



PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN

25 August 2023

City Council  
City of Brampton  
City Hall, 3rd Floor 2 Wellington Street West  
Brampton, ON L6Y 4R2

Dear Members of Council,

**RE: 28 August 2023 Planning and Development Committee  
Meeting – Item 5.1 – Staff Report re: Major Transit Station  
Areas (MTSAs), Draft Brampton Plan Policies, City-wide  
200 County Court Boulevard, Brampton, ON  
WND File: 22.532**

WND Associates has been retained by County Court Centre Ltd. as its planning consultant with respect to the submission of concurrent Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment, and Plan of Subdivision applications for the lands municipally known as 200 County Court Boulevard (“Subject Site”). The Subject Site is a generally rectangular-shaped lot with approximately 95 metres of frontage on Hurontario Street, 105 metres on Havelock Drive, 194 metres on County Court Boulevard, and a total area of 2.149 hectares. The Subject Site is currently designated *Mixed-Use Two* within the Hurontario-Main Corridor Secondary Plan (“HMCSP”) and is zoned Service Commercial (SC) Special Section – 2651 under the City of Brampton Zoning By-law 270-2004.

After two very productive Pre-Consultation meetings with City Staff on 13 January 2023 and 8 March 2023, concurrent Zoning By-law Amendment and Plan of Subdivision applications were submitted on 16 August 2023 to facilitate the construction of five residential towers ranging in height from 22 to 44 storeys, atop podium elements which include retail and service-commercial uses at-grade (the “Proposed Development”). The applications are currently being reviewed by City Staff for completeness.

An amendment to the HMCSP, which currently permits residential uses, but which introduces specific land use permissions via a Special Policy Area that encompasses the Subject Site, is also proposed to align Brampton’s policy framework with emerging Provincial policy direction that supports the need for housing and recognizes a weakened demand for office uses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An Office Market Study, prepared by Altus Group Economic Consulting, was also submitted and concludes that the proposed employment (at-grade retail and commercial) is appropriate for today’s market conditions.

As detailed below, we formally request that the Committee incorporate the following revisions to Attachment 1 Draft Brampton Plan MTSA Policies and Land Use Schedules:

1. Eliminate the proposed Height Transition Area overlay from the southern portion of the Subject Site;
2. Revise the "Neighbourhood (Low-rise Residential)" designation for the lands adjacent to the south to "Neighbourhood (Mid-rise Residential)"; and
3. Revise the proposed "Office Mixed Use" designation for the Subject Site to "Mixed Use Areas (High Rise)".

### **Concerns with Draft *Brampton Plan* Policies Relating to Major Transit Station Areas City-wide**

#### **1. New Height Transition Area**

The newly proposed Height Transition Area along the southern boundary of the Subject Site is concerning as it did not exist within the preliminary land use plan for the Ray Lawson MTSA when it was introduced in February 2023. Similarly, the HMCSP does not identify the south portion of the Subject Site as a Height Transition Area; while other portions of the HMCSP do include transition areas adjacent to lower scale development, the townhouses adjacent to the south part of the Subject Site do not have such an overlay which in our opinion is appropriate given they are within the boundaries of the MTSA, and in proximity to rapid transit and other contextual considerations.

Furthermore, all Height Transition Areas within the in-force HMCSP abut the MTSA's boundary to provide a transition in building height to properties outside of the MTSA boundary. This same pattern generally persists within the proposed Ray Lawson Boulevard Station Draft Land Use Plan in Attachment 1 associated with item 5.1, except for the Subject Site. In other words, the proposed Height Transition Area for the Subject Site would be the only Height Transition Area that does not abut the MTSA boundary (see Figure 1 below).

In our opinion, the townhouses to the south, being designated as Medium Density within the HMCSP, along with the MTSA boundary itself farther to the south, already provide an appropriate transition in building height as distance increases away from the future location of the Ray Lawson stop.

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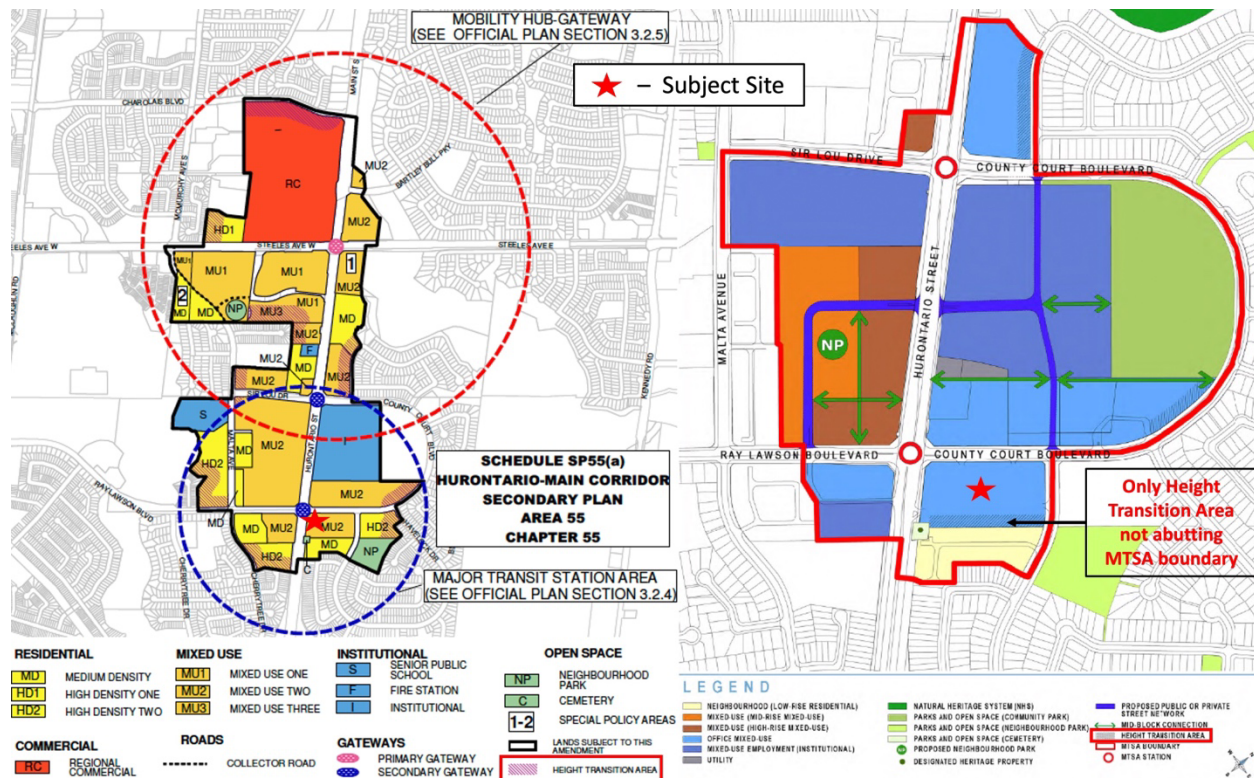


Figure 1: Height Transition Areas within Appendix G of the HMCSP (left) and the proposed Ray Lawson Boulevard Station Draft Land Use Plan (Right).

## 2. Down-designation of Townhouses from Medium Density Residential to Low-Rise Residential

Further to the above noted issue of the new transition overlay, the lands adjacent to the south of the Subject Site (existing 3-storey townhouses) are proposed to be down-designated to Neighbourhood (Low-Rise Residential), which permits a maximum building height of **3 storeys**, whereas the February 2023 version of the preliminary land use plan for the Ray Lawson MTSA identified these lands as Medium Density Residential. Moreover, these lands are currently designated Medium Density within the HMCSP, which permits a maximum building height of **4 storeys**.

Introducing restrictive building height transition requirements as well as down-designating lands that are located approximately 150-200 metres (approximately a 2-minute walk) from the future location of the Ray Lawson Stop, and that are governed by a specific policy framework (the HMCSP), would in our opinion not support the optimization of Municipal and Provincial transit investments. More specifically, the down-designation of the lands adjacent to the south, and the introduction of a Height Transition Area on the Subject Site, does not conform with Policy 2.2.4.2 of the Growth Plan (2019) that directs municipalities delineate the boundaries of major transit station areas in a transit-supportive manner that maximizes the size of the area and the number of potential transit users that are within walking distance of the station. In addition, these proposed policies do not conform with Policy 2.2.4.6 of the Growth Plan (2019) that prohibits land uses within MTSAs that would adversely affect the achievement of minimum density

targets. We therefore request that the Height Transition Area overlay be removed from the Subject Site, and the lands adjacent to the south of the Subject Site be designated as Neighbourhood (Mid-rise Residential).

### **3. Office Use and the City's Office Market Review**

Previous comments submitted by WND Associates on 26 July 2023 in response to Item 7.1 at the 31 July 2023 Planning and Development Committee Meeting outlined concerns with designating the Subject Site for Office Mixed Use, given that the City's Market Analysis was being conducted and therefore its findings had not informed the development of the preliminary land use plans. In our opinion, designating lands within the Ray Lawson MTSA, in part or wholly for Office uses, was premature given the City's Office Market Review was not yet completed. We request the lands instead be designated as Mixed Use Areas (High Rise) which does not restrict the amount of residential given there is an overwhelming need for housing (which also accommodates employment through work-from-home arrangements).

To build on this comment, the City's Office Market Review, prepared by Watson & Associates ("Watson Report"), has now been provided publicly, and after the applicant team's initial review, we would like to identify the following preliminary issues:

- i. The Major Office Employment ("MOE") targets found in Attachment 1 associated with Item 5.1 were derived from Municipal Comprehensive Reviews ("MCR") that were conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As per page 56 of the Watson Report, "the M.C.R. forecasts [which were used to derive the MOE targets] were primarily prepared either before the pandemic or during the early stages of the pandemic and may not fully reflect the acceleration of trends in remote work". This is problematic given the shift in the Office market that favours work-from-home is not properly accounted for.

- ii. The Watson Report is significantly overstating the need for office space in the next 30 years.

The Watson Report properly acknowledges that one of the accepted outcomes from pandemic-related changes to the way people work is that the FSW factor ("floor space per worker" a standard measure used by land economists in estimating office need) has been reduced significantly. It was opined that this reduction is 40%. The 40% is in line with industry standards. However, the Watson Report does not apply the FSW accurately in their modelling, resulting in a significant overstating of how much new office space will be needed to accommodate MOE in Brampton and elsewhere in Peel Region over the next 30- Years. We would like to see Watson revise the modelling to properly account for the lower FSW for future employment *and* for existing employment.

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Using the assumptions in the Watson Report for MOE growth, existing supply and future FSW trends, but properly applying those trends, Mississauga and Brampton combined will have approximately 6.0 million square feet of surplus space in the years ahead as many existing firms rationalize their space toward new work standards. This is enough to accommodate about half of the need for new office space in the Watson Report.

While this reinforces that there needs to be some planning for new office space, it also makes clear that need is likely 15-20 years away.

- iii. The Watson Report did not fully consider the competitive market effects of existing office vacancies in the local market area outside of Brampton when deriving MOE targets.

As per the Office Market Analysis Report prepared by Altus Group Economic Consulting in support of the Proposed Development, there is significant vacancy in the existing office buildings (1.2 million square feet of available floor area) along the Hurontario Corridor, specifically from Cooksville in the south to Steeles Avenue in the north. MOE targets would be significantly reduced for the Ray Lawson MTSA if these values were accounted for.

- iv. Overall, the forecasts in the Watson Report need to be very closely evaluated as they are dramatically strong.

Figure E-5 of the Watson Report (PDF page 20 document page xiv) show that Watson's opinion is that new office construction will immediately and consistently over three decades increase by some 552% from 6,100 sm/year to 26,000 sm/year. This is an extraordinary and unprecedented growth. Findings like this certainly should give pause in accepting these forecasts at this point without scrutiny.

- v. Issues with the use of work-from-home employment values

As per page 14 of the Watson Report, work-from-home employment is generally included in the population-related employment category. Meanwhile, the draft policies for the Office Mixed Use designation within Attachment 1 provide that:

*a) **The ratio of MOE jobs to be provided in Table 1 shall not include population serving jobs (employment that primarily serves a resident population), such as retail, education, health care, local government and work-at home employment.** (emphasis added)*

Therefore, the MOE targets are derived by accounting for work-from-home employment, but work-at-home employment will not count towards fulfilling the minimum required MOE targets. Density targets need to acknowledge that many jobs exist within residential uses, given the shift towards work-from-home employment typologies.

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#### **4. The Draft *Brampton Plan* Policies and Land Use Plans are Contrary to the Intention of Bill 97**

The policies and land use plans contained within Attachment 1 associated with Item 5.1 are contrary to the province's intention behind the new scoped definition of "Area of Employment" within the *Planning Act*, which is to facilitate the delivery of much-needed housing in existing institutional and commercial areas not associated with manufacturing and industrial uses.

Given the matters discussed in Issues 3 and 4 above, we request that the City revise the proposed "Office Mixed Use" designation for the Subject Site to "Mixed Use Areas (High Rise)" which would facilitate non-residential uses, and housing, while enabling the City to stay on track to complete their MTSA study by November 2023, as required by the *Planning Act*. Requiring lands to incorporate a significant amount of Office space when the future viability of such uses is still in question could be an impediment to the City fulfilling their pledge to deliver 113,00 new homes by 2031, given these lands could otherwise be developed for new dwelling units.

#### **5. Timing of the City's Office Market Review Report**

The Watson Report was posted only 2 business days prior to the August 28 Planning and Development Committee Meeting where item 5.1 will be considered. In comparison, the other supporting documents for Item 5.1 were posted 5 business days prior to the meeting. As such, we formally request that the adoption of this item be deferred to provide the applicant team and the public adequate time to review the Watson Report in more detail.

#### **Conclusions**

The current policy framework that governs the Subject Site requires lands south of Steeles Avenue that are designated Mixed-Use Two to be developed predominantly for office and institutional uses (Policy 5.3.3), in addition to residential use permissions. However, it is crucial to note that this Policy was enacted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2017. Therefore, as noted in Issue 3 above, if the draft policies in Attachment 1 are adopted in their current state, the policy framework that governs the Subject Site will still not consider a post-COVID-19 environment which favours a shift towards more flexible live-work spaces and a departure from traditional business parks. The appropriateness of Office uses for the Subject Site and surrounding area has therefore not been adequately evaluated since the COVID-19 pandemic.

We trust that you will consider our requests during the detailed policy writing and plan development stage that will comprise the future City-initiated OPAs for November 2023. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned or Erik Retz of our office.

Yours very truly,

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**WND associates**  
planning + urban design

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Ferancik', written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrew Ferancik, MCIP, RPP  
Principal