

Executive Summary

Background

The City of Markham has long recognized the significance of Places of Worship to its residents, and their importance to the creation of a healthy community. To ensure that the City's (then Town) policies met the needs of its citizens and reflected current practices pertaining to these key facilities, Council authorized a Places of Worship Study in May 2001.

Based on this work, amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law were approved. The zoning amendment included a new parking standard and definition of Places of Worship which was added to Zoning By-law 28-97 through Zoning By-law Amendment 2003-301.

Subsequent to the approval of Amendment 2003-301, an issue with respect to non-fixed seating area occupant capacity calculations was identified. The issue was not with the recommendations of the Places of Worship Study, but with the transcription into Amendment 2003-301. The Places of Worship Study recommended occupant capacity for worship areas with non-fixed seating be calculated assuming 0.75 m² are occupied by each individual. However, this was erroneously transcribed to Amendment 2003-301 such that this number is multiplied by the net worship area rather than divided into the net worship area. This error results in lowering the parking supply required by the By-law.

The City of Markham addressed this issue through a housekeeping amendment to the Zoning By-law 28-97. The amendment was appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). The City is required to demonstrate to the OMB justification for the proposed amendment.

Recognizing that the original Places of Worship Study is now more than 10 years old, the City of Markham engaged MSH and HDR Corporation (HDR) to undertake a scoped review of the approach to Places of Worship, with a focus on the parking regulations. The intent of this review is to ensure that the City has up to date and current information with respect to the parking standard and the development of Places of Worship.

Scoped Review Process

The scoped review process included the following:

- **General Place of Worship Development Trends**
A review by MSH of trends in the development of Places of Worship as a basis for consideration of the City's general policy approach to Places of Worship and to the review of parking standards.

- **Parking Standards**

A review by HDR of the existing City parking standards for Places of Worship, and the most current approaches used in other municipalities, as a basis for determining whether any changes are required to the City's parking standards and definitions for Places of Worship.

Conclusions

The scoped review of the approach to Places of Worship indicates the following:

Development Trends

There have been no significant changes in the nine trends identified in the 2002/2003 Study with implications for the development of policies with respect to Places of Worship in Markham. Therefore the policy framework developed at that time is still an appropriate framework for future development of Places of Worship. In particular, the policy framework is designed to respond to the following trends:

- Increases in the number and type of Places of Worship will continue in response to the growth of the community and the increasing diversity of its population;
- Larger Places of Worship will continue to be built requiring specific controls on development to address the high intensity nature of the use and potential impacts related to traffic and noise and, in particular parking which is always a significant concern;
- Auxiliary uses can also create significant impacts which must be considered;
- Locations outside residential areas have been sought by many groups to mitigate impacts, however, such locations create their own concerns. In particular, locations in employment areas which create a range of specific issues; and,
- City policy should continue to recognize the needs of all stages of development of Places of Worship, and to recognize the importance of Places of Worship as a key component of the "social safety net".

Policy and Regulatory Framework Implications

The review of the current policy and regulatory framework indicates that conclusions of the original Study with respect to the implications for the development of Places of Worship remain generally appropriate including:

- Restrictions on development of Places of Worship in the Agricultural Area should continue in conformity with Provincial, Regional and City policy which directs such development to urban areas;

- A flexible approach to the location of Places of Worship in most designations in the Urban Area continues to be appropriate, modified to introduce increased restrictions on locations in industrial areas;
- Increases in the number and type of Places of Worship will continue, and existing facilities will expand and move to accommodate increased population and its diversity. Such new Places of Worship and changes to existing Places of Worship will result in many which are larger facilities. Such high intensity land uses continue to require careful evaluation to ensure compatibility with respect to traffic, parking, location and scale of development in accordance with the specific policies and development criteria of the City's existing Official Plan and proposed new Official Plan for Places of Worship.
- In accordance with current policies, specific studies to address issues will continue to be required (e.g. parking, traffic, shadow, design and massing). Approaches to dealing with parking and traffic issues include shared parking with adjacent uses; locations in proximity to public transit and active transportation facilities; and establishment of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plans will have to be considered as part of application review.
- Continuation of site reservation policy for new secondary plans given that it appears to work fairly well and provides an option for the location of Places of Worship in new Secondary Plan areas, while still allowing for the location of Places of Worship on other sites in the City chosen by faith groups through their own efforts.

Parking Standards Review Conclusions

The analysis of the parking surveys shows that the parking requirements set out in Zoning By-law 2003-301 (when correctly applied) are on average within 5.5% of the peak parking demand observed at the six Places of Worship that were surveyed as part of this scoped review. This generally confirms the validity of the recommendations from the original 2003 Places of Worship Study, specifically with respect to parking requirements.

When applicable, we have correctly applied the Zoning By-law 2003-301 non-fixed seating worship area capacity ratio of 0.75 m² per person, instead of applying this ratio as is required by Zoning By-law 2003-301. We have found that the worship area capacity based on this ratio tends to govern the Zoning By-law requirements instead of net worship floor area calculations.

When calculating the worship area capacity for non-fixed seating, it is important to not underestimate the net worship areas which will be used for prayer as this will determine the parking supply requirements.