

THORNHILL EMPLOYMENT AREA LAND USE STUDY



May 26, 2009

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

In June 2008 Council directed staff to review Official Plan, Secondary Plan and zoning provisions for the area to:

- Advance and promote the transition of the area from general industrial to higher order Business Corridor;
- Address issues of land use compatibility with surrounding residential; and,
- Consider adding restrictions on incompatible uses.

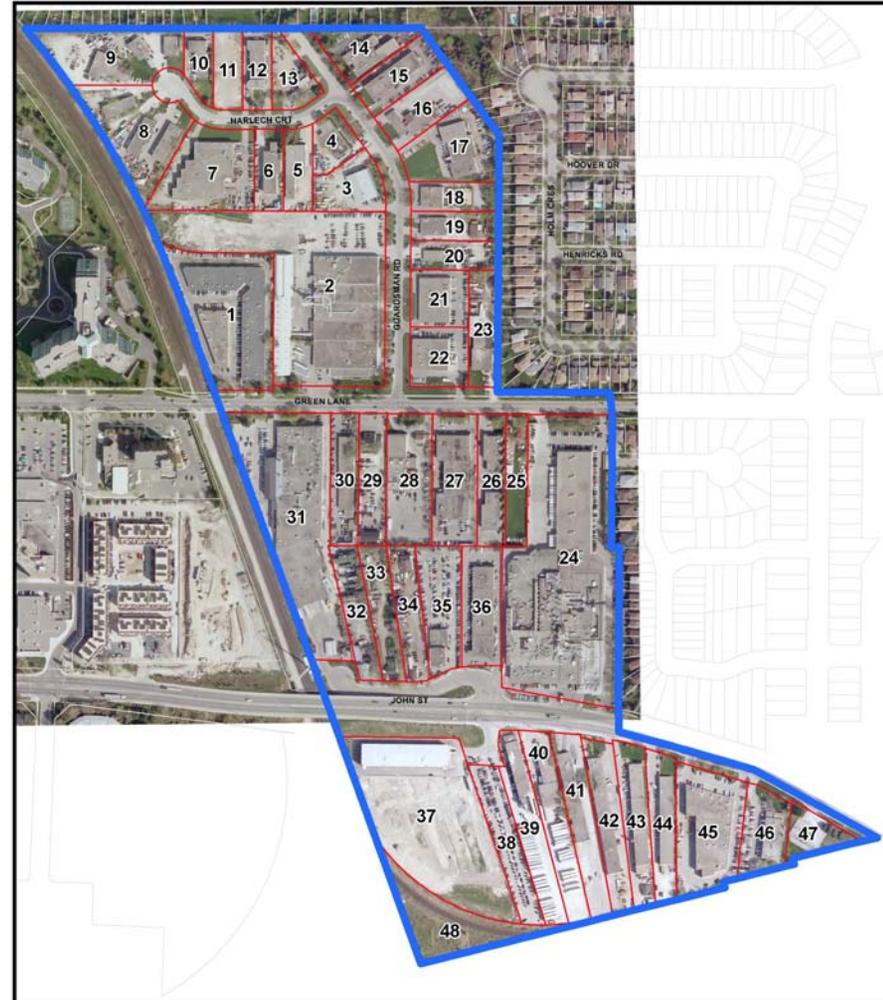
CONTEXT

- Study Area is 34.1 hectares (84.1 acres) in size.
- Residential to the north, east and south.
- Thornhill Square, Community Centre to the west.
- Long history of industrial uses in area; corresponds to zoning history.
- Services extended to area in 1977 and 1979.



CONTEXT (cont'd)

- 47 properties, approximately 103 businesses. Roughly 10 vacancies (small and large).
- Approximately 92,300 sq.m (995,000 sq.ft) of floor space.
- Estimated capacity for 1,950 employees (@ 58 employees/ha).

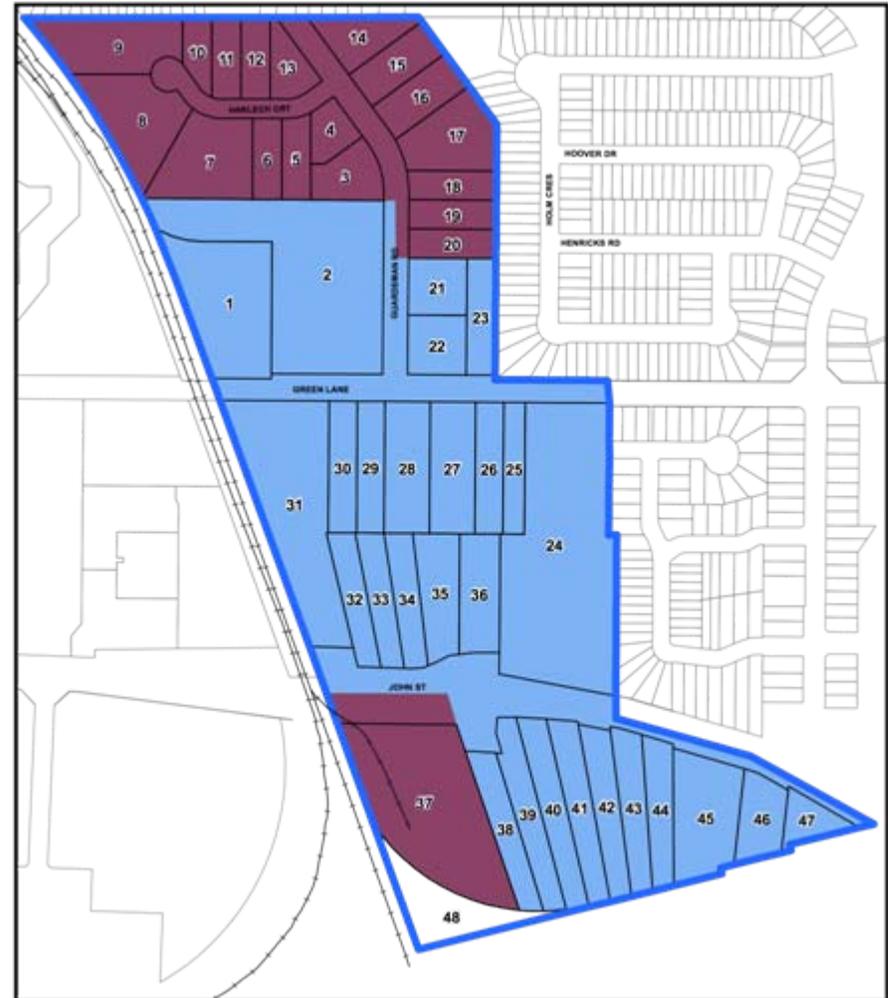


FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- Closure of Canac Kitchens and potential future uses for the site.
- Current application to develop free-standing office building on Harlech Court.
- Development of a number of institutional uses in the area.
- Nature of existing and proposed land uses in adjacent areas.
- The role the Thornlea area plays in providing opportunities for employment in Markham.
- Nature of the services that are currently provided in the area.
- The types of uses that may be attracted to the area to the future.

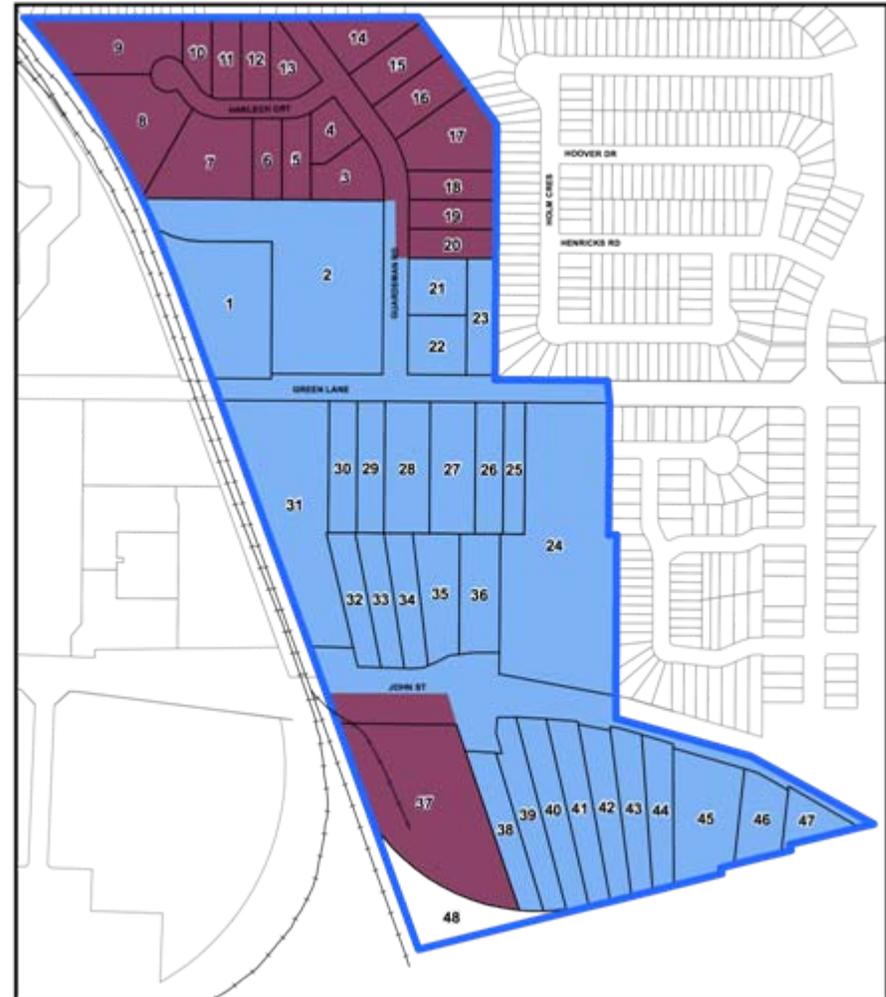
CURRENT POLICY AND ZONING FRAMEWORK

- OP: General Industrial, northern portion of Guardsman, all of Harlech, one property on John Street (now Zoom Zoom Storage).
- Accounts for 9.3 ha (just under one-third) of the Study Area.



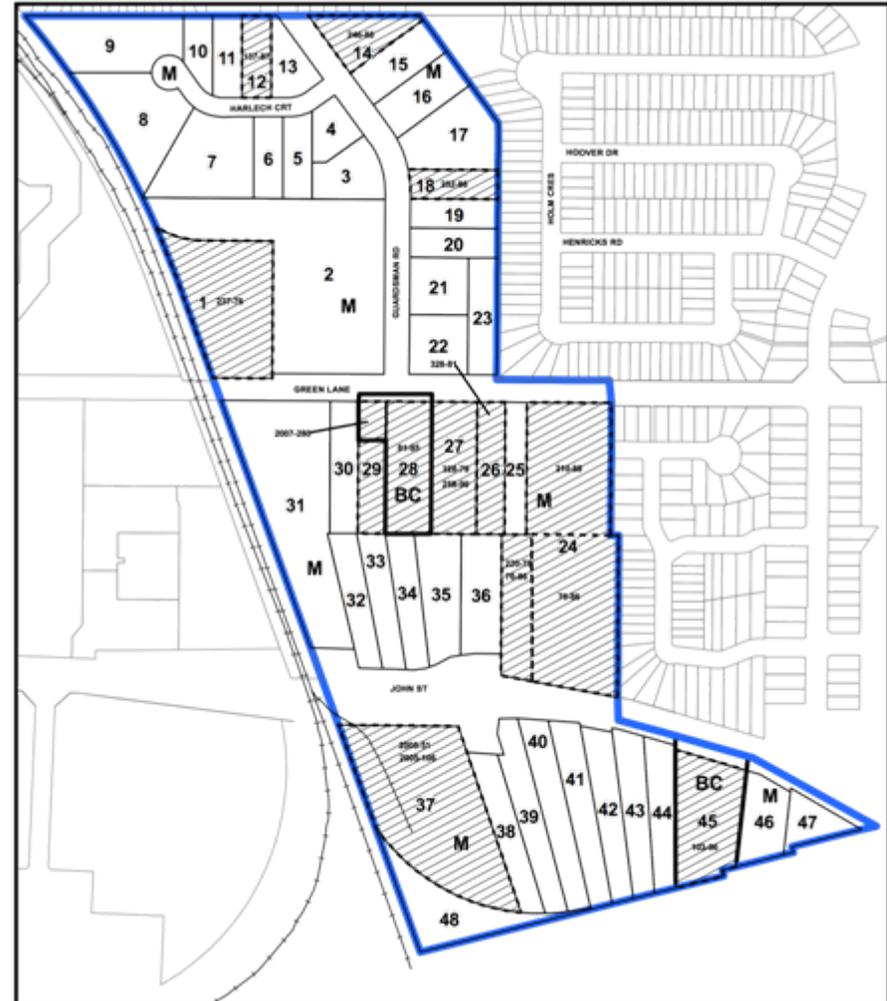
CURRENT POLICY AND ZONING FRAMEWORK (cont'd)

- OP: Business Corridor, effectively all properties having frontage onto Green Lane or John Street.
- Accounts for 20.1 ha (just over two-thirds) of the Study Area.



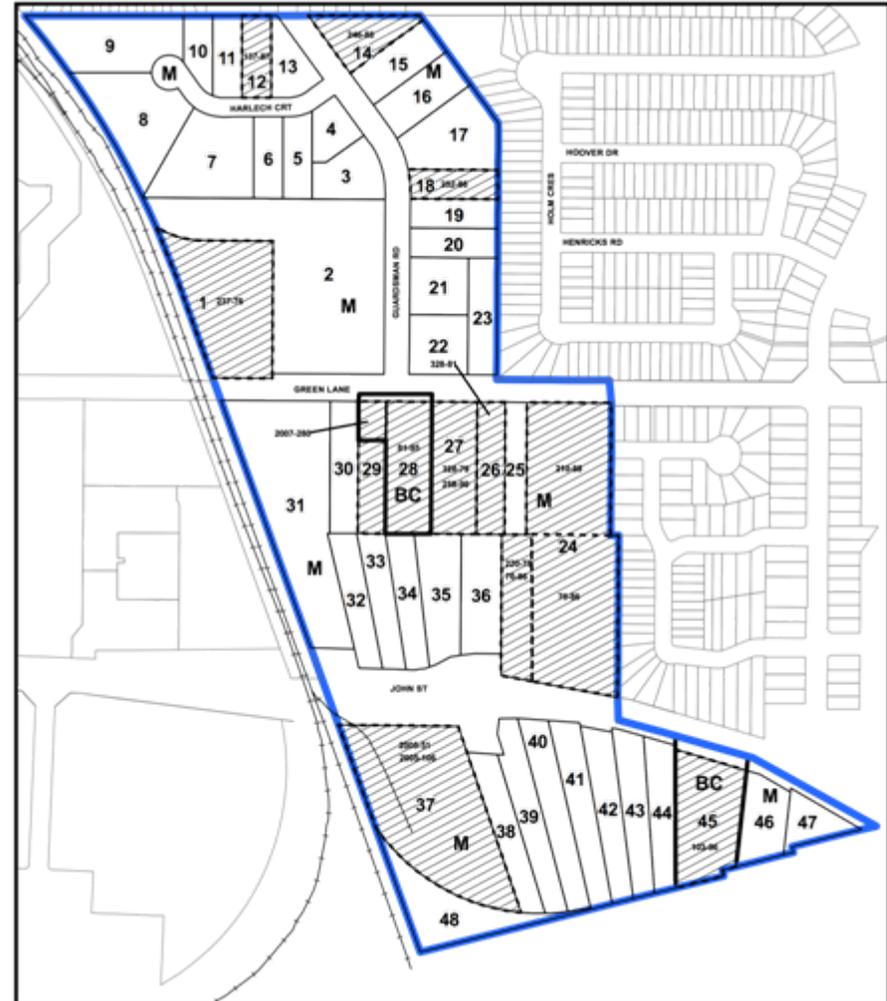
CURRENT POLICY AND ZONING FRAMEWORK (cont'd)

- Subject to Township of Markham Zoning By-law 2325-68: mostly Rural Industrial (R.Ind) with one Rural Residential (RR1) property.
- Newer Zoning By-law 77-73 adopted in May 1973.



CURRENT POLICY AND ZONING FRAMEWORK (cont'd)

- Entire Study Area then zoned Industrial (M). Required larger lots and larger required yards, reflecting the lack of full municipal services.
- New Business Corridor (BC) Zone introduced in 1995, and applied on a site-specific basis. Smaller yards than Industrial (M) Zone



CURRENT POLICY AND ZONING FRAMEWORK (cont'd)

- M Zone permits a wide range of industrial uses - some of which may be incompatible with adjacent residential uses
- Range of uses permitted in BC is less than in M Zone, and only 'light industrial' uses are permitted. However, new zone has only been applied to two properties and only existing uses permitted.
- There have been 29 amendments to By-law 77-73, with 13 total site-specific exceptions, mostly reducing performance standards (one increased rear yard only).

CURRENT POLICY AND ZONING FRAMEWORK (cont'd)

- Some amendments have added permitted uses to the area: day nurseries, offices, personal service establishments.
- 15 Minor Variances on 12 properties. Generally reduced setbacks only (one loading door facing the street, one expansion of LNC use, one expansion of LND dwelling).
- 1 pending application: A.V. Bombini ZBLA and Site Plan.

LAND USE OBSERVATIONS

- 55 out of the 103 businesses related to automobile repair.
- Many other service commercial, institutional-type uses in Study Area. Potential does exist for a wide range of industrial uses to operate.
- Many existing uses have an outdoor storage component.
- Minimal buffers between Study Area, adjacent residential uses.
- Potential exists for site contamination within Study Area.
- Given location and size of buildings, floor space costs (to buy or rent) are more affordable than in other parts of Markham.
- Potential exists for a range of start-up businesses to be attracted to the Study Area.

FUTURE TOWN-WIDE POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Town-wide Employment Lands Strategy currently underway.
- May result in a reduced number of designations, reorganized framework or (at a minimum) revised list of use permissions.
- There are other similar areas in the Town which contain the same types of uses.
- Preliminary work on strategy recognizes the value of areas like this in the provision of employment opportunities and services.
- Preliminary work also indicates that there is a shortage of employment land and that conversions should not be permitted.
- Study also indicates that all employment areas should be considered as long-term 'assets'.

POTENTIAL LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR THE AREA

Reinforce the planned function of the area. It is destination-oriented and not particularly related to or supportive of adjacent areas / uses.

Shortlist of possible permitted uses includes:

- Service commercial uses;
- Business offices, including freestanding offices;
- Ancillary / Specialty Retail; and,
- Multi-unit buildings providing office / workshop space to support business start-ups and SME's.

CONCLUSIONS

The Thornlea Industrial Park is a vital employment area that contributes to the Town's employment targets.

1. Refine Secondary Plan policy use permissions and performance standards (e.g. consider prohibiting manufacturing with nuisance uses, consider adding offices and limited retail, consider setbacks from residential uses); and,
2. Use this Report to inform Employment Lands Strategy (Phase 2).

NEXT STEPS

Report to Development Services Committee in the Fall with the following:

1. A finalized land use study; and,
2. Draft Amendments to the Official Plan, Thornhill Secondary Plan and (if required) Zoning By-law 77-73.