

# NOVÆ RES URBIS

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## INCENTIVIZING OFFICE

Matt Durnan

The City of Brampton is working to address the growing demand for office space in the city by incentivizing the development of office buildings, in a move that Brampton's economic development office and a local councillor say will be key to bolstering and diversifying the economy of one of Ontario's fastest-growing cities.

At its April 9 meeting, Brampton city council approved amendments to its development charges by-law which will waive or defer development charges for office buildings and complementary uses that align with one or more of the city's following sectors: advanced manufacturing, food and beverage processing, innovation and technology, health and life sciences, or professional services.

In many GTHA municipalities, the office market

took a significant hit during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many businesses transitioning to a work-from-home model, leading to a significant softening of the office market.

The inverse however has been true for Brampton, where the city's office vacancy rate sits at less than one per cent, with an

ever-growing demand for more office space.

"COVID changed a lot and it was unpredictable for a long time as far as what the effect was going to be on the office market. There are office conversions happening all over from office to residential, and there are offices that are sitting vacant," Brampton ward 9 and

10 councillor **Gurpartap Singh Toor** told *NRU*.

"The story in Brampton has been a little different and our office vacancy is currently less than one per cent. And part of the reason for that is relatively unknown, but if I were to take a crack at it, I would say that Brampton is a major home to

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Photo of MDA Space's office complex and research and development facility at 7500 Financial Drive in Brampton. The facility was completed in 2024. The developer of the research complex, Kaneff Group and the aerospace firm that occupies it were able to save \$2.5 million on this project thanks to City of Brampton's Development Charge Program. The City recently expanded the incentive program to waive development charges for all office developments, including mixed-use projects that include an office component.

SOURCE: CITY OF BRAMPTON

# INCENTIVIZING OFFICE

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employees who were probably commuting to downtown Toronto. Since COVID happened, with more people working remotely, it's brought a lot more people back into the suburbs, to the point where new businesses are starting to open."

Brampton's waiver of development charges for eligible office developments will not only be applicable to typical office tower buildings, but will also apply to mixed-use developments that incorporate office space, with the development charges for the office portion waived.

Additionally, the City is looking to promote growth for small-scale businesses that are looking to expand from a "mom-and-pop shop" to a larger-scale operation where they may require office space, which would have been less feasible with development charges in place.

"If we can provide development charge relief to office builds in our city, that's a great incentive. One, for our new builds, but also for existing businesses like a mom-and-pop shop that has been in our city for 20 years but have never really built out an office space, partly because adding something like an office mezzanine to an industrial building would have cost them

a lot of money in development charges," Singh Toor said.

"Or anytime there is a conversion from industrial to office, you're paying the difference in DCs, so those always kind of prevented people from doing that. This will benefit those second and third-generation businesses that are looking to build office and get more professional with their work."

This latest move to waive development charges for office buildings adds on to the work of Brampton's Development Charge Program, which has been critical in attracting large, campus-style office development to the city, specifically **MDA Space**, a pioneering Canadian aerospace company that set down roots in Brampton roughly seven years ago.

The earlier version of the City's Development Charges Program enabled the aerospace firm and developer **Kaneff Group** to save approximately \$2.5 million in the building of the company's head office and research and development centre in Brampton.

The previous iteration of the City's Development Charges Program exempted office development charges for office developments with a minimum total floor area of

20,000 square feet. The latest change will now exempt all office developments, including mixed-use projects that include an office component.

"We have had success with large-scale office development, and the example we use quite often is MDA Space. They were located over kitty-corner to the **Stellantis Canada** (automobile assembly) plant and they had an older office building. They (MDA) came to our team and said that their office wasn't really meeting their needs and they needed something modern. So there is that end, with the larger existing clients where there may not be the office space available that they're looking for,"

**Invest Brampton** (Brampton's economic development office) director of economic development and international relations **Denise McClure** told *NRU*.

"We were really successful with that model where it was a large-scale campus-style office that they were looking for, and it was a greenfield new build. There's also the other end of the spectrum, with that soft landing client; it could be a foreign direct investment, someone in the GTA that may want to start with maybe five employees, and they're looking for a small office to start growing. So we need to be able to provide that to be at that level to compete with other municipalities."

Brampton is one of Ontario's fastest-growing municipalities, and like many Ontario cities, is pushing to get as much

housing built as possible to accommodate its population growth that has seen the city grow by 17 per cent (135,000) people since 2021 to a total of nearly 800,000 people.

While housing remains a top priority for Brampton council, initiatives like this office development charges waiver play a key role in ensuring that there will be places for new residents not only to live, but to work, as well.

"This is how we're going to end up with that concept of having complete cities, where Brampton has typically had the reputation of just being a bedroom community. We're shedding that image. We want to be business first. We want to be innovative. So in bringing these office DC waivers and attracting more office to our city, we'll definitely see more residential growth alongside that," said Singh Toor.

"We can't focus only on residential growth though. It's kind of a 'chicken and egg' problem where we're growing really fast residentially, and the onus is on us to make sure that we're growing fast in number of jobs as well and maintaining a good ratio. That has been a key to success in Mississauga, thanks to the airport they have, and they've held a good ratio for jobs to people. And I think we need to be doing that here in Brampton as well." 🌸