

REFLECTING A MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY

**Should Religious Symbols Be Allowed on
Town of Markham Properties?**

CONTEXT

- Jewish community permission to erect menorah
- Community members request menorah removal or equal access to other faiths
- Backdrop: growing controversy about public celebration of Christmas
- Town considering policy on allowing religious symbols on Town property.

WHAT WE NEED FROM COUNCIL

- Consider policy approaches presented
- Direct us on approach Council wishes to pursue

THE PUBLIC SQUARE

- Places people feel they `own' e.g. municipal properties
- Reflects/defines community
- Governed by traditional/historic
- Multiculturalism =new dynamic
- What should/should not be in public space?

POLICY OPTIONS

- Maintain status quo
- Cancel/deny access to all + create new opportunities to celebrate Markham's religious diversity.
- Allow access to all religions/faiths

Maintain Status Quo

Pros

- Familiar, historical, accepted.

Cons

- 1) Possible legal challenges
- 2) Compromise disdained
- 3) Unpleasant, controversial, divisive.

Cancel/Deny Access to All

Pros

- Seen as fair to all
- Supports traditional belief: religion private
- Eliminates court challenges, controversy
- Easier to say “No” than qualified “Yes”

Cancel/Deny Access to All

Cons

- Path of least resistance for a mature democracy?
- Robbing community of rich heritage; key part of social cohesion?
- Removing evidence of common search for/expression of “otherness”?

Allow All

Religion: “belief about deity, rituals, code of ethics, philosophy of life”.

Pros

- Affirms/celebrates Town’s cultural make-up
- Gives voice to less known religions
- Educates to build shared community beyond ‘tolerance’
- Discourages ignorance; hate crimes
- Shows community belongs to all

Allow All

Cons

- Discomfort sharing space
- Stir up old/ancestral strife?
- Who decides what is bona fide religion?
- What if holy days coincide?

Create New Opportunity

- Allows for educational approach
- Gives Town control
- Demonstrates inclusiveness
- Engages community in helping
- Tie-in with cultural celebrations
- Allows editing: dynamic, not static
- *Caravan*-type opportunity for community

OTHER JURISDICTIONS

- *'Blind eye'*
- *By-law*: community can book space if commit not to discriminate (Kingston)
- Apply for permit: commit not to incite hatred (City of Toronto *"Terms and Conditions"*)
- *Guidelines and Procedures for the Accommodation of Religious Requirements, practices and Observances* (TDSB)

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- **Direct us on approach/approaches Council wishes to pursue**