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RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION CASE STUDIES

Municipal Initiatives

THE “KINGS REGENERATION” INITIATIVE (The King-Parliament and King-Spadina Secondary Plans)

Toronto, Ontario

SUMMARY

The plans relax planning and zoning requirements in two former industrial areas near downtown Toronto.

Date Implemented: 1996

Key Outcomes: Eighty-six development projects are either built, under construction or are being planned in the two areas. Once built out, these projects will add 7,040 housing units.

BACKGROUND

King-Spadina and King-Parliament, commonly referred to as the "Kings" because of the prominent role served by King St. in both areas, are adjacent to Toronto's financial core (see Figure 1). Historically these areas served as manufacturing districts, but entered a period of decline in the 1970s that accelerated in the later 1980s and early 1990s as manufacturing activity migrated to suburban locations.

The prevailing zoning regulations cast the Kings as traditional, heavy-industrial areas, prohibiting most other types of modern development activity. As the area declined, the City attempted to stimulate reinvestment for employment uses. Nonetheless, vacancy rates increased and property owners began to demolish buildings with heritage value in order to reduce realty taxes. By the mid-1990s, it was recognized that these districts could not compete as locations for manufacturing and interest was growing in loosening land use restrictions.

In 1995, then Mayor Barbara Hall initiated a consultation process that resulted in the elimination of traditional land use restrictions and redesignation of these districts as "regeneration areas" to encourage reinvestment, create housing opportunities and offer creative spaces for new businesses. In April 1996, the Council of the former City of Toronto approved planning and zoning amendments to implement the new vision.

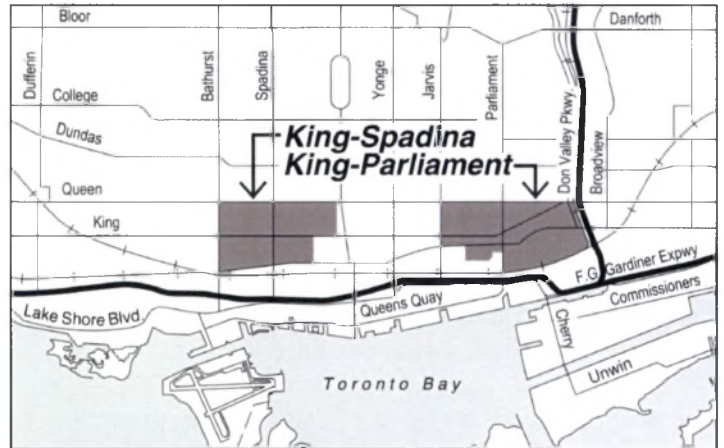


Figure 1: Location of the Kings Regeneration Areas
Source: City of Toronto

DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

The aim of the King-Parliament and King-Spadina Secondary (or neighbourhood) Plans was to "deregulate" land use in the affected areas, abandon the industrial policy strategy and base a new regulatory system on built form so as to encourage reinvestment for a broad range

of compatible mixed land use. By shifting away from its historical vocation as a single-use industrial area and simplifying the planning regulatory framework, the City hoped to attract a mix of uses that would retain the physical and heritage character of the areas, reuse existing buildings, enhance public space, create jobs and encourage a synergy between employment and residential uses.

The new planning approach included:

- as-of-right development permission within general height limits;
- maximum flexibility in land use policies to permit new buildings and conversions of existing buildings to almost any use;
- the removal of density restrictions;
- new built form regulations focusing on building height, massing and light, view and privacy standards;
- the relaxation of a number of general bylaw standards regarding parking and loading for new buildings, with exemptions being given to existing and heritage buildings.

Zoning amendments were approved by Council along with the new secondary plans. The Reinvestment Area zoning permitted a wide variety of land uses, including light industrial, commercial, entertainment, retail, residential and live/work. Industrial uses that can create noxious impacts would have to meet quantitative performance standards related to matters such as noise, odour and air quality emissions as a condition of receiving a building permit. The zoning amendments also included the new building form regulations, including heights and setback requirements.

The new planning policies and zoning represented a dramatic departure from the way planning had traditionally occurred in the former City of Toronto. The traditional approach relied on restrictions such as specific limits on the type of use to which the land could be put, density and even on the proportion of different uses mixed together on one site. This approach could not keep pace with changing market conditions in areas that are undergoing important transitions from one use to another.

The focus of the new approach is on built form, not density or land use. The purpose is to create a high quality, predictable built environment while leaving the issue of land use flexible. The new policy emphasizes how a new building fits into the established pattern and scale of existing buildings in the area. Much greater

emphasis is placed on height, mass, privacy, access to sunlight and wind conditions at grade. Together, these considerations establish the building envelope in which new development can occur.

COMPLEMENTARY POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

As former industrial areas, little attention was paid in the Kings to public spaces or pedestrian amenities in the past. Recognizing that improvements to the public realm would be required to make these industrial districts more attractive to new business and residents, Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) were adopted by Council in 1997 for both the King-Spadina and King-Parliament areas. These plans focus on enhancing heritage character, improving the quality of public spaces and public safety.

The notion of reinvestment areas derived from a planning report entitled *New Directions for Physical Planning: The Three Lenses*, adopted by City Council in 1995. The three lenses approach proposed a new way of thinking about planning in the city. It recognized three different types of areas: stable areas such as residential neighbourhoods where change was expected to occur only gradually; green/brownfield areas where large-scale development or redevelopment would occur; and reinvestment areas, where the focus would be on maximum flexibility and diversity of uses. The same approach has been used to structure the Official Plan for the amalgamated city. Reinvestment areas became "regeneration areas" in Toronto's new Official Plan and several such areas (with flexible planning policies) have been designated in several other locations in the city.

The City does not offer any financial incentives to attract development to the Kings.

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE

The new planning approach in the Kings was championed by senior staff in the Planning Department, and was supported by other departments and the mayor at the time. Outside supporters included Jane Jacobs, prominent architects and planners.

The consultation process leading up to the adoption of the secondary plans and zoning amendments included a one-day public forum and a series of consultations with the outside experts. This consultation provided direction on the conceptual approach, which staff teams then translated into the necessary regulatory changes.

The planning and zoning amendments to implement the new approach were put in place barely eight months after the first public discussion. This is a sign of the broad-based support for the initiative in the community and within the City administration.

There was no resident opposition to the policy when it was introduced as there were very few people living in those areas at the time. Land owners in the area generally supported the policy as they perceived it as a more flexible approach to planning that would remove impediments to development. Once the policy was in place, however, some land owners did complain that the building envelope restrictions (especially heights) were too rigid.

The introduction of the new approach was accompanied by a good deal of promotional activity by the City, including brochures and pamphlets explaining the new approach. They were distributed by planning staff, the City's economic development office and politicians. Once the new approach was introduced, active promotion was discontinued.

IMPACT

The new planning approach in the Kings has been credited for an influx of development applications in both areas since 1996. Eighty-six development projects are either built, under construction or are being planned in the two areas. Once built out, these projects will add 7,040 housing units. New residents in the area tend to be younger adults, without children, who for the most part work downtown.

Many projects involve the renovation and conversion of vacant multi-storey warehouses into live/work units. For example, a project on Adelaide Street East in the King-Parliament area saw the conversion of an existing three-storey warehouse into 50 live/work units with a minimum of parking spaces (Figure 2).



Figure 2: 379 Adelaide St. East in the King-Parliament Area.

Other projects have seen the introduction of residential high-rise buildings of up to 15-20 floors on underused or vacant lots. A good example is The Morgan (Figure 3), a 16-storey condominium at Richmond and Spadina. The building, which replaced a one-storey industrial building that housed four small retail operations, has 217 residential units.



Figure 3: 150 Spadina Avenue in the King-Spadina Area.

In addition, over 321,000 m² (3.45 million ft²) of commercial space has been created or is being planned, often within former industrial buildings. As a result, employment activity in both regeneration areas has increased by 18 per cent since 1996, outpacing the city-wide growth rate of 11 per cent. Many of the jobs generated are in media, business services and computer services.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

There were no extraordinary costs involved in the development of the new planning strategy in the Kings. Staff costs were absorbed into departmental budgets and there were no consulting costs as the external experts provided pro bono advice.

Because the two planning areas are part of larger geographical assignments, it is difficult to estimate the staff costs that are directly attributable to the ongoing planning and administration in the Kings themselves. A rough estimate is that about .4 FTE for two staff members goes into the administration of planning applications in the two areas, plus about .1 FTE for managerial responsibilities. Other City staff in urban design, public works and transportation must also participate in the assessment of development applications.

Any large-scale costs associated with development in the area, such as the need for land decontamination, are borne by developers on a site-by-site basis. The Community Improvement Plans (mentioned above) provide a basis for staff to negotiate with property owners to achieve needed improvements to the public realm (e.g., street lighting, pedestrian crossings, sidewalks, boulevards, parks and open spaces). Essentially, developers are asked to pay into a reserve fund in exchange for permission to go above the height limits found in the zoning bylaw. So far, the City has collected approximately \$500,000 from developer contributions. These funds will be spent in a fashion consistent with the CIPs and council guidelines and will over time begin to address public realm improvements as the areas are transformed from industrial to mixed-use neighbourhoods.

There have been no major upgrades to the underground infrastructure in the areas. However, both secondary plans required that a strategy be developed for the provision of "soft" infrastructure (i.e., community services) in the area once more than 800 residential units had been occupied. This community needs assessment is now being undertaken.

The re-use of existing buildings and new development increased total taxable assessment by over 28 per cent (approximately \$400 million) in the two areas between 1998 and 2002.

EVALUATION

The planning policies developed for King-Parliament and King-Spadina in 1996 have, along with favourable economic conditions, stimulated substantial reinvestment in both of these districts. What had been declining areas that were not experiencing any reinvestment are being transformed into vibrant mixtures of residential lofts, commercial and entertainment uses, with some residual manufacturing. Not surprisingly, these areas are generally considered to be shining examples of successful urban revitalization.

Some challenges include the fact that the mix of uses that is developing in the areas is giving rise to conflicts between residents and the operators of entertainment and late-night facilities, such as clubs. Also, the City is waiting to invest in public realm improvements in the areas, such as parks and open spaces, until a needs assessment is done. Finally, architectural success has been uneven, due in part to the fact that the City has limited ability to control architectural and material details.

The planning approach used in the Kings required a dramatic shift in planning culture that was only possible with strong political and staff leadership and the injection of innovative approaches from external sources. However, if the market conditions are favourable, a relaxation of planning controls could have positive results in other locations as well. Because of the emphasis on built form, this approach is especially well suited to areas of special character that are in transition and require the sensitive integration of different types of uses.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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DOCUMENTS:

City of Toronto. January 1996. King-Parliament: Official Plan Part II.

City of Toronto. January 1996. King-Spadina: Official Plan Part II.

City of Toronto, January 1998 Tracking the Kings (Monitoring Report)

City of Toronto. November 2002. Regeneration in the Kings: Directions and Emerging Trends. (Monitoring Report).

WEB SITES:

www.toronto.ca
(City of Toronto web site)

www.toronto.ca/planning/kings_execsum.htm
(the City's Regeneration in the Kings web page)

www.toronto.ca/torontoplan
(the City's Official Plan page)

OUR WEB SITE ADDRESS: www.cmhc.ca

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