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**COMMUNICATION : C 19
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (2)
MAY 20, 2020
ITEM # 10**

“WITHOUT PREJUDICE”

Office of the City Clerk
City of Vaughan
2141 Major Mackenzie Dr.
Vaughan, ON L6A 1T1

May 19, 2020
File 3867-1

Attn: Mayor Bevilacqua and Members of City Council

**RE: Region of York Municipal Comprehensive Review
Planning for Employment and Employment Conversions
Vaughan Mills Centre Secondary Plan Lands**

Weston Consulting is the planning consultant for H & L Title Inc. / Ledbury Investments Ltd., 2811187 Ontario Limited, and Anland Developments Inc., which comprise the Vaughan Mills Centre Secondary Plan Landowners Group (the “Landowners Group”) who have land holdings located southeast of the intersection of Weston Road and Rutherford Road in the City of Vaughan (herein referred to as the “subject lands”).

We have been actively engaged in the York Region Municipal Comprehensive Review (“MCR”) process on behalf of the Landowners Group. We have reviewed the Staff Report, dated May 20, 2020, and associated attachments (Committee of the Whole Item 10) as they relate to City Staff’s recommendation on the subject lands and the active employment conversion request. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate and clarify our request that a portion of the subject lands be converted to non-employment uses to allow for mixed-use development, including residential uses. This letter also seeks a deferral of the consideration of the proposed conversion request in order to host a public open house with the community, which has been delayed as a result of the current circumstances surrounding the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Property Description and Background

The subject lands are located south of Rutherford Road, west of Highway 400, east of Weston Road, and north of the future extension of Bass Pro Mills Drive. The subject lands have a combined area of approximately 39.20 hectares (96.86 acres).

Although the subject lands have been designated for employment uses for several years, they are currently vacant, with the exception of a garden centre. As such, despite being surrounded by a wide range of urban uses including commercial retail, commercial employment and low-rise residential uses, and having direct access to major arterial roads and a provincial highway, the subject lands currently contribute minimal employment opportunities to the local, regional and Provincial economy.

The subject lands have been removed from the Provincially Significant Employment Zone (“PSEZ”) by the latest mapping released by the Province in December, 2019. This suggests that the subject lands are not deemed significant on a Provincial level for meeting the Province’s employment needs and achieving forecasted growth targets.

Bass Pro Mills Drive Extension Municipal Class EA

A Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (“Class EA”) for the extension of Bass Pro Mills Drive west of Highway 400 to Weston Road commenced on March 5, 2020. The Class EA will define the problems and opportunities, evaluate solutions and designs and determined a preferred design for the propose transportation improvements. The proposed development concept for the subject lands considers this extension as part of an improved road network.

The extension of Bass Pro Mills Drive will reduce congestion on Weston Road and provide alternate, direct access to Highway 400 and the nearby Vaughan Mills Shopping Centre for the residents of Woodbridge. In addition, the proposed development plan provides for a full internal road network to facilitate complete transportation ingress, egress, and circulation within the development block.

Community Consultation

The Landowners Group would like to work closely with the community to address feedback and concerns as they relate to the proposed development concept. Based on discussions with City Staff and the local Councillor, it is the intent of the Landowners Group to host a public open house with the community in order to seek feedback and address concerns from the public. However, given the current circumstances surrounding the global COVID-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to arrange for and host an open house event in advance of Council’s consideration of Staff’s employment conversion recommendations. As such, we are requesting a deferral of the consideration of the conversion request for the subject lands in order to allow for the hosting of a public open house and to provide time to address the concerns of the community.

Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Appeal

On June 26, 2014, York Region Council approved Amendment No. 2 to the City of Vaughan Official Plan (“OPA 2”), the Vaughan Mills Centre Secondary Plan (“VMCSP”). OPA 2 proposes to designate the subject lands within the “Vaughan Mills Centre Business District” for Prestige Office Employment and Prestige Employment uses. The proposed land use pattern will further segregate the subject lands from mixed-use areas proposed for the east side of Highway 400 and south of Rutherford Road. As a result, the Landowners Group appealed OPA 2 to the Ontario Municipal Board (continued as the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (“LPAT”)), pursuant to s. 17(36) of the Planning Act. The Landowners Group also appealed portions of the City of Vaughan Official Plan (“VOP 2010”), which was adopted by City Council on September 7, 2010.

Both VOP 2010 and OPA 2 were adopted at a time when the 2006 version of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe applied. The LPAT had scheduled a first phase hearing of the Landowners Group appeals of VOP 2010 and OPA 2 (Case Nos. PL140839 and PL111184); however, on consent of the Landowners Group, the City of Vaughan and York Region, the LPAT adjourned the originally scheduled hearing. The parties requested the adjournment, in part, given the anticipated amendments to the Growth Plan and to allow the parties sufficient time to pursue settlement discussions.

Description of Proposed Development Concept

The proposed development concept for the subject lands envisions a mixed-use development consisting of low to high-rise residential uses on the west side of the lands, higher-order office employment and commercial uses on the east side, and open space uses. A public open space ("Greenway Public Open Space") containing a portion of the Black Creek extends through the centre of the subject lands, separating the proposed residential and employment uses from one another. The residential uses are proposed to have building heights ranging from 4-storeys in the northwest corner, 6-storeys for the proposed buildings fronting onto Weston Road, 5 to 18-storeys in the interior of the west side, and 8-storeys for the proposed buildings abutting the proposed Greenway Public Open Space. The proposed office employment uses will have building heights ranging from 2 to 8-storeys. Two 9-storey hotels and 1- to 2-storey retail buildings are also proposed on the east side of the subject lands.

The concept plan proposes that employment uses on the subject lands are situated on the east side of the proposed greenway channel, closest to Highway 400 and are appropriately separated from the low-density residential community west of Weston Road. Approximately 21 hectares (51.9 acres) of the site are proposed to remain within the employment designation, which includes 5 hectares (12.4 acres) of public open space associated within the realigned Black Creek. The intensification of employment uses on the east side of the subject lands will provide for a significant amount of employment on these currently vacant lands.

On the west side of the subject lands, an appropriate mix and variety of housing types are proposed for all incomes to support the principle of creating a complete community. Approximately 17 developable hectares (42 acres) are proposed for conversion to non-employment uses to facilitate the proposed residential intensification. This represents less than half of the total site being proposed for conversion. To clarify, the proposed employment conversion does not apply to the full 39 hectares.

Employment Densities

The VMCSPP contemplates a total of 7,590 jobs for the 'Vaughan Mills Centre Business District', which includes the entirety of the subject lands as well as the lands to the north fronting Rutherford Road (the "Rutherford Lands"). IBI Group has determined that approximately 512 jobs can be appropriately accommodated on the Rutherford Lands, which would leave 7,078 jobs to be accommodated on the subject lands based on original forecasts. In our opinion, the City has failed to adequately justify the employment numbers contemplated by the VMCSPP, and these projections

remain unsubstantiated and unsupported on the subject lands given their physical and market context.

The proposed employment, retail / service, and potential hotel uses on the subject lands will yield approximately 5,033 jobs on site. This employment target will be met through both the commercial space contained within the mixed-use area of the plan and through the higher density employment uses fronting Highway 400. Approximately 4,700 of these jobs will be created from the higher-order office employment uses along the Highway 400 corridor. The total employment density will therefore comprise over 300 jobs per hectare across the entire site. This employment yield will complement the density target of 200 jobs and persons per hectare set for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre ("VMC"), which is emphasized as an office priority area, and functions as the City's Urban Growth Centre. In our opinion, this represents a level of potential employment that will not compete with the VMC, compared with the original employment targets prescribed by York Region of over 7,000 jobs.

In addition to those identified in the VMCSPP, Regional job density targets have been established for York Region. The target density for employment uses including Major Office is 54 jobs per net hectare. Based on the area of the subject lands, approximately 1,700 jobs would need to be accommodated on the site to meet Regional employment land density targets. The proposed employment densities exceed the Region's target by 3,333 jobs and represents over 2 times the planned target. As a result, although the proposed concept does not provide the ongoing anticipated number of jobs identified by the VMCSPP as described above, the proposal does provide an appropriate employment density for the subject lands given their location and context that well exceeds the number of jobs anticipated or planned by the Region.

Furthermore, the densities proposed by the concept are more respectful of the context applicable to the subject lands and recognize a complimentary relationship with the VMC. Without the necessary infrastructure, including higher order transit facilities such as a subway line, the development of the subject lands with the VMCSPP target of 7,000 jobs would serve to compete with the function of the VMC in an area that does not have the appropriate services to support it. Achieving an employment density as proposed by the VMCSPP would, in our opinion, threaten the viability of the VMC as a major employment centre and would not be sustainable on the subject lands given its contextual location and lack of higher order transit services. The proposed employment density exceeds the 200 jobs and persons per hectare densities targeted for the VMC. As a result, the proposed concept will serve to better complement the City's Urban Growth Centre, rather than compete with it, particularly in emphasizing the VMC as an office priority area.

In consideration of the recent global circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, it is anticipated that employment-related development patterns will be permanently altered. Given the recent shift to physical distancing and working from home, traditional compact office buildings based on floor space rate of 75 square feet per employee will no longer be the standard work space. Increased opportunities for work from home employment have been contemplated by the development proposal.

Complete Community & Housing Affordability

The compact, mixed-use development concept incorporates a mix of residential, commercial, open space, and employment uses, providing a place where residents can live, work, and play close to home. The proposed built form incorporates a range of densities and appropriately transitions from employment in the east to residential in the west. It is designed to maintain compatibility with the adjacent low-rise, established residential neighbourhood to the west of the site. As well, the residential uses on the west side will step down in height and density towards Weston Road, respecting the adjacent neighbourhood.

Furthermore, the proposed concept allows for the provision of alternative forms of housing in terms of built form, tenure and affordability. A greater range of housing styles and affordability will be accommodated on the subject lands through the proposed apartment-style built form, compared to the previously proposed forms. This supports the Provincial, Regional and local objectives for the creation of complete communities and the reduction in the number of required automobile trips.

Conclusions

Based on the foregoing, we submit that the proposed employment conversion for the subject lands is appropriate and reflects the overall objectives of the City, Region and Province. However, given the circumstances around the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to defer City Council's consideration of this request. We respectfully request that:

- Consideration of the employment conversion request for the subject lands by City Council be deferred until a public consultation meeting can be held with stakeholders in order to address feedback and concerns related to the proposed development concept.
- The proposal does not constitute a conversion of the full subject lands in their entirety. Only the western portion of the site abutting Weston Road, comprising a total developable area of 17 hectares (42 acres), is proposed for conversion as part of this redevelopment scheme, which represents less than half of the total site area. The remaining lands (approximately 21 hectares) are to remain for prestige employment uses and a central public open space.
- The employment numbers currently contemplated by the VM CSP are unsupported and unrealistic, and would result in densities that exceed those within the VMC. The proposed concept contemplates more appropriate employment densities which still exceed the regional target for Major Office employment, but which better respect the locational context of the subject lands, consider the availability of services and infrastructure to serve the site, and better complement the function of the VMC as the primary office hub rather than compete with it.
- The proposed concept would allow for the creation of a complete mixed-use community which would provide opportunities for living and working within close proximity. A range

and mix of alternative housing forms will be accommodated, while also maintaining significant employment densities in order to meet Regional and Provincial targets.

- In the context of the proposed development concept, the proposed conversion request should be properly presented and discussed with the neighbouring community, and in our view, represents good planning and should ultimately be supported.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. Please contact the undersigned at extension 240 or extension 241 should you have any questions regarding this submission.

Yours truly,

Weston Consulting

Per:



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and



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- c. Vaughan Mills Centre Secondary Plan Landowners Group, Client
Bill Kiru, City of Vaughan
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