

Moving Industry Up:

Examining the Potential for Intensification of New & Cultural
Industries In Vancouver's Mount Pleasant Industrial District

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Executive Summary

Many cities, such as Vancouver, London and San Francisco, are facing a shortage of urban industrial land, as much of this land has been converted to mixed-use and other non-industrial uses. These types of infill projects are commonly accredited for contributing to sustainability by regenerating brownfield sites, adaptively re-using existing buildings, avoiding urban sprawl and decontaminating land (DeSousa, 2008; McCarthy, 2002). However, recent literature is urging planners to broaden their definition of sustainable urban development by including spaces for industry and employment into new plans for old industrial spaces. The literature argues that incorporating spaces for employment and industry into mixed-use, transit-oriented and infill development can contribute to sustainability by diversifying the economy and reducing job sprawl (Green Leigh & Hoelzel, 2012).

It is challenging to retain industrial land in cities where land prices are high and there is considerable pressure for residential and commercial development. This research explores the potential for allowing multi-storey buildings and mixing industrial and office uses in urban, light industrial areas in order to mitigate the mismatch between high property values and low-density, industrial zoning. This study is guided by the idea that many businesses operating on urban industrial land do not produce the noise and other negative externalities of historical industries. In fact, many new and cultural firms (such as New Media, Music and Video Production, Architecture, etc.) tend to be attracted to inner-city industrial land (Hutton, 2008, 2004a; Scott, 2000; Florida, 2000; Kratke, 2022; Jacobs, 1969). This study builds on theories that new/cultural firms represent a new form of industry and hypothesizes that these businesses may be more capable of operating in multi-storey or mixed-use buildings than traditional forms of industry.

Methods & Research Questions

In order to understand the potential for intensifying different types of industries operating on urban light industrial land, this research examines the land use and space needs of businesses in the I-1 Light Industrial Zone in the City of Vancouver's Mount Pleasant neighbourhood. The study area is home to a range of new and old businesses that have been separated into the following 3 categories:

1. **Traditional Industries** (i.e. warehousing, manufacturing and wholesale distribution).
2. **Intermediate Industries** (i.e. office-based services such as accountants, real estate services, and general offices).
3. **New and Cultural Industries** (i.e. creative firms, such as video and music production companies, architecture and artisan manufacturers as well as technology-based firms, such as software designers and computer services).

This research involved a document and literature review, the creation of an industry profile for the study area and a survey completed by businesses in the study area. Once the industry profile was complete, the researcher contacted each business by telephone or email to provide them with an opportunity to respond to the survey. This study aims to answer the following key questions:

1. *How can urban planning policy encourage intensification of light industrial land, without displacing traditional industries?*
2. *What are the land use and space needs of traditional, intermediate and new/cultural industries and how do they differ?*

Summary of Analysis

The survey achieved a response rate of 21% and the responses suggest that new/cultural industries require a blend of purely office and light industrial space. Though new/cultural businesses do require office space, they also require significant space for studios and production and prefer buildings with high ceilings. The survey responses indicate that, from a functional perspective, new/cultural Industries are more capable of operating in multi-storey buildings than traditional forms of industry. Of those traditional industries currently operating on the ground floor, 95% said that a ground floor location was essential, while of the new/cultural industries only 53% said that their location on the ground floor was essential for operating their business. Thus, the idea of “stacking” industries in multi-storey buildings may be feasible for some new/cultural industries but it is unlikely that traditional industries would be interested in this type of development.

The responses suggest that buildings with space for light industry on the ground floor and office-based firms on upper floors represents a more feasible option for intensification. At least two thirds of the businesses currently operating in Mount Pleasant stated that they would be willing to operate in this type of building. An approximately equal percentage of traditional, intermediate and new/cultural industries stated that they would not be willing to operate in this

form of building (14%), demonstrating that some industries would be displaced if this building form became predominant through Mount Pleasant. Respondents generally supported the idea of mixing industrial and office-based uses and recognized that this would allow for the retention of light industrial uses in the City; however, some businesses were concerned about externalities, such as noise and smells. Though the externalities are a key issue, the data suggests that the main challenge associated with the intensification of Mount Pleasant's industrial uses is ensuring there is sufficient parking.

Recommendations

This study concludes with 4 recommendations to guide municipalities and cities promoting the intensification of urban industrial land through multi-storey "stacking" of industry or mixing of traditional, intermediate and new/cultural Industries:

Recommendation 1: *Raise awareness amongst the public, industry and developers about the importance of retaining jobs in order to achieve sustainable urban development and share stories about projects that have successfully achieved intensification of industrial land.*

Recommendation #2: *Develop careful and flexible definitions of "light industrial" when drafting zoning bylaws and planning policy.*

Recommendation #3: *Develop a parking strategy to accommodate increased traffic associated with increased density and explore options for increasing alternative modes of transportation.*

Recommendation #4: *Foster partnerships and collaboration between the diverse mix of firms operating on light industrial land and support traditional industries.*