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Green Building

Project Green seeks to transform area around Toronto's Pearson Airport

Waste recycling, intensification and more green space planned

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Efforts are underway to transform a 120-square-kilometre swath of industrial land surrounding Toronto Pearson International Airport into an environmentally-friendly business park.

Partners in Project Green, a consortium that includes Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Peel Region, the Greater Toronto Airports Authority and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, envision the Pearson Eco-Business Zone as internationally-recognized, high-performance and ecologically-centred, where waste becomes a resource, fleets are green, and operations contribute resources rather than simply consuming them.

"It means turning the area into the place to do green business," Chris Rickett, who heads Partners in Project Green, said last week at the fourth Annual Green Building Festival Conference & Expo, held a couple of kilometres east of the airport at the Toronto Congress Centre.

"It's about looking at old problems and developing new solutions by working together," Rickett said. "In the short term, it's helping existing businesses improve their financial and environmental performance, but over the long term let's make them the greenest in their class globally, and let's attract new green technology companies to complement the existing ones."

Land-use is one issue.

A significant amount of the industrial land in the area consists of roads, and only four percent of Mississauga's portion is occupied by buildings. "This means the efficiency of land use isn't that high," Rickett said. "There are opportunities to increase the amount of built space, and also

increase the number of jobs per hectare.”

Stormwater management also percolates. Rickett said rainwater presently goes straight into a nearby creek. “Why not develop a multi-stakeholder solution and build a joint stormwater pond so that all of the buildings in the area can feed into it and turn that stormwater into a resource for a golf course in the area. They could use it for irrigation.”

There’s also operations. Area businesses consumed 5.8 million megawatt hours of electricity in 2007. “That was about 1/26th of Ontario’s total energy consumption, and that was only for comfort,” Rickett said.

Pearson airport has an energy-efficient co-generation facility on site, which produces both electricity and steam for heating and cooling its facilities.

“Partners in Project Green is looking at how it might share this with the surrounding community,” Rickett said.

Undeveloped green space is also key. There’s about 1,000 hectares of that, with plans to expand by 25 percent. Other planned initiatives include joint-procurement of environmental technologies, and methods for food processors to transform waste into biogas to generate electricity for neighbouring companies and new revenue streams for themselves.

Ecologically-friendly business parks are nothing new.

“These projects are taking root across Canada,” he added, citing activity in Kingston, Port Perry and Sudbury, in Ontario, and in Alberta and Nova Scotia.

The eco-zone area includes more than 12,000 businesses, with 350,000 employees, with sectors including transportation and logistics, food processing, automotive supply chain, plastics, and airport-related manufacturing and services.

Roughly 80 percent are small-to-medium-size enterprises, with fewer than 500 employees.

There are some big names, and some have already undertaken environmental initiatives.

Unilever’s margarine production operation realized energy-reduction gains by using waste margarine for its boilers. Algonquin Power, a waste-to-energy facility, sends waste steam to its neighbours.

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