole new official plan.

For these reasons, Staff will review employment policies in Chapter 4 of the OP and related definitions and schedules and propose changes to conform to the *Growth Plan*.

The Region met, individually, with municipal staff on employment lands and areas, amongst other things, in the summer of 2019. Consultation with stakeholders is currently planned for October 2019. After this consultation, and after undertaking a detailed review of the OP policies, staff will return to PEDC with a draft Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) proposal and statutory public meeting.

The proposed ROPA will be a conformity exercise under the *Growth Plan* and therefore will proceed under Section 26 of the *Planning Act, 1990* with the Province as the approval authority.

In addition to the process set out in this Report relating to the existing OP, staff continue its work on policies for the *new* OP, which was set out in PDS 33-2019.

Alternatives Reviewed

An alternative is to not proceed with an amendment to the current OP employment policies at this time. This is not preferred since the current plan contains outdated employment policies that do not position the Region well in responding to employment-related applications.

Additionally, not proceeding would put the Region at a competitive disadvantage to other municipalities in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area that have more modern policies.

Official plan conformity with the *Growth Plan* is required; Staff have the resources and momentum to proceed at this time.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Commencing an immediate update to the Region's employment policies to ensure alignment with the *Growth Plan* will assist in implementing Council's Strategic Priority of Supporting Business and Economic Growth.

Other Pertinent Reports

- PDS 33-2019, Growth Management Program Update for the New Official Plan

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Appendices

None.