

OLD BUILDINGS, GREAT BEER:

Lessons of Adaptive Reuse and Microbreweries
in the City of Toronto

Daren Zuk

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

June 2015

Copyright © Daren Zuk, 2015

A report submitted to the School of Urban and Regional Planning in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Urban and Regional Planning.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Microbreweries have become increasingly popular in recent years, responding to changing consumer demands and tastes. In Canada, the phenomenon started in the last fifteen years, with microbreweries proving popular among urban, young professionals. To cater to their main demographic, many microbreweries are choosing to locate in dense, mixed-use urban neighbourhoods. This creates a host of planning issues – such as zoning relating to microbrewery’s light industrial status – but also issues surrounding the adaptive reuse of old buildings in which microbreweries locate; both of which have hindered the development of microbreweries in these neighbourhoods.

Within the City of Toronto, many microbreweries have chosen to locate in dense, walkable, and traditional mixed-use neighbourhoods. To locate in these neighbourhoods in transition, many microbreweries have opted to adaptively reuse older existing buildings, some of which have heritage significance. The advantages of such older buildings are their affordability, flexibility, and a unique ‘cool’ factor. With the increasing popularity of microbreweries, and other light industrial uses, there is value in investigating further into the phenomenon’s dynamics and recommend solutions to improve the process for both the microbreweries and the municipalities in which they choose to locate.

The main purpose of this report is to answer the following research questions:

Primary Question: What are the legislative and policy barriers to the adaptive reuse of old buildings for small-scale industrial uses?

Secondary Question 1: How do municipal by-laws encourage and discourage the adaptive reuse of old buildings for small-scale industrial uses such as microbreweries?

Secondary Question 2: What lessons (barriers and opportunities) can be learned from the experiences of existing microbreweries in Toronto that have used adaptive reuse for their breweries?

Method

To answer these research questions, a case study approach was used which involved a literature review, municipal planning document review, and interviews with representatives from four microbreweries in the City of Toronto. The literature review was completed to provide an overview of the existing literature, research, and findings related to the research question and to serve as a base for the report's later analysis and recommendations. A municipal planning policy review was done to deliver a summary of the current relevant policy framework in Toronto. Four microbrewery case study interviews were conducted, which provided an opportunity to gain an understanding of the experiences of each individual microbrewery. The interview question responses were categorized into themes, which were later aggregated and formed into lessons and recommendations.

Recommendations

Recommendations are provided with the goal of assisting both municipalities and microbrewery owners during the development process. They are categorized into 'Recommendations for Municipalities' and 'Recommendations for Microbreweries'. Although these recommendations were based on the experiences of microbreweries in the City of Toronto, they are broad enough that they could be applied to municipalities across Canada.

Recommendations for Municipalities

Recommendation 1: Establish effective communication methods.

Communication, within the municipality, and with the proponent (microbrewery) is necessary to create a healthy relationship and create an efficient development process. Within the municipality, effective and constant communication between the Planning Department, Department of Economic Development, the Building Department, and any other involved department can help streamline the process, saving unnecessary trouble later. Often, departments have the same goal in mind, but when a proper line of communication is not established, the result can be unnecessary bureaucratic red tape for the proponent.

Recommendation 2: Assign one planner to be the main contact for the proponent, or its representative.

Often, an application is passed around the Planning Department, landing on the desks of multiple planners. This can create confusion, where different planners tell wrong or different information to the proponent, causing delays in the application process. When an application is given to one planner, a stream of effective and constant communication should be established, resulting in the application being processed faster. The use of layman's terms when communicating with the proponent, especially when it is directly with the microbrewery owner (who may not have a background knowledge of the planning process), should be a best practice.

Recommendation 3: Define microbreweries in planning documents.

Establishing a proper definition of microbreweries in the Zoning By-law will help alleviate any misconceptions or misinterpretations by the City staff. This can include defining the differences between different sizes and types of brewing – industrial breweries, craft breweries, microbreweries, and brewpubs – each with their own specific by-law regulations and zones in which they are permitted to locate.

Recommendation 4: Study the role of light industry in dense, established, mixed-use neighbourhoods.

The role of light industry in contributing to a vibrant and liveable mixed-use neighbourhood is still not fully understood. If a municipality wishes to promote this type of small-scale light industrial development – such as microbreweries – a study should be completed on the role of such development and its long-term effects on the neighbourhood.

Recommendation 5: Create a policy handbook on light industrial uses.

Once a study is conducted on the role of light industrial uses, a best practices handbook should be published, with input from both the Planning Department and the Economic Development Department. This handbook will outline clear policies and strategies for integrating small-scale light industrial uses into existing mixed-use neighbourhoods.

Recommendation 6: Create incentives for the adaptive reuse of old buildings in established neighbourhoods.

Adaptive reuse can have many benefits for a neighbourhood, from economic, to socio-cultural, and environmental. Municipalities should promote and create incentives for businesses to adaptively reuse old buildings. Incentives could include subsidizing the upgrades needed to meet current Building Code, a costly and time consuming process that can deter many new small businesses from adaptively reusing old buildings.

Recommendation 7: Integrate more light-industrial uses into mixed-use neighbourhoods, through the use of inclusive zoning policies.

Municipalities should create more inclusive zoning policies for light industrial uses, and target industries that will have the largest positive impact on dense, mixed-use neighbourhoods. Those include industries that generate minimal freight traffic, move fewer quantities of more expensive goods, have small square footage requirements, and will positively contribute to a vibrant and walkable streetscape.

Recommendation 8: Establish proactive zoning policies for neighbourhoods in transition.

Neighbourhoods are constantly changing, thus the existing zoning may not be sufficient for the type of change occurring. When a neighbourhood, or segment of a neighbourhood main street, is identified as undergoing revitalization, proactive zoning should be put in place to attract new investment into the community. This can be achieved by outlining policies in the Official Plan that could then be specified in the Zoning By-law and Secondary Plans. In addition, out-dated parking requirements should be updated to reflect changing travel patterns in these neighbourhoods.

Recommendations for Microbreweries

Recommendation 1: Enter the application process with a clear understanding of the planning and approvals process.

This will ultimately save time during the application process, as well as during any Committee of Adjustment (COA) meeting. To avoid the application being rejected for insufficient information or any other issue, hold multiple pre-consultation meetings with municipal staff.

Recommendation 2: Start the community consultation process early.

Early community consultation is important for gauging the extent of community support and opposition. Proper consultation, especially when it is completed by the microbrewery owners themselves, can resolve fears amongst the community. Methods that have been used in the past include door-to-door canvassing by microbrewery owners and hosting a public open house in the future microbrewery building. These methods help humanize the brewery so that it is seen not as just another business but as a contributor to the vibrancy and liveability of the neighbourhood.

Recommendation 3: Gaining political support can help public support for the microbrewery, as well as during the COA process.

Gaining formal support from the local MP, MPP (or other Provincial representative), or local ward/City Councillor can help in the approval process, especially if the application has to go to the COA. Politicians, although having no power to approve or reject an application, can be a source of information on community support or opposition. They can also be a source of information for the community seeking information on the microbrewery, as well as a source of formal support during the COA process.