



Report to: Development Services Committee

Report Date: February 11, 2025

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**SUBJECT:** RECOMMENDATION REPORT, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of Canada, Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment Applications to permit the development of a new Bahá'í National Centre and Canadian National Temple at 7200 and 7290 Leslie Street (Ward 1)

File PLAN 22 262723

**PREPARED BY:** Rick Cefaratti, MCIP, RPP, Acting Development Manager, West District, ext. 3675

**REVIEWED BY:** Stephen Lue, MCIP, RPP, Senior Development Manager, ext. 2520

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. THAT the February 11, 2025, report titled, "RECOMMENDATION REPORT, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of Canada, Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment Applications to permit the development of a new Bahá'í National Centre and Canadian National Temple at 7200 and 7290 Leslie Street (Ward 1), File PLAN 22 262723", be received;
2. THAT the Official Plan Amendment application submitted by National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of Canada, be approved and that the draft Official Plan Amendment, attached hereto as Appendix 'A', be finalized and brought forward to a future Council meeting to be adopted without further notice;
3. THAT the Zoning By-law Amendment application submitted by National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of Canada, be approved and that the draft Zoning By-law Amendment, attached hereto as Appendix 'B', be finalized, and brought forward to a future Council meeting to be enacted without further notice;
4. AND THAT Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This report recommends approval of the Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment applications (the "Applications") submitted by National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of Canada ("the Owner") for the lands located on the west side of Leslie Street adjacent to the German Mills Meadow (the "Subject Lands"). The Owner proposes to develop a new Bahá'í National Centre building that includes administrative offices, meeting rooms, and lodging facilities at 7200 Leslie Street, and a National Temple building for the Bahá'í faith at 7290 Leslie Street (the "Proposed Development"). The surface parking located Don Valley Education property at 7015 Leslie Street will provide additional off-site, overflow parking during special events associated with the Baha'i, if required.

The Subject Lands are an appropriate location for the Proposed Development. The Owner demonstrated that the proposed amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law are consistent with the intent of provincial policy, the York Region Official Plan, and the Markham Official Plan 2014. The Owner demonstrated that a comprehensive compensation and restoration plan of the

natural heritage system will be provided, and that a feasible safe access solution can be provided to the satisfaction of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

**PURPOSE:**

This report recommends approval of the Applications submitted by the Owner to permit the Proposed Development on the Subject Lands.

**PROCESS TO DATE:**

- November 30, 2022: Staff deemed the Applications complete
- May 23, 2023: Statutory Public Meeting (1) held for 7200 and 7290 Leslie Street
- January 24, 2024: Thornhill Sub-Committee meeting #1 was held
- April 9, 2024: Thornhill Sub-Committee meeting #2 was held
- May 2, 2024: The Ward 1 Councillor hosted a Community Information Meeting
- May 28, 2024: Statutory Public Meeting (2) held to include 7015 Leslie Street

The 120-day period set out in the *Planning Act* before the Owner can appeal the Applications to the Ontario Land Tribunal (“OLT”) for a non-decision ended on March 30, 2023. Accordingly, the Owner is able to appeal the Applications to the OLT.

If the DSC supports the Applications, the planning process will include the following steps:

- Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment instruments approval at a future Council Meeting
- Submission and approval of a future Site Plan application

**BACKGROUND:**

**Location and Area Context**

Figures 1 to 3 show the 16.56 ha (40.9 ac) Subject Lands located on the west side of Leslie Street (7200 and 7290 Leslie Street), approximately 520 m (1,706 ft) north of Steeles Avenue, and the northeast corner of Leslie Street and Steeles Avenue (7015 Leslie Street), containing the following:

- 7200 Leslie Street: the existing administration building for the Baha’i faith
- 7290 Leslie Street: the existing log cabin style detached dwelling; a detached garage
- 7015 Leslie Street: the existing Don Valley Education Centre (programmed for plenary sessions, small study groups, educational and service events, and other community outreach programs, such as youth day camps, arts and craft activities, outdoor play, and recreation); surface parking; a recreational building; tennis courts (former site of the Adventure Valley Day Camp and the Mayfield Tennis Club).

The Subject Lands contain natural heritage resources and woodland features and are located within a regulated area of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (“TRCA”).

**Figures 4 and 5 conceptually show the Proposed Development, as summarized below**

<b>Table 1: the Proposed Development</b>	
Gross Floor Area:	National Centre Building (7200 Leslie Street): 5,163 m <sup>2</sup> Temple Building (7290 Leslie Street): 650 m <sup>2</sup>

**Table 1: the Proposed Development**

Maximum Building Height:	National Centre Building (7200 Leslie Street): 5.2 m Temple Building (7290 Leslie Street): 25 m
Parking Spaces:	110
Access	Vehicular and pedestrian access to Leslie Street

**OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:*****The Proposed Development is consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (the “2024 PPS”)***

The 2024 PPS provides direction on matters of Provincial interest related to land use planning and development. These matters, in part, include building strong healthy communities. The Owner has demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts to natural heritage features and that safe access and egress can be provided for the Proposed Development.

***The Proposed Development conforms to the 2022 York Region Official Plan (the “2022 ROP”)***

The 2022 ROP designates the Subject Lands ‘Urban Area’ on Map 1 – Regional Structure, which permits a wide range of land uses including residential, commercial, employment, and institutional uses as well as places of worship. Map 1A – Land Use Designations designates the Subject Lands ‘Community Area’, which are areas where many residents, personal services, retail, arts, culture, recreational facilities and human services needs would be located. The Proposed Development includes uses that are contemplated under the ‘Community Area’ designation at a scale that is considered compatible with the surrounding area.

***The Owner proposes a revised Greenway Boundary in the Markham Official Plan 2014 (the “Official Plan”)***

The Owner proposes to redesignate portions of the Subject Lands from “Greenway” to “Residential Low Rise” and to facilitate the development of the House of Worship/ Temple building. In addition, the Owner proposes to add site-specific policies in Section 9.18 of the Official Plan to permit the development of a new Bahá’í National Centre on 7200 Leslie Street and the Canadian National Temple and a Bahá’í House of Worship/Temple building at 7290 Leslie Street. The proposed Official Plan Amendment will require modifications to Maps 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the Official Plan to properly reflect the extent of key natural heritage features, hazard lands, and the Greenway System within the Subject Lands.

Staff further notes that although Leslie Street north of Steeles Avenue is not an arterial road, the Subject Lands can accommodate the Proposed Development, which will increase in scale and intensity from established land use for the Baha’i faith since the 1960s. This issue is discussed later in this report.

***The Owner proposes to remove the Subject Lands from By-laws 1767, 2612 and 304-97 and incorporate them into By-law 177-96, as amended***

The Owner proposes a Zoning By-law Amendment to permit the Proposed Development with site-specific exceptions including, but are not limited to, the following:

- Permit Maximum Building Heights at 7200 Leslie Street (7.6 m); 7290 Leslie Street (25 m)
- Permit accessory uses such as temporary lodging, residences for faith group leaders
- Place of Worship
- Combined parking for 7200 and 7290 Leslie Street

***The section below identifies how the matters raised throughout the review process, including those raised at the Thornhill Sub-Committees meeting, the statutory Public Meetings, and Community Information Meeting, have been resolved or considered***

**a) Residents expressed concerns regarding the environmental impact or ecological loss of the Proposed Development on the surrounding natural areas**

The Owner submitted a comprehensive, multi-season Environmental Impact Study (the “EIS”) to evaluate the ecology of the site and surrounding natural heritage system. The terms of reference for the EIS were developed in conjunction with the City’s Natural Heritage staff and the TRCA. Based on a review of the EIS submission, Staff opine that the Proposed Development will not adversely impact the natural heritage system and that the Owner’s proposed compensation for the removal of existing vegetation to accommodate the Proposed Development will result in a net overall ecological gain.

The City retained an independent third-party reviewer to undertake a Peer Review of the Applications from an environmental perspective. The Peer Reviewer has confirmed that the submitted EIS provided sufficient information to evaluate the significance of key natural heritage and hydrologic features on the Subject Lands and commented that the information demonstrates that the environmental work supports approval of the proposed amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law to facilitate the Proposed Development. In addition, the Peer Reviewer confirmed that the proposed removal of portions of the existing woodlot is appropriate subject to compensation being provided and that the Proposed Development will have a minimal impact on adjacent woodlands as well as that the proposed modifications to Leslie Street will provide safe access and egress while addressing parking and car and pedestrian user conflicts.

Although the Proposed Development will require the removal of 0.5 ha of woodlands to facilitate the place of worship and the encroachment of 0.2 ha of valley lands to facilitate the parking area adjacent to the existing log house dwelling at 7290 Leslie Street, Staff opine that any ecological impacts will be appropriately mitigated and compensated through ecological restoration, including meadow/forest/riparian restoration and invasive species management. A net gain in both the area of natural heritage features and Greenway System area is anticipated as a result of the full implementation of these Applications.

The proposed compensation demonstrates the many opportunities on the Subject Lands to reduce the existing impact of invasive species, create new habitats, and remove impermeable surfaces to improve the overall ecological health of the German Mill Creek corridor, which is in keeping with directions promoted in the Don River Watershed Plan and to the benefit of the local environment. Furthermore, Staff confirmed that although the proposed parking area is within the TRCA regulated area, it is in the residential designation, and outside the floodplain, slope and erosion hazards. The redevelopment of the residential designation for parking can be achieved with minimal impact on the adjacent woodlands. The creation of parking here supports

the removal of some existing parking at 7015 Leslie that is within the flood hazard, and as such, is consistent with provincial policy.

The Owner will be required submit , detailed restoration plans, which must be phased to identify any ecological impacts associated from the Proposed Development, and identify compensation measures. TRCA and City staff recommend that a Holding (“H”) Provision in the Zoning By-law Amendment includes the requirement that a Landscape Restoration and Enhancement Strategy be submitted to the satisfaction of the City. The implementation and long-term maintenance of the landscape restoration and enhancement works will be secured through an agreement during the Site Plan Approval process.

**b) Concerns expressed regarding the provision of emergency access through the meadow at German Mills Park**

The Owner’s original development concept plan proposed an emergency access route through German Mills Settler’s Park. Concerns were raised that this emergency road would have a negative impact on wildlife. The Owner has since revised the Proposed Development to remove any reference to an emergency access route through this park.

The Owner has conceptually demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the City and the TRCA, that safe access can be provided to the Proposed Development by raising the low points of Leslie Street that are currently within the floodplain, whereby safe access can be provided to the Subject Lands and the residential properties along Waterloo Court. Staff support that the raising of Leslie Street will avoid impacts and fragmentation of the core meadow habitat area at German Mills Settler’s Park.

To ensure that safe access and egress is achieved prior to development, the TRCA and City staff recommend that a Holding (“H”) Provision be included in the Zoning By-law Amendment that would require the Owner to enter into any necessary agreement(s) to raise Leslie Street, to the satisfaction of the City and the TRCA

**c) Concerns expressed regarding the existing condition of Leslie Street north of Steeles Avenue and the potential for a connection to the existing Lake-to-Lake Cycling Route and Walking Trail Network**

The lake-to-lake trail is a 121 km recreational and commuter trail that connects Lake Simcoe to Lake Ontario and represents a key north-south spine in York Region and the City of Toronto, which supports the City’s multi-use pathway along Leslie Street and John Street, and a multi-use trail through the German Mills Settlers Park. This trail supports the City of Toronto’s active transportation network and connects to the Greenbelt Route, PanAm Path, and Waterfront Trail, destinations like transit hubs, and other attractions like beaches, community centres, and parks. The Owner confirmed that they will contribute to improvements to Leslie Street including the provision of a dedicated sidewalk and bike lane within the Leslie Street right-of-way to separate vehicular traffic from cyclists and pedestrians as an enhancement to this trail.

**d) Concerns raised regarding unorganized parking at the terminus of Leslie Street**

Staff recommend that as part of the improvements to Leslie Street, that separated multi-use pathway and on-street layby parking be incorporated within the right-of-way. These elements will be considered as part of the detailed design review for Leslie Street.

**e) Residents expressed concerns with increased traffic generated by the Proposed Development and lack of available parking**

Staff reviewed the Owner's transportation impact assessment and supports the conclusion that the proposed parking supply (110 spaces), in conjunction with the available off-site parking lot at the Don Valley Education Centre at 7015 Leslie Street that includes approximately 100 spaces, will be sufficient to accommodate the Proposed Development. Furthermore, to secure the proposed measures in the Traffic Management Plan and Transportation Demand Management Plan, Staff recommend that a Holding ("H") Provision be included in the zoning by-law requiring the Owner to execute an agreement with the City to submit and implement a Traffic Management Plan and a Transportation Demand Management Plan to the satisfaction of the City.

**f) Concerns expressed regarding the Proposed Development not meeting locational criteria for Places of Worship**

The criteria in policy 8.13.7 of the Official Plan specifies that Places of Worship and associated buildings be located at the intersection of an arterial road with another public road. The intent of this policy was established to mitigate adverse impacts on traffic and parking on adjacent uses. Staff note that the main access for the Proposed Development from Leslie Street will not require additional vehicular access for the Proposed Development through other local roads. Staff opine that based on the Development Concept Plan submitted with the Applications, there will be adequate on-site parking and additional off-site parking available at 7015 Leslie Street to mitigate any potential overflow parking on Leslie Street or Waterloo Court. Staff support that the Proposed Development meets the intent of the location criteria, which will not impact the surrounding area.

**g) Concerns regarding scale and compatibility of Proposed Development**

Concerns were raised relating to the height and scale of the proposed temple building at 7290 Leslie Street and the Owner has responded as follows:

- i) reduced building height from 30 m to 25 m to ensure it is generally in line with the heights of the surrounding vegetation
- ii) reduced overall gross floor area from 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> to 600 m<sup>2</sup>
- iii) shifted the building west to minimize any construction impacts or encroachments to the vegetation protection zones
- iv) increased the south side yard setback from the new administration building (7200 Leslie Street) from 4 m to 4.5 m to accommodate additional tree plantings to reduce visual permeability of this building to the residential properties on Waterloo Court.

**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

Not applicable.

**HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:**

Not applicable.

**ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

The Applications align with the strategic priorities for growth management of the environment, and transportation in the context of a safe, sustainable and complete community.

**BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:**

The Applications were circulated to various departments and external agencies and their requirements and comments have been taken into consideration.

**RECOMMENDED BY:**

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Giulio Cescato, RPP, MCIP  
Director of Planning and Urban Design

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Arvin Prasad, RPP, MCIP  
Commissioner of Development Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Figure 1: Location Map
- Figure 2: Area Context and Zoning
- Figure 3: Aerial Photo and Context
- Figure 4: Proposed Development Concept Plan
- Figure 5: Conceptual Rendering – Temple Building
- Appendix 'A': Draft Official Plan Amendment
- Appendix 'B': Draft zoning By-law Amendment