

UNBALANCED GROWTH IN DOWNTOWN TORONTO: MAINTAINING  
EMPLOYMENT USES IN TORONTO'S DOWNTOWN CORE

by

Melissa Eavis  
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## **Abstract**

Unbalanced Growth in Downtown Toronto: Maintaining Employment Uses in Toronto's Downtown Core

Melissa Eavis - Master of Planning, 2013

Urban Development, Ryerson University

Downtown Toronto is experiencing a significant increase in residential development. It attracts people and investment due to its mixture of land uses, transit, and vibrant urban environment. As an employment node, downtown plays an important role in the economic stability of the city. The King-Spadina case study is used to argue that unbalanced growth is occurring within a significant employment area and if left unmitigated, will seriously undermine the future employment growth opportunities that will be necessary to the continued success of the city. This study found that: 1) King-Spadina is a significant employment area, 2) King-Spadina is experiencing rapid population growth, 3) King-Spadina contains a significant amount of developable land, and 4) Residential development is displacing non-residential uses and consuming remaining soft sites at a significant pace. Recommendations are made to address the nature of growth happening in the area and to better protect long-term employment growth opportunities.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

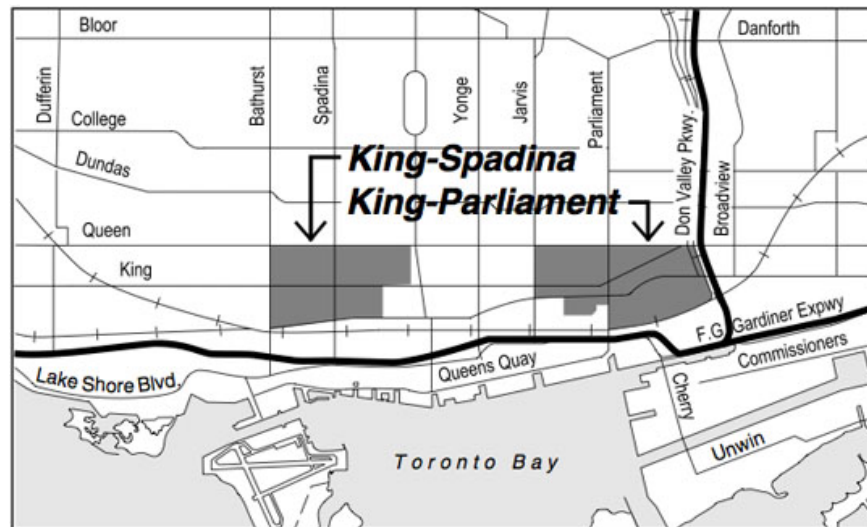
Toronto's downtown core is an important economic zone for the city, the province of Ontario and for the country as a whole. It is the epicenter for the Canadian financial market as well as the largest and most populous urban center in the country. Unlike many other North American cities, Toronto's downtown core has remained a popular residential location. As mentioned by Jennifer Keesmaat, Toronto's Chief Planner, in a recent Toronto Star article, the popularity of key employment areas as desirable living spaces has raised concerns regarding their future role in the Toronto economy (Toronto Star, November 2012). What was once a predominately employment and commercial center is now also a popular residential real estate market. This change has resulted in some unique planning challenges.

In order to understand the importance of the changing growth patterns in Toronto's downtown, it is necessary to briefly outline how growth has been managed within this area of the city thus far. The city of Toronto made a concerted effort to protect the downtown core in 1976 with The Central Area Plan (CUI, 2012). This plan was in response to the growing pressure for development to decentralize to the outer fringes of the GTA, which was relatively common during that time period. The policy's primary goals were to "contain office development, encourage residential growth and restrict high densities to the financial district, as well as a commitment to halting expressway construction linking the Central Area to the outer areas as a means to inhibit decentralization" (CUI, 2012). These initial policies helped to dampen decentralization through to the 90s though there was a significant amount of office development that occurred in surrounding municipalities (City of Toronto, 2005). In



1996, the City of Toronto “adopted a new land use planning approach” in response to the decreasing growth happening in the downtown core (The Planning Partnership, 2006). This approach was significantly evident in the policies implemented in two key areas of Toronto’s downtown core, the Kings.

Figure 1: Location of the Kings in downtown Toronto.

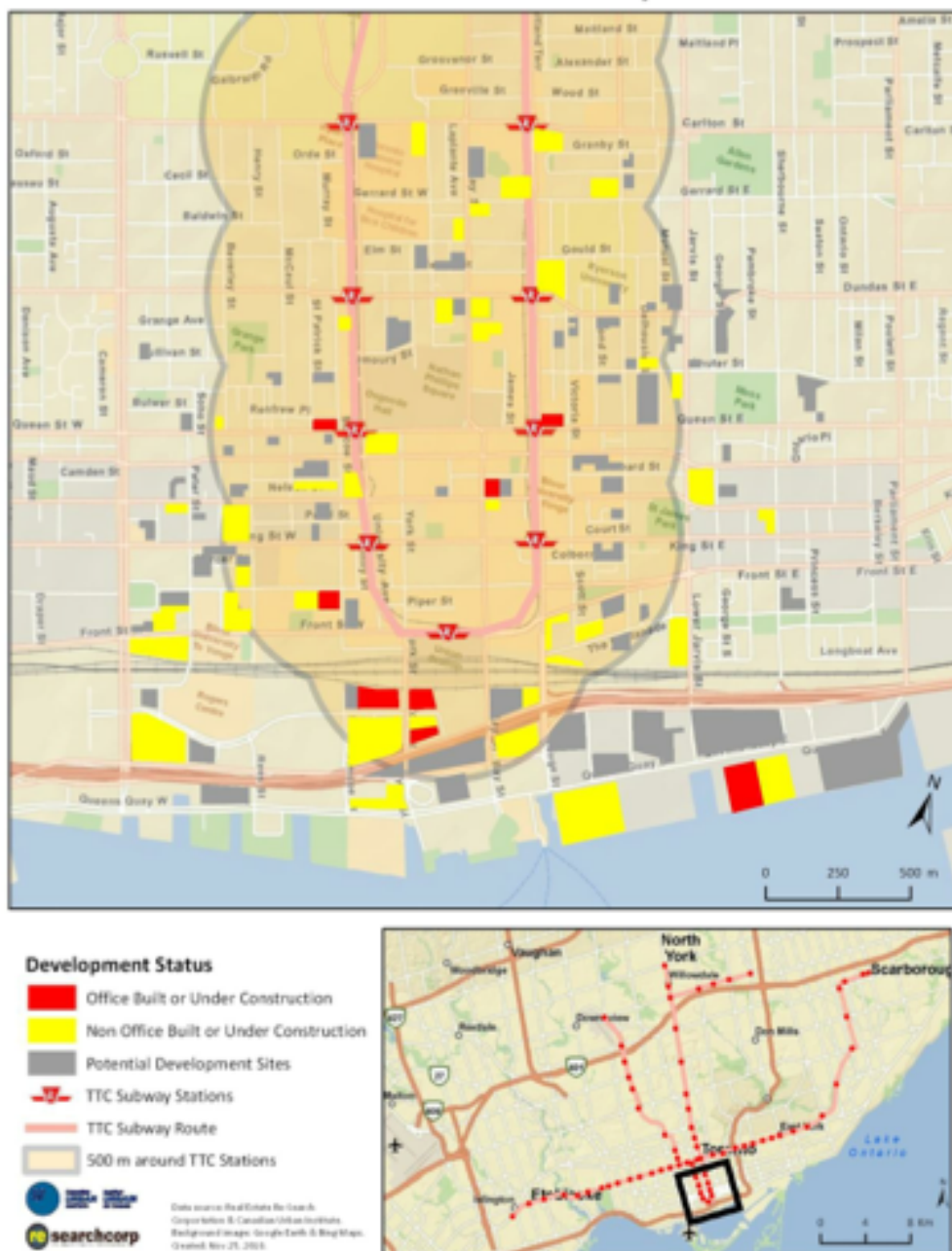


Source: Regeneration in the Kings, City of Toronto.

The Kings, identified in Figure 1, were historically, major manufacturing and industrial areas of downtown Toronto. Like many other North American cities, deindustrialization rendered the uses of these lands largely obsolete and they went into decline. As a result of the shift in the city’s planning approach in the 90s, the Kings were designated ‘Reinvestment Areas’ in order to encourage economic investment, growth and renewal within the downtown core. By establishing the Kings as Reinvestment Areas, policies “provid(ed) minimal restrictions on use and increased flexibility for redevelopment” (The Planning Partnership, 2006). After redesignation and rezoning, these areas received significant amounts of investment. These lands also became increasingly desirable for Toronto’s quickly growing condominium market and the young

professional demographic. As residential development gained momentum in the downtown core, it will be argued that non-residential development was significantly effected. The redevelopment happening in the Kings is occurring quickly and

Figure 2: Downtown Toronto Block Development 2002 - 2010



with little planning direction. Although this was the intention behind designating the Kings as Reinvestment Areas, the lack of planning direction has resulted in some unforeseen challenges. There has been little regard to the effect that increased residential growth will have on the downtown community and on the future stability of Toronto's economic health.

The downtown core has become a popular residential community and this is a desirable outcome. However, in order for the community to retain its vitality, there must be a balance of uses. As shown in Figure 2, development within the last decade has been primarily in the residential market and although this is important, it is also necessary to ensure that current employment uses and future employment opportunities are maintained.

This paper proposes to assess the current state of development happening in the downtown core and more precisely, in the King-Spadina neighbourhood. Specifically, can the unprecedented growth currently happening in the downtown core, and in the King-Spadina area be considered 'unbalanced'? What constitutes 'unbalanced' growth and what are its implications? Because this rapid growth is happening in key employment districts in the city, the impacts of that residential growth on employment lands are an important planning concern. How will significant residential growth impact the future role of downtown as an important economic hub of the city and how can planning policy mitigate those unintended consequences?

Through the use of a literature review, document analysis, case study, key informant interviews, and quantitative data analysis this study will:

1. Establish that there is unbalanced growth in Toronto's urban core

2. Argue that this unbalanced growth is happening in a significant employment area (King-Spadina) and as such puts the current and future economic stability of the city at risk
3. Determine the implications of unbalanced growth for Toronto
4. Make key planning recommendations as to how unbalanced growth can be addressed

## **Literature Review: The Importance of Downtown**

As downtown areas become more attractive for residential development, it is important to understand the role these areas play in the city's wider economy. The following section will outline the recent historical context of North American downtown growth, decline and revitalization. The next sections will discuss some of the reasons why downtown areas are both economically, socially and environmentally important. Downtown areas of most cities are considered to play a significant role in the stability and growth of a city's economy. Although suburban cities and edge cities are also playing an increasingly important role within the regional economy and the function of the downtown core has changed, its importance has not been diminished. The following literature review will outline some of the more important aspects of a city's urban core and its relation to the economic health of the surrounding region. Smart Growth and its embodiment within a city's metro core is also important. The next section will outline the Smart Growth approach and how downtowns are currently exemplifying many Smart Growth best practices.

### *Historical Context*

The downtown core is often the most vibrant area of a city and can emulate many urban planning and design best practices. They are pedestrian friendly, mixed-use spaces that provide interesting streetscapes. In many cases, they are well connected to transit and cater to a diverse population with abundant and varied needs. They can also be flexible spaces that users program to suit the specific needs of a given time or place. Downtowns are the places where we build our culturally significant and symbolic structures as well as the location of important public spaces (Rypkema, 2003).

These fundamental characteristics often make downtown areas desirable places for both people and investment.

As the demographics, values and priorities of cities change and shift, so too do the subtle natures of their downtown cores. Historically, there have been phases of downtown desirability, from both residential and commercial markets and with each shift significant changes have been wrought on both the physical form and its function within the urban environment. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, downtowns were viewed as valuable urban spaces where most of the city's commerce was carried out. Canada's downtowns were centrally located, well connected by transit "with well defined street grids, strong heritage features and...closely connected with adjacent suburbs" (CUI, 2012). Automotive transportation was still in its infancy and mass transit was starting to emerge, which meant cities were mostly walkable places with fine street grids.

After WWII many major cities in Canada went into economic decline, as did their downtown cores (CUI, 2012). With the increased popularity of the car, congestion was becoming an issue. The problems that come with mixing heavy industry and residential uses became a concern and as a result, Euclidean or single-use zoning gained popularity. Downtowns, in general, had gained a reputation for an abundance of crime, unsanitary conditions, over-crowding and social ills (Garnett, 2007). The downtown cores of many American cities also experienced decline, as the suburbs became the more desirable place to live for the middle and upper classes. This was significantly less apparent in Canadian cities as many central areas retained some residential uses, but suburban migration and sprawl was an issue. As a result of this negative perspective,

downtowns became the recipient of many revitalization projects, which in many cases were unsuccessful (CUI, 2012).

The 1980s and 1990s brought with it the realization that downtown areas were economically and culturally important. These areas could act as local employment generators as well as significant revenue sources for local governments. Downtowns were once again the focus of revitalization efforts but a different approach was taken this time around. Instead of trying to solve the social ills of downtown areas through large-scale housing and highway projects, initiatives sought to improve and build on what initially made downtown areas attractive places to live and work. Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, congestion and commute times became more of an issue and individuals began to relocate closer to the metro core to take advantage of the close proximity to employment opportunities, amenities, entertainment and public transportation. Today, downtowns in most Canadian cities enjoy improved livability and sustained growth.

### *An Economic Engine*

The inner area and central business district of most cities remains a hub of commercial and retail activity. Although many Canadian cities experienced some inner city decline during the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many downtown areas have maintained their economic importance. According to Porter (1997), inner cities provide firms with strategic location advantages and are often located in some of the most valuable areas in their regions. This value comes from their locations, which are often “near high-rent business centers, entertainment complexes, and transportation and communications nodes” (Porter, 1997). Surveys conducted in a number of cities within

the United States found that “strategic location was cited as the most important advantage for a significant majority of business” (Porter, 1997). This advantage was due in part to proximity to customers, highways and suppliers. Porter also states that the long-term stability of inner city economies depends largely on their ability to capitalize on “nearby regional clusters of firms and industries” (Porter, 1997). The idea here is to develop employment clusters within the downtown core that can then be linked to surrounding economies.

Clustering is a popular theme among the literature that deals with the role of the downtown core within a city’s wider economy. Porter has defined clusters as the “geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions [such as universities and trade associations] in a particular field that compete but also cooperate” (Porter, 2000). These clusters can vary in geographical size that can range from an entire state, a region or a single city. Vang & Chaminade (2007) found that in Toronto, film studios and related industries in particular tended to perform better when they are a part of a cluster. This is thought to be because of externalities associated with decreasing costs of production factors, knowledge spillovers and institutional support systems which is a common benefit to those industries outside of film as well (Vang & Chaminade, 2007).

Rypkema (2003) argues that downtowns will play an important role in the new global economy. According to this argument, globalization will need to be dealt with on a local scale. In order for a city to remain economically stable it will need to have firms operating on the international scale and these types of firms are often found in downtown environments. Diversity (of many forms including racial, economic,



services/goods, market, and rental) is another important aspect of our globalizing world and downtowns are often the most diverse places in the city. Preserving that diversity will go part and parcel with ensuring the continued survival of a diverse and economically significant city. Rypkema (2003) also argues that in order to have effective environmental and transportation policies, successful historic preservation and effective Smart Growth development, downtowns are not only important but irreplaceable (Rypkema, 2003).

Many Canadian downtowns continued to be popular residential markets and as such, maintained a high concentration of educated middle and upper class populations (Mercer and England, 2000). However, it should be noted that in the case of Toronto, roughly 50% of all daily commuter trips by car originate in the central city and terminate in surrounding areas (Metrolinks Personal Communication, 2013). This means that there are a significant amount of individuals who are commuting out of the downtown core for employment purposes.

Kemp (2011) argues that the suburbanization trend is now reversing. This is happening due to older individuals wanting the convenience and accessibility of living downtown. Also, Kemp states that young people are “postponing the American Dream” to focus on careers which are largely happening in the downtown cores. Changes in mode of travel are also increasing the population living downtown as people opt to ride their bike, walk or take transit to work.

Downtowns are also popular retail destinations and Robertson (1997) discusses how the downtown cores of many cities have remained competitive with the suburban shopping mall. Robertson identifies four ways in which downtown cores have attempted

to compete with the suburban shopping experience. These strategies are: pedestrian malls, festival marketplaces, indoor shopping centers, and mixed- use centers.

Providing services and amenities to downtown residential communities is also an important aspect of ensuring these areas maintain retail and commercial uses.

Although decentralization is an important issue in today's planning context, downtown areas are still vitally important to the economic health of our cities (Charney, 2005). Unlike the United States, Canada's downtown cores have remained relatively vibrant though some decline has occurred (Charney, 2005). Considering the current role of downtowns within Canada, a number of important issues become evident. Firstly, downtowns are still economically significant for most cities. For instance, downtown Vancouver accounts for less than 10% of the overall tax assessment base of the city but generates 20% of total property taxes (CUI, 2012). In Halifax, the downtown comprises less than 1% of Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM) total land mass but holds 46% of the office floor space of the entire municipality (CUI, 2012). Charney (2005) states that there are four factors that allow Canadian downtowns to continue to thrive: 1) "livable inner cities", 2) "suburbanization of a lesser scale", 3) "better transit access" and 4) "intense political sponsorship" (p303). According to Charney, these factors, combined with a strong development community is what keeps Canadian downtowns economically important (ibid). With a renewed interest in living and working in the downtown core, it is important that planners ensure urban cores are developed in a balanced way while still encouraging both residential and non-residential development (ibid).

Toronto's downtown is doubly important. Not only does it play a significant role in the economic health of the Province of Ontario but it also plays an important role within Canada. As a world city, Toronto is Canada's gateway to the global market. The city contributes 11% to Canada's total GDP and is home to the country's financial services sector, a major driver of the economy (City of Toronto, 2012). It is one of the fastest

Figure 3: Toronto's Downtown Core and Financial District



Source: City of Toronto, Official Plan

growing cities in North America with over 185 high-rise buildings currently under construction (ibid).

Toronto's downtown (the boundaries of which are shown in Figure 3) is home to 168,604 residents. From 1996 to 2006, the number of dwelling units in the downtown grew by 40%. Population grew by 17%, which is significantly higher than the 5% growth experienced in the rest of the city. As mentioned, Toronto's downtown is also a major employment center. There are approximately 260 jobs per hectare and the area holds 53% of the city's office space. Downtown also generates 25% of the city's property tax

revenue (CUI, 2012). These figures support the argument that Toronto's downtown core is economically important to the stability and growth of the city and the region.

### *Smart Growth*

Understanding the tenets of the Smart Growth approach may provide some insight into the importance of preserving employment uses in the downtown core and why it will be a vital area in future economic growth. Smart growth developed as a response to the detrimental effects of urban sprawl and unsustainable housing and commuting practices. It was originally a "reaction to the sprawling form of urbanization" which was and still is, having a significant impact on quality of life and on the environment (Filion, 2003). The term was first used in Maryland legislation in 1997 where it sought to "limit the sprawling patterns of low-density residential development and arterial strip commercial development, spilling outside of existing cities and villages" (Daniels, 2001). Smart growth policies were thought to encourage "land-use plans and ordinances that promote efficient infrastructure and well-designed development" (ibid). This is done primarily through promoting mixed-use development, intensifying on existing built areas and around existing infrastructure, making transit a priority and taking steps to support environmentally conscious practices (Ontario Smart Growth, 2003). In order for the smart growth approach to be successful in limiting sprawl and reducing environmental degradation, a balance of uses is necessary.

The success of the Smart Growth approach relies heavily on mixing both residential, commercial and employment uses. One of the key characteristics of downtown that makes it so economically and socially successful is that this mix of use is typical in the urban form. Living downtown often means being close to employment

opportunities, connections to major transit routes and easy access to amenities. It has been argued that the mixed-use nature of many urban cores has been a significant force behind the success of many downtown areas (Jacobs, 1960). Planners have advocated a mix of uses since the beginning of the profession and even when segregating uses became a popular practice, planners encouraged access to amenities and retail within residential neighborhoods (Grant & Perrott, 2011).

This idea is particularly useful when considering the importance of maintaining employment uses within the downtown area. In fact, Ontario Smart Growth defines “balanced growth” as: “Increases in population and employment that are distributed in such a way that municipalities have a mix of business and residential uses. This means that people can live near where they work” (Ontario Smart Growth, 2003). If mixed-use development is a key aspect of creating vibrant communities that are attractive for individuals and employers, then ensuring that residential development does not consume existing or potential employment land is crucial to the continued success of the city. Also, with increased densities, those new residents will need access to employment or they will be forced to commute and further exacerbate existing congestion issues. For these reasons, if Toronto’s downtown core can remain both a successful residential neighborhood as well as a significant employment node, it will be to the benefit of not only the downtown residents but also to the economic stability of the city.

## **Method**

A mixed-method approach was used to determine exactly what constitutes unbalanced growth and the extent to which this unbalanced growth has been occurring in the downtown core of Toronto. Through the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study attempts to fully understand not only the nature of growth in the downtown core, but also how this growth will affect the sustainability and livability of the downtown community. Specifically, document analyses, a case study, key informant interviews, fieldwork and qualitative data analysis were employed.

To understand the repercussions of recent development happening in the downtown core, a key policy area was assessed, King-Spadina. This area was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a unique policy area and because of that, the area has been undergoing rapid growth over the last number of years. Secondly, it is considered to be an area where there is still considerable room for growth. Places like the financial district, which is also a significant employment area, has for the most part, very little room for any significant development capacity. This makes the developable land in King-Spadina that much more valuable. Thirdly, this area has traditionally been used for employment purposes and changes in land-use will have considerable impact on the nature of the urban environment and future employment growth opportunity.

The document analysis was conducted with three primary goals in mind: to determine the policy direction that the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto have taken in regards to managing development and maintaining employment within the downtown core; and to inventory and understand the existing research and knowledge

base that informs much of the policy regarding Toronto's metro core. To this end, the policies and reports shown in Table 1 were reviewed.

Other downtown areas in North America and Europe have also experienced this type of rapid residential growth and understanding how this issue has been addressed in other cities will be important in formulating an appropriate planning response for the City of Toronto. Approximately ten years ago, the City of Vancouver was dealing with a very similar issue. A popular residential real estate market in the downtown core was pushing out employment uses. In response, the city developed the "Metropolitan Core Area Jobs, Economy and Land Use Plan". A case study of Vancouver's response will be used to further support the importance of this issue and its time sensitive nature.

Table 1: Policies and Reports Reviewed

Understanding Policy	Reports and Studies
Planning Act, 1990 <i>Province of Ontario, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing</i>	"Regeneration in the Kings" <i>City of Toronto, 2003</i>
Provincial Policy Statement <i>Province of Ontario, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing</i>	"King-Spadina Secondary Plan Review" <i>The Planning Partnership, 2006</i> prepared for the City of Toronto
Places to Grow Act, 2005 <i>Province of Ontario, Ministry of Infrastructure</i>	"From the Ground Up: Growing Toronto's Cultural Sector" <i>Martin Prosperity Institute et.al.</i> prepared for the City of Toronto
Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe <i>Province of Ontario, Ministry of Infrastructure</i>	"Long-Term Employment Land Strategy, City of Toronto" <i>Hemson Consulting Ltd</i> prepared for the City of Toronto, 2007
Official Plan <i>City of Toronto</i>	"The New Geography of Office Location and the Consequences of Business as Usual in the GTA" <i>Canadian Urban Institute, 2011</i>
King-Spadina Secondary Plan <i>City of Toronto</i>	"The Value of Investing in Canadian Downtowns" <i>Canadian Urban Institute, 2012</i>
King-Parliament Secondary Plan, <i>City of Toronto</i>	

Qualitative data analysis was also used to provide tangible evidence of the changes taking place in the King-Spadina area and was used to demonstrate the unbalanced growth that is currently occurring there. The King-Spadina study area that

has been used for data collection is shown in Figure 11. Data was gathered during fieldwork that occurred in May and June of 2012 which included a soft site analysis that cataloged developable sites defined as properties with a depth of 30m or greater and containing 1 to 2 storey buildings, parking or vacant lots. Lots with depths of 30m or less are less useful for development purposes. Also, lots with no buildings or buildings that are less than 2 or 3 storeys are considered to be underutilized sites and therefore, prime development spaces. This inventory demonstrates the supply of developable land currently available in King-Spadina.

The City of Toronto employment data from 2003 to 2012 was also used for analysis. This data was collected as a part of the Toronto Employment Survey which the city conducts every year. The employment data for King-Spadina was aggregated by block to protect the privacy of the participants.

Statistics Canada Census data was also used for the 1999, 2001, 2006 and 2011 census periods. It is important to note that the census tract data includes two blocks on the west side of the King-Spadina study area that are not included in the employment or fieldwork data. Although this difference may cause some minor discrepancies in some of the comparisons, it does not significantly distort any findings.

Development application data from January 2001 to June 2012 is also used to demonstrate the amount of new residential development taking place in King-Spadina. This data is used to calculate how much non-residential space is being lost and gained with each proposed development.



## Policy Framework

Provincial and municipal governments have also recognized the importance of maintaining the downtown areas of Ontario cities. They have instituted policies that support the creation and maintenance of strong downtowns. These policy initiatives range from specific policies like design standards to more broad overarching policies that deal with the long-term vision governments have for their downtown cores. Both types of policy are necessary in maintaining the health and vitality of a city's urban center. It is also important, for the purposes of this study, to understand the key policy documents that are applicable to the sustainability and health of downtown areas in order to address some of the more pressing policy issues moving forward.

The *Provincial Policy Statement* (PPS) is the Province's overarching policy vision that guides land use within the Province of Ontario and is legislated under section 3 of the *Planning Act*. It represents the provinces interest in land use planning and development. Its most current iteration provides policy initiatives on building strong communities, the efficient use of resources and infrastructure, and the creation and maintenance of mixed-use compact communities. There are a few key areas of the PPS that are most applicable to employment and downtown areas. Section 1.3 - Employment Areas, addresses the need to maintain a stable and diverse employment base within the province. Specifically, Section 1.3.3 states that "planning for, protecting and preserving employment areas for current and future uses" and conversions to other non-employment can only be done after a comprehensive review where it has been demonstrated that the area will not be useful for employment purposes in the long term and that the conversion is necessary (PPS, 2005). In terms of downtown areas, Section

1.7.1 states that long term prosperity will be supported through “maintaining and, where possible, enhancing the vitality and viability of downtowns and mainstreets” (PPS, 2005).

Another important policy document that provides support for downtown areas and city centers is the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006), which is legislated under the *Places to Grow Act, 2005*. The Growth Plan outlines how and where communities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) will grow until 2031. This policy initiative focuses on the creation of compact, transit-supportive communities that have walkable neighborhoods and vibrant streetscapes. One of its primary functions is to “revitalize downtowns to become vibrant and convenient centres” (GPGGH, 2006). The creation and maintenance of downtown areas is an important aspect of this policy initiative and is enabled through targeted intensification policies coupled with the designation of 25 Urban Centers. Under the GPGGH, the downtown core of Toronto has been designated as an Urban Growth Center and is required to meet a minimum density target of 400 people and jobs per hectare. By combining the two targets (people and jobs per hectare), the province is signaling the mixed-use nature of future growth. However, in attempting to meet these targets municipalities may rely more so on the more easily attainable residential component. There is currently no required ratio of jobs to people that each growth center should have. This oversight may jeopardize the mixed-use nature of growth centers that have high residential demand like Toronto’s downtown core.

The next layer of policy that enacts the legislation previously outlined and also plays a fundamental role in the development of vibrant and mixed-use urban centers is

a city's Official Plan (OP). For the City of Toronto, Section 2.2 states that growth will be directed to those areas that are already well serviced by transit and have a high redevelopment potential. Specifically, Section 2.2 states that growth will be directed to "Centers, Avenues, Employment Districts and the Downtown" (OP, 2002). Under Section 2.2.1, *Downtown: The Heart of Toronto*, the planning vision for the downtown core is outlined. The downtown is recognized as a critical component to the continued health and stability of the city.

Secondary Plans are also an important policy initiative as they "establish local development policies to guide growth and change in a defined area of the City" (OP, 2002). These plans implement policies outlined in the OP and ensure that the goals and objectives of the OP are being executed as intended. There are currently ten secondary plans located in the downtown core. This study focuses on the King-Spadina secondary plan area.

Although there is a clear hierarchy to the above policy initiatives and the interconnected and interrelated nature of the framework is important, there are key areas where there is a disconnect between the policies relating to the downtown areas and their importance as economic engines and key employment districts. The designation of "Employment Area" does not necessarily mean an area where a large amount of employment takes place. The PPS states that an Employment Area "means those areas designated in an official plan for clusters of business and economic activities including, but not limited to, manufacturing, warehousing, offices, and associated retail and ancillary facilities" (PPS, 2005). As such, areas without Official Plan Employment Area designation, like the downtown core, are not afforded the same

protection. That is not to say that the downtown should be designated as an “Employment Area” as the priorities and goals of city centers are fundamentally different from employment districts. However, there should be some mechanism to protect the plentiful and important employment that is occurring in the downtown core.

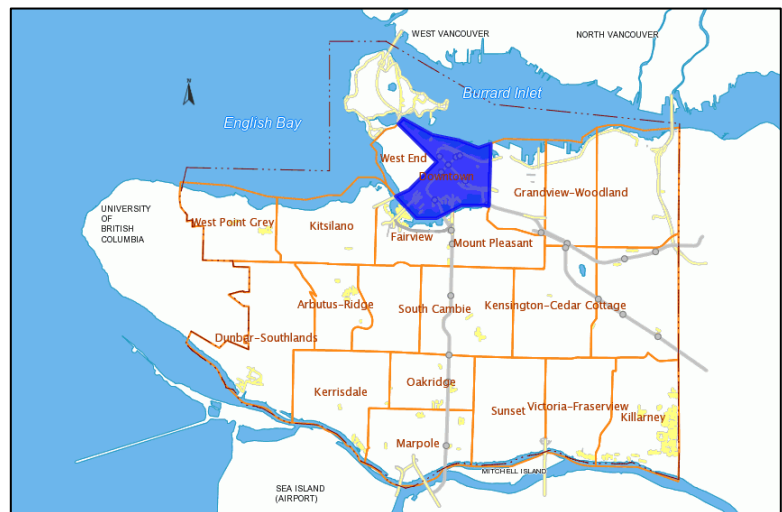
## Unbalanced Growth Case Study

There are instances of other Canadian cities besides Toronto that have also experienced a sharp increase in residential growth within the downtown core. This growth is often in response to an intentional direction taken by the city to revitalize an area that has gone into decline. As suggested in the discussion on Smart Growth practices, mixed-use urban areas have many positive benefits. However, residential growth can lead to problems if it is not managed correctly. The following case study, outlines how the City of Vancouver has experienced this issue and how they are trying to remedy this oversight.

### *Vancouver Case Study*

Vancouver has been experiencing rapid housing development and a booming residential real estate market within the downtown core since the early 1990s (Terplan, 2007). This

Figure 4: Vancouver's Downtown Core



Source: City of Vancouver Website, 2013

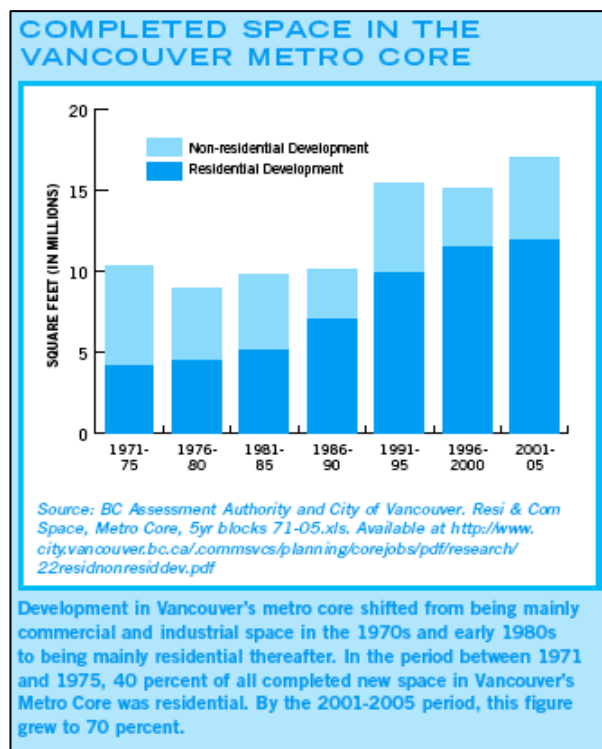
sustained residential growth has greatly changed the face of Vancouver's central business district and downtown core. It has also resulted in some interesting planning issues and responses that could be useful in determining how and, more importantly, *when* to address some of the same issues that are currently playing out within Toronto's

downtown core. The following case study of Vancouver's unbalanced growth problem is useful in understanding what has been happening in Toronto and to demonstrate that this is a time sensitive issue that needs immediate attention. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Vancouver devised and implemented the Living First planning strategy. This initiative was in response to the "stall" in development that was happening in the early 1980s due to the economic recession coupled with inadequate zoning, old and deteriorating housing stock, and expanding square footage for housing (Challenge Series, 2009). The Living First initiative promoted residential development within the downtown metropolitan core by "emphasizing housing intensity and diversity; coherent, identifiable neighbourhoods; and regional architectural principles" (Challenge Series, 2009). As shown in Figure 4, the Metro Core consists of three areas: Downtown, South of False Creek and the Eastern Core (City of Vancouver, 2009). Under the direction of Vancouver's Central Area Planning Department and the policy framework of the Central Area Plan, the city rezoned 8 million square feet of commercial and industrial land located in the city's core to residential use (Terplan, 2007). The waterfront rail yards were also converted and used for residential development (Terplan, 2007). The population of the core then swelled from 105,000 residents to 135,000 and 24 million square feet of residential space was constructed. By the end of the decade, the population growth rate of the metropolitan core had doubled. Problems began when it became obvious that residential development was significantly outpacing non-residential development. During the same time period, only 8.7 square feet of non-residential space was added to the metropolitan core (Terplan, 2007). As shown in Figure 5, nearly 70% of all completed space in Vancouver's downtown core between

2001 and 2005 was residential. As of 2006, nearly one third of head office jobs had left the city and there were more people leaving the core during the morning rush hour than coming in (Boddy, 2006).

There is no question that the Living First initiative and the resulting residential growth successfully revitalized the downtown core. In the two decades prior to the

Figure 5: Completed Space in the Vancouver Metro Core



Source: Terplan, 2007

implementation of the Living First

strategy, "the defining planning problem

was the rampant growth of offices in the

CBD, and a lack of downtown housing

capacity" (Hutton, 2009). However, with

the Living First initiative, the urban form

and use of downtown Vancouver was

irrevocably changed. Boddy (2005)

suggests that downtown Vancouver was

losing its 'downtownness' and that it was

becoming a single-use community very

similar to the traditional suburban form

and with similar problems.

At this point we can draw some parallels to the current situation unfolding in areas of Toronto's downtown core. Similar to the downturn experienced by Vancouver in the 1980s, King-Spadina and King-Parliament also experienced decline during the decades leading up to the 1990s. As manufacturing and industrial activities relocated to

offshore markets and Toronto shifted to a more service based economy, these areas experienced massive disinvestment. In 1996, the City of Toronto sought to encourage growth and investment within these areas and they did this by designating these traditional manufacturing districts to “Reinvestment Areas”. Although the spirit of the designation was slightly different then that of Vancouver’s Living First approach, the fundamental principals were similar; to provide “minimal restrictions on use and increased flexibility for redevelopment, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of built form” (Planning Partnership, 2006). The city wanted to funnel investment into the area in whatever form the market dictated.

As intended, development dollars flowed into the Kings. As of 2006 in King-Spadina, 75% of new investment was residential and between 1996 and 2006 the number of dwellings increased from 480 to 3,155 (both occupied and proposed). Also, by opening up the zoning, these areas have become attractive to developers and as such, residential growth has been occurring at a phenomenal rate. As a later section of this study will argue, this trend of rapid residential development seen in the late 1990s and early 2000s has not changed overly much.

So how has Vancouver dealt with the issue of unbalanced growth? After almost two decades of uncontrolled residential growth in the downtown core and a significant loss of jobs and employment space, the city began to seriously consider the issue. In 2005, city planning undertook a strategic policy review entitled “Metropolitan Core Area Jobs, Economy and Land Use Plan”. The purpose of this plan was to “estimate the land use requirements of the city’s economy” and to “ensure enough land (through zoning and land use policy) for future job growth and economic activity in the Metro Core”



(Terplan, 2007 and City of Vancouver, 2009). The study was conducted in four phases or steps:

- ❖ Step 1: Understanding Yesterday and Today
- ❖ Step 2: Projecting the Future
- ❖ Step 3: Issues and Directions
- ❖ Step 4: Policies for Tomorrow

*Step 1: Understanding Yesterday and Today* outlined much of what has been discussed here regarding how Vancouver's unbalanced growth problem began. It also set the stage for further discussion on the existing land supply in Vancouver's Metro Core. This step considered the trends occurring over the last 30 years. Specifically this step identified the following issues:

- 1) The Metro Core plays a key economic role in a growing region.
- 2) The number of jobs in the Metro Core has been growing; jobs are diverse across economic sectors.
- 3) The economy is changing and adapting to reflect broader economic trends.

(City of Vancouver, 2009)

*Step 2: Projecting the Future* assessed both the projected supply and demand for the study time period. For demand, job projections were based on "economic factors, such as provincial GDP, and demographic factors such as birth rates and immigration" (City of Vancouver, 2009). Between the years of 1971 to 2001 the Greater Vancouver Region grew by 30,000 people per year and the total population is forecasted to be close to 2,900,000 by 2031. The City of Vancouver is expected to grow by 3,900 people per year and reach a total population of 660,000 by 2031 (City of Vancouver, 2009). Based on these population forecasts, there is expected to be 420,000 jobs in the City of Vancouver by 2031. The Metro Core holds the largest concentration of these jobs at

64% of the city's employment. This is not expected to change and in 2031 the Metro Core will exceed 270,000 jobs. The space requirements for this projected demand were then calculated based on employment type and typical amount of space for each category of employment use. The space requirements were categorized based on either commercial or industrial uses and detailed floor space requirements for each sector were calculated based on existing assessment information.

This analysis resulted in two demand scenarios for each type of space:

*Commercial Space Demand – High* and *Commercial Space Demand – Low*; and *Industrial Space Demand – High* and *Industrial Space Demand Low*. These scenarios estimate the *additional* floor space that will be needed to accommodate demand until 2031. Table 2 summarizes these scenarios. As expected, there is a much lower projection for industrial space demand.

Table 2: Employment Space Demand Scenarios

	Commercial (sq. ft.)	Industrial (sq. ft.)
<b>High Demand*</b>	15,000,000	2,800,000
<b>Low Demand**</b>	4,800,000	1,400,000

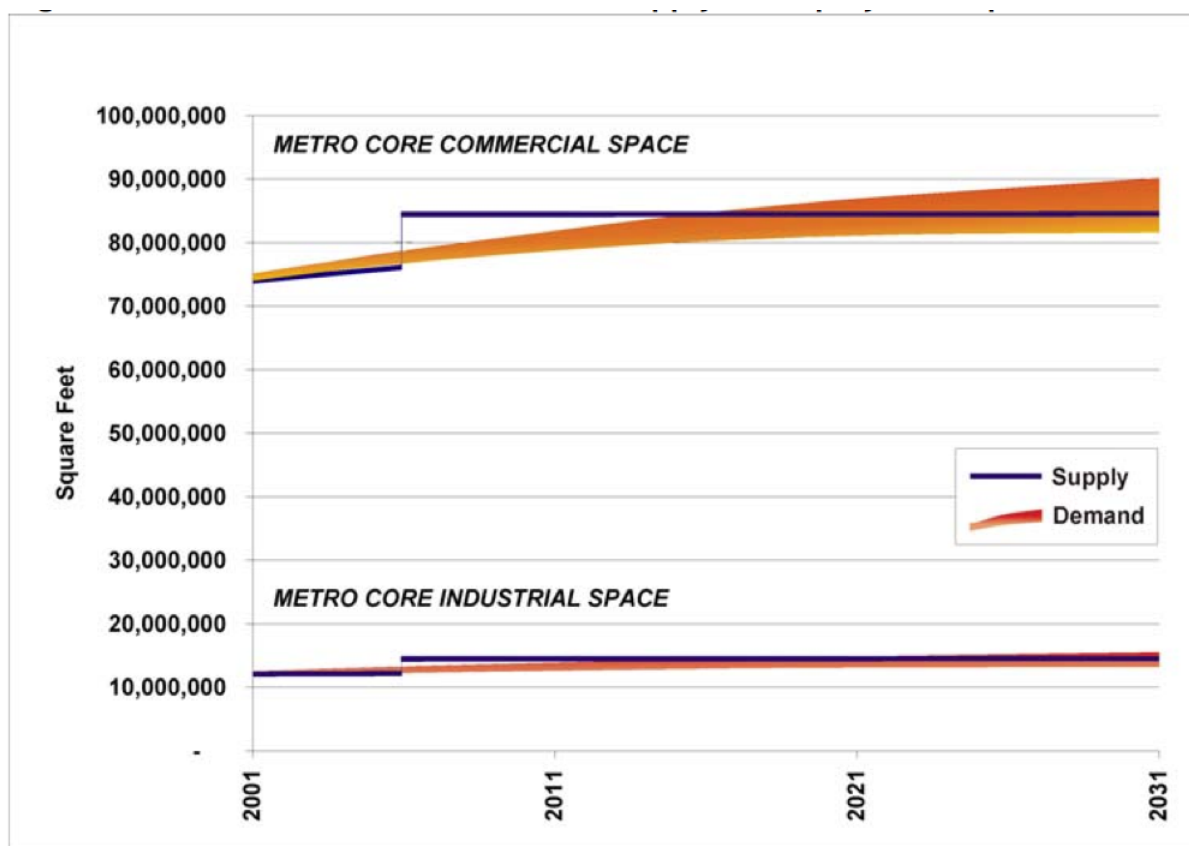
\*High: Commercial - Work at home stays the same, 4% increase in demand for retail space; Industrial – No change in demand patterns

\*\*Low: Commercial - 2.4% increase for work at home, no change in retail, and 10% reduction in office space FSW; Industrial – 10% reduction in FSW

In terms of supply projections, a site-by-site field assessment and zoning analysis were completed to assess “building age and size, height limits, site consolidation and ownership patterns” (City of Vancouver, 2009). These characteristics would provide a good indication as to the likelihood of a site developing before 2031.

Once a list was compiled of the sites that were most likely to develop within the plan timeframe (before 2031), zoning restrictions and market demand trends were used to determine “realistic potential” for development (City of Vancouver, 2009). The analysis concluded that if the zoning remained as is, the Metro Core could

Figure 6: Future Demand and Potential Supply of Employment Space – Vancouver Metro Core



Source: City of Vancouver, Metro Core Study, 2009

accommodate a total of 86,000,000 sq. ft. of commercial space and 14,500,000 sq. ft. of industrial space. As shown in Figure 6, demand will likely outstrip supply in the long-term. In particular, this study revealed that the downtown core will run out of commercial space between 2011 and 2025, South of False Creek Area would run out in the medium term (which is undefined but outside of the 2031 timeframe) and the Eastern Core Area supply would easily accommodate future demand in the long-term.

Drawing on the analysis of Step 2 and the findings that indicate Downtown Vancouver will run out of employment space in the short term, *Step 3: Issues and Directions* provide policy direction to address these issues. A set of general policy directives resulted from Step 3 and these include: the reaffirmation of the Metro Core as an important employment node for the Greater Vancouver Area, to ensure that the diversity of employment space is encouraged to meet the needs of a changing economy, to support sustainable transportation practices, to expand the CBD and reaffirm its important economic and cultural role, to exclude market housing development from key areas, to encourage true mixed-use development in areas that have less employment importance, to discourage conversions of office buildings, and to ensure that areas with an industrial designation are used for production, distribution and repair (PDR) activities (City of Vancouver, 2007). Also, a description of how these policies will directly increase job capacity in each job area within the Metro Core was also provided. Figure 7 provides a useful map that demonstrates how these policies will directly increase or have no effect the employment space supply until 2031 in each area within Metro Core. As shown, the policies increase job supply in most areas and this is done through increasing density, prohibiting residential development, requiring minimum

commercial density for mixed-use developments, requiring job space as a part of density bonusing, limiting retail uses in designated industrial areas, and the rezoning residential areas to commercial uses.

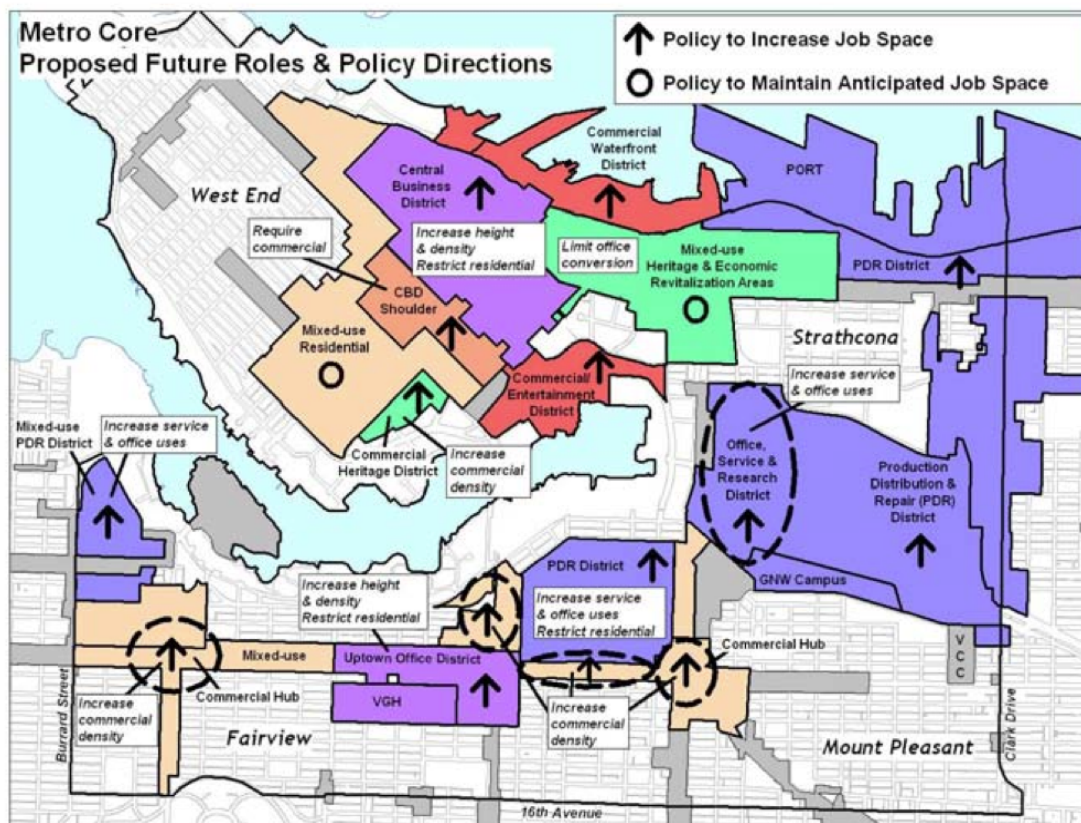
The Plan makes a number of issues and assumptions that should be considered when attempting to draw parallels between the issues that Vancouver faced in the early 2000s and the situation Toronto is currently dealing with. For one, Vancouver and Toronto have very different economic profiles. Toronto is the epicenter of Canada's financial market. Secondly, assumptions in market trends were based on the premise that the market will stay as is and current demand was simply projected forward. This is one possibility, however, market trends are rarely so predictable and as such, attempting to accurately forecast market trends until 2031 may be difficult if not impossible.

Another issue is the fact that ensuring the supply of employment land until 2031 is, in reality, not a very long-term vision though effectively and accurately planning beyond this point is difficult. Considering the fact that there is a finite amount of land in our urban environments and that barring any catastrophic events, our cities will be here for centuries, it seems very limited to allow for development in such a short timeframe. That is not to say that cities can realistically and accurately plan for long-term growth; it would be a futile effort. However, vacant or underdeveloped land located in the downtown areas of established cities should be treated as precious commodities. Utilizing them to the fullest and best use when it is necessary and preserving them for long-term growth opportunities when at all possible should be a basic requirement. The

goal of the city's government and policy makers should be to find a way to balance short-term market gains with long-term planning objectives.

The Metropolitan Core Area Jobs, Economy and Land Use Plan demonstrates that the city of Vancouver has recognized the imprudence of allowing excessive and fast-paced residential development within the downtown core. The sustained health and vitality of any city center is greatly dependent on a successful and diverse economic base. Although residential development is a highly lucrative real-estate sector, and greatly contributes to the health and vitality of a city's downtown core, policy makers must be diligent in ensuring development is of a mixed use nature and take steps to protect areas for future employment growth opportunities.

Figure 7: Metro Core Proposed Future Roles & Policy Directions



Source: City of Vancouver, Step 3: Issues and Directions, 2007

## **Unbalanced Growth in Toronto's Downtown Core**

Like Vancouver, Toronto's downtown core has also been experiencing sustained and rapid residential development. This residential development is often in the form of high-rise condominium towers. To be clear, this residential growth is a desirable outcome for a downtown area and forms the foundation of a vibrant and sustainable metropolitan community. The issue lies in the fact that the downtown core is an important employment area and the land supply is finite. Once these lands are completely built out, there will be little opportunity to revert residential space to other uses. A balance of uses is necessary in creating complete communities that are transit supportive, well animated and diverse. To ensure that this area of the city is developed with long-term sustainability and stability it is imperative that employment uses are preserved and that there is room for future non-residential growth. The issues that are prevalent in existing suburban environments demonstrate that single-use development is unable to create livable and sustainable communities. As demonstrated with the Smart Growth approach, creating a true mixed-use community that accounts for residential, commercial and employment needs is a much more advantageous form of development.

In support of this argument, this study will limit analysis to the King-Spadina area. Although this area is unique in that its designation as a Reinvestment Area has significantly effected how development has occurred, it is also an important employment area and contains some of the most developable land within the downtown core. Because the downtown is for the most part built out, the preservation of existing employment areas in popular residential markets, like King-Spadina and others located

throughout the downtown core, will become crucial to the future economic stability of the city.

The following discussion will demonstrate that: 1) King-Spadina is a significant employment area; 2) the area is experiencing rapid population growth; and 3) that there is a significant amount of developable land remaining in the area. It will be argued that the remaining supply of developable land in King-Spadina should be managed with the goal of preserving existing employment uses and promoting more balanced development moving forward.

*1) King-Spadina is a significant employment area*

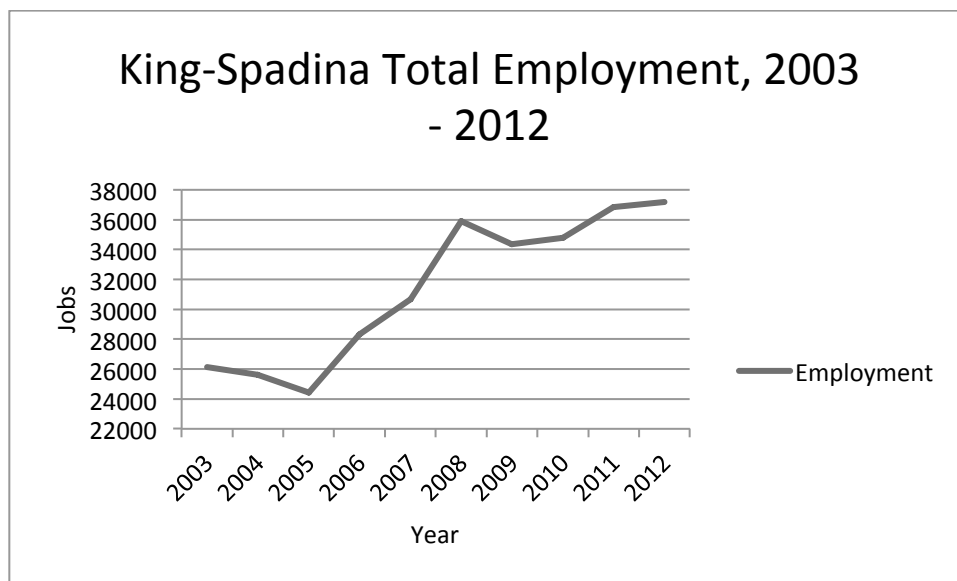
King-Spadina is approximately 1km<sup>2</sup> and, like the rest of downtown Toronto, has a fine grain street grid with high-density development. The study area is located west of Toronto's financial district and its boundaries are shown in Figure 11. King-Spadina has a rich history within the City of Toronto. Historically, it was a major manufacturing and industrial node. As globalization saw the outsourcing of these sectors, the area fell into decline (Planning Partnership, 2007). This fact, coupled with the "recession in the early 1990s, resulted in the area no longer being of relevance as a viable manufacturing district" (Planning Partnership, 2007). In 1996, the city designated the area as a 'Reinvestment Area', which relaxed planning controls and "sparked an almost immediate wave of major reinvestment" (ibid).

But what role is King-Spadina currently playing in Toronto's employment base? Figure 8 shows the total employment occurring in the area between the years 2003 and 2012. As shown, employment has significantly increased during this time period within the study area. Other than some decline occurring between 2003 and 2005,



employment has been steadily increasing. In 2003 there were approximately 26,150 jobs in the King-Spadina area. Within ten years that number rose to 37,170, a percentage change of approximately 42%. This is significantly higher than the city's overall employment growth that occurred from 2001 to 2011. Total employment for the city of Toronto rose from 1,286,300 jobs in 2001 to 1,317,300 jobs in 2011, a percentage change of 2.4%.

Figure 8: Total Employment in King-Spadina, 2003 - 2012.



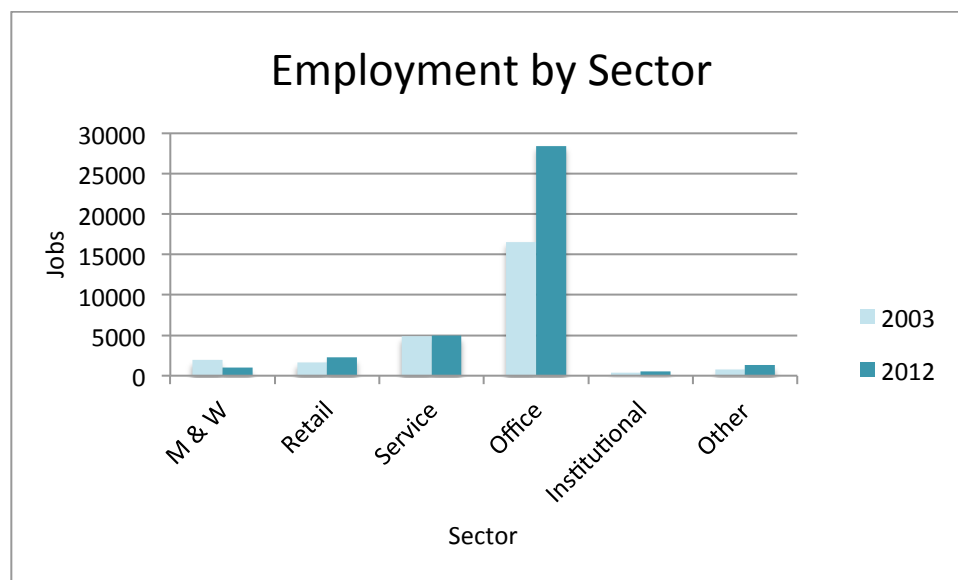
Source: Toronto Employment Survey, 2003 – 2012

The accelerated growth rate of employment within the King-Spadina neighborhood demonstrates the area's importance as a significant employment node within the downtown core. It is also worth noting that employment gains were primarily in the office sector as shown in Figure 9. This is important as growth in the retail or service sector usually means a growth in low paying jobs with little room for mobility. The only sector to experience job loss was the Manufacturing and Warehousing sector

which is expected as many of these processes are relocating or being outsourced (Shown as M&W in Figure 9). There are a number of reasons that this area maybe appealing to employers, especially those desiring office space. It is centrally located and well serviced by higher order transit making it an attractive location choice for firms in need of office space.

It is also worth noting that the GTA is currently experiencing accelerated employment growth. Office vacancy rates across the GTA have decreased from 5.6% to 5.1% during the first quarter of 2012. Predictably, rents increased from an average of \$15.77 per square foot to \$16.12 due to the decreased supply (Toronto Star, April 2012). If this trend continues, the current supply of non-residential space and the potential supply of developable land in key employment nodes will become even more important.

Figure 9: Employment by Sector in King-Spadina, 2003 - 2012



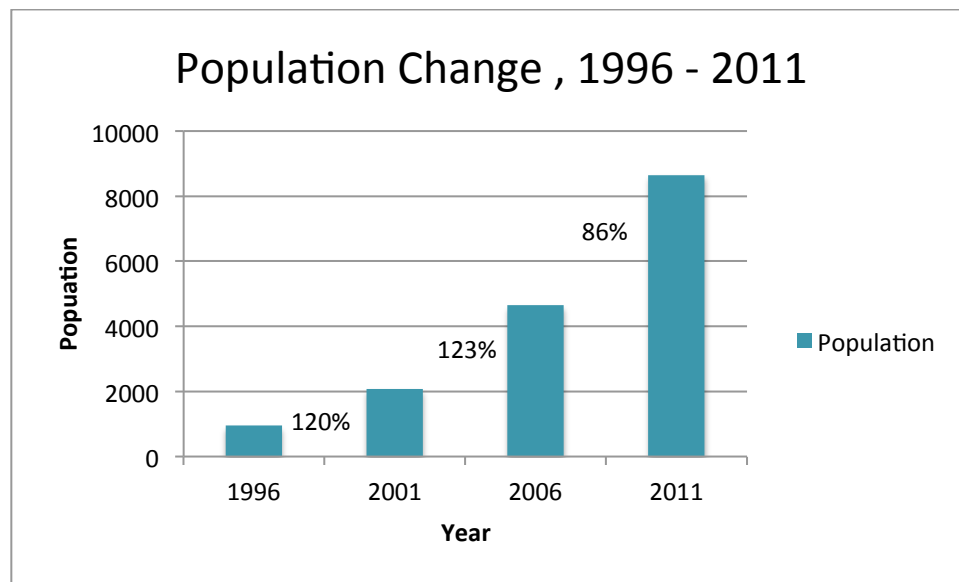
Source: Toronto Employment Survey, 2003 – 2012  
(M&W = Manufacturing and Warehousing)

## *2) King-Spadina is experiencing rapid population growth*

Toronto as a whole has been experiencing population increase from both immigration and intra- and interprovincial migration. With this increased population and the growth projected in the GPGGH, measures need to be taken to ensure that growth is occurring in a sustainable way. Not only do these new Torontonians need actual jobs, but they also need sustainable ways of getting to these jobs as well as other services and amenities. Creating complete communities that can offer residents access to employment and services within walking and cycling distance will be necessary in order to avoid costly congestion and environmental degradation associated with unmitigated sprawl. As shown in Figure 10, King-Spadina has also experienced robust population increases. From 1996 to 2011, the area grew from a population of 945 to 8645.

As of 2011, 5,500 additional dwelling units were being constructed in Toronto's downtown core alone. Externalities associated with an influx of residential uses include higher demand for services such as transit, amenities, community and public space, schools and entertainment as well as issues associated with a decreasing land supply that is being rapidly developed. A decrease in land supply within the downtown core has the effect of driving up land costs, which further discourages employment development due to the higher profitability, associated with residential development. Because land is extremely costly to develop in the downtown area and because there is more profit to be made in residential development, non-residential development declines.

Figure 10: Population Change in King-Spadina from 1996 - 2011



Source: Census of Canada, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011

*3) King-Spadina contains a significant amount of developable land*

According to the soft site analysis conducted within the King-Spadina study area, there is over 103,082m<sup>2</sup> of developable land. These areas are a part of a very limited land supply within the downtown core and their location is shown in Figure 11. There are also a number of constrained soft sites that were excluded from the final selection due to the need for assembly or accessibility issues. Taking those sites into consideration would further support the argument that King-Spadina holds immense future growth opportunity.

*4) Residential development is displacing non-residential uses and consuming remaining soft sites at a significant pace*

Since King-Spadina has been designated as a Reinvestment Area and zoning has been relaxed, there has been a significant increase in development. However, if we

consider the development applications over the past decade we can see that most of the development has been residential in nature. Since 2003 there has been proposed development on 165,723m<sup>2</sup> of land in King-Spadina. Of that 165,723m<sup>2</sup>, approximately 130,400m<sup>2</sup> or 79% has been primarily residential in nature (strictly residential or residential with retail at grade). Many of these developments are large condominium towers and contain a total ground floor area of 1,337,348m<sup>2</sup>.

According to the soft site analysis, there is approximately 103,082m<sup>2</sup> of remaining developable land within the study area. If the trends of the past decade continue, we can expect that remaining soft sites in the King-Spadina area to be developed within the next decade or so. If steps are not taken to ensure that these lands, and other similar lands found throughout the downtown core, are developed with long-term goals in mind, Toronto will face similar issues as those currently being dealt with in Vancouver.

It is important to note that there are limitations to using development application data. Firstly, the data only contains developments that have triggered a planning response. This means that there may be conversions of existing buildings taking place that are not accounted for in this analysis. Secondly, the development applications are at various stages of completeness. Although these limitations are important to note, using the development application data is useful in providing a sense of the nature of development happening in King-Spadina.

# King-Spadina Soft Site Map

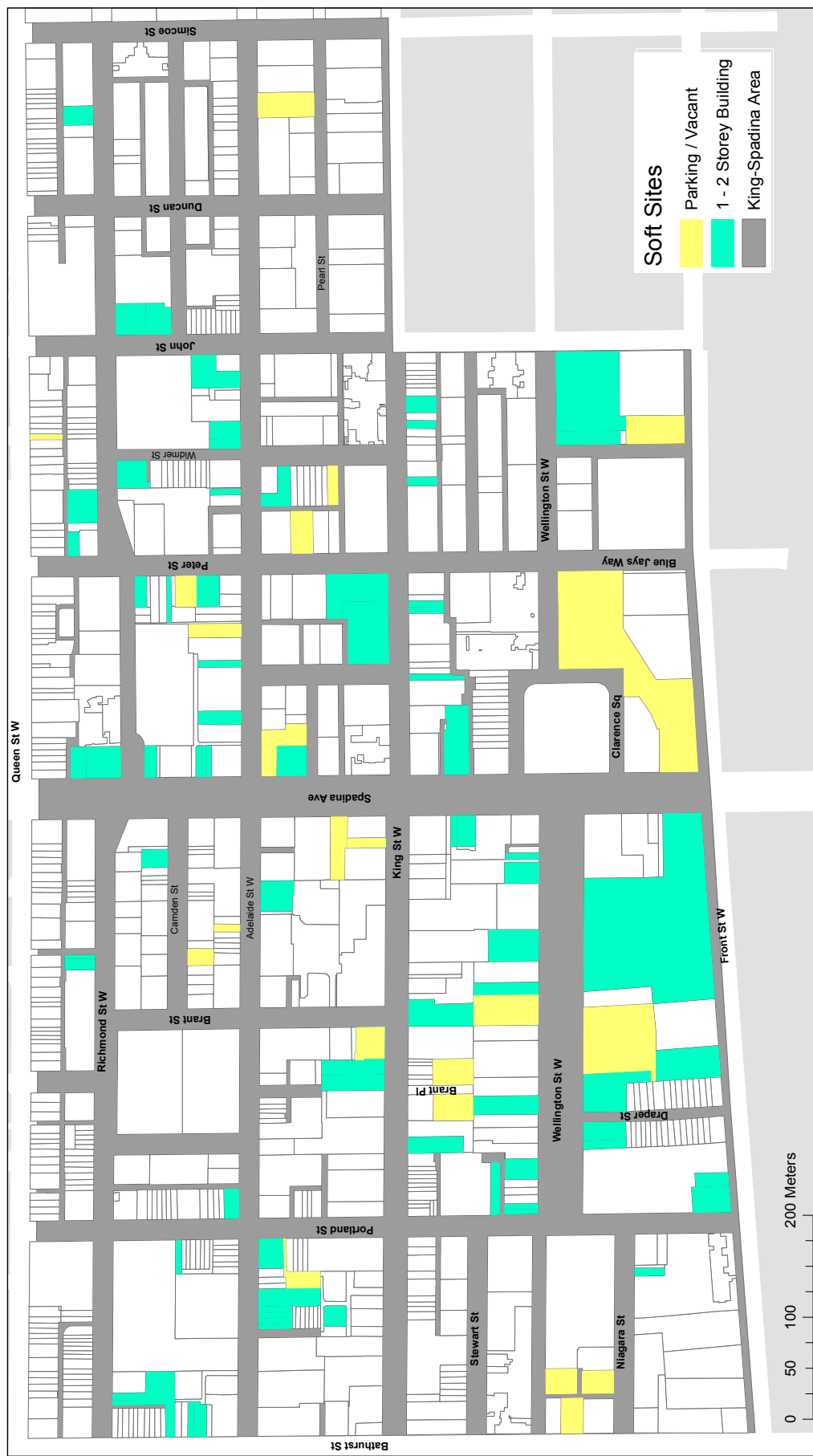


Figure 11: King Spadina Soft Site Map

## Conclusions and Recommendations

From the previous discussion and analysis, there is evidence that a deliberate planning response needs to be taken to mitigate the negative consequences of unchecked residential development within Toronto's downtown core. The downtown areas of large metropolitan regions are important employment zones. As cities and regions grow, downtown areas will become even more important as intensification and compact urban forms become more necessary. The following are some key recommendations that have resulted from the previous analysis.

### *Recommendations*

#### **1) Acknowledgement of the important nature of employment within the downtown core through policy revision at both the Provincial and Municipal level**

The downtown core is an important employment node for the City of Toronto and for the Province of Ontario. It is also home to a vibrant and growing residential community. Almost all municipal and provincial planning documents clearly underline the importance of downtown areas but there are few policies that aim to preserve its defining feature as an employment node. Although employment land designation would not be appropriate for the core, governments should consider the protection of employment uses within the downtown core as a necessary and important goal of current policy. By emphasizing the importance of the downtown core as a significant employment node and further

supporting that with clear policy direction, the long-term economic stability of the central city can be ensured.

One way to achieve this in Toronto's downtown core would be through a Growth Plan amendment which requires a ratio of jobs to people per hectare within designated urban growth centers rather than just jobs and people per hectare. This ratio could be in conjunction with the existing targets or a stand-alone target that is met separately. For instance, the current blended density target is 400 people and jobs per hectare. The accompanying ratio could be 400 people and jobs per hectare with a ratio of 10 jobs for every person (to account for those commuting from outside of the core for work). Research would be needed to understand what that appropriate balance of jobs to people would actually be.

Another way to support this would be through the establishment of legislated design criteria that mandates a true mix of uses within the downtown core. Although beneficial, retail uses at grade do not often promote significant employment opportunity. With office space demand estimated at 20.5 million square feet over the next couple of decades, mixed use buildings that provide this space will be vital to meeting that demand (City of Toronto, 2013).

## **2) Implement a tracking system that could directly monitor non-residential conversions and construction**

In order to effectively manage the remaining land supply in Toronto's downtown core, it is necessary to have an accurate inventory of what already exists and what is



changing. Knowing how much non-residential to residential conversion is taking place would better equip planning staff so the appropriate policy responses can be made. A dedicated supply monitoring system will also allow the city to quickly and adequately respond to market fluctuations.

**3) Identifying, managing and preserving the remaining developable land supply is imperative and should be done through a dedicated policy initiative**

Although the King-Spadina area is unique, the current increase in residential development is not. There are many neighborhoods throughout the metro core that are experiencing increased residential development. Toronto's downtown core has been undergoing 'condofication' for the past number of years and though this growth may slow, it is very unlikely that it will stop. It is imperative that the city takes the necessary steps to protect existing employment uses within the downtown core and identify those lands that should be preserved for further employment growth opportunity.

**4) Adopting a Downtown Official Development Plan that specifically addresses issues unique to Downtown Toronto.**

The creation and adoption of a Downtown Official Development Plan would address many of the issues outlined in this study. Toronto's downtown core is unique and some of challenges faced here are unlike any other in within the region. A dedicated development plan would establish a vision for the downtown core and outline the role it

will play in the future growth of the City. This plan would outline exactly where residential development should take place and where lands will be used for other activities including employment. As the residential population of the downtown core swells, this plan would also address issues of accessibility and movement. Design characteristics would also be outlined which would ensure that the core remains a vibrant, sustainable and desirable space for living and working.

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