

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the development of mosques in the Greater Toronto Area and planning policies of municipalities which regulate places of worship. The objectives of this report are (1) to identify patterns of mosque development and their historical evolution in the Greater Toronto Area and (2) to examine responsiveness of local planning policies, regulations, and standards to efforts to develop mosques in particular and non-Christian places of worship in general and (3) to formulate general guidelines for the development and planning of mosques.

To achieve these objectives all mosques operating in 1995 were marked on maps. Field surveys and interviews were carried out for determining the history, functions and uses of mosques. For mosque development applications, municipal records were reviewed to determine planning issues, conditions of approval and municipal planning policies for places of worship.

There are 31 mosques in the GTA and 19 were finally selected for detailed analysis. Although the report primarily focuses on 19 mosques including two in rented buildings, additional mosques have also been mentioned where relevant data was available. Out of 19 selected mosques, 15 are located in Metro municipalities, one in Brampton, two in Mississauga, and one in Vaughan. Muslims are also using 11 temporary locations for fulfilling their worship requirements for weekly prayer only.

Patterns of mosque development

According to Statistics Canada, Muslim population has increased significantly in the Greater Toronto Area during 1980s. Census data shows that 105,970 Muslims were living in the GTA in 1991, comprising 72.80% of the Ontario Muslim population. Muslims are mostly concentrated in Metro Toronto municipalities, but they are spread throughout the urban area and are not forming any religious enclaves.

The first mosque was established in a disused church in Toronto in 1967. 23 mosques were surveyed for building type: 5 are newly built, 4 are located in disused churches, 5 in industrial buildings, 6 in single family dwelling units, and 3 are located in other type of buildings. In terms of access, survey results show that 21 mosques provide good access to the Muslim community. Almost all of the mosques are located away from Muslim population, except Islamic Society mosque. Mosques in disused churches are mostly located on residential streets, while the rest of the mosques are located on or close to major arterial roads. Only newly built mosques provide exact *qibla* direction for prayer and have minarets and domes. Three newly built mosques are located in or at the periphery of industrial zones and one is located in an agricultural zone. 18 out of 24 mosques belongs to Sunni Muslims, and mosque's use is further specialized along ethnicity. Muslims of 8 different ethnic origins have established their own mosques. Most of the mosques also act as cultural centres and provide facilities for other activities as well. 11 out of 19 mosques were established before 1990, and since then 8 more mosques, including 3 newly built, have become functional. Mosques in industrial buildings and those newly built have comparatively larger lots and more gross floor area.

Lot areas of mosques range from 353 m² to 97,409 m². Average lot area is 3,458 m². Average gross floor area of a mosque is approximately 1,155 m². The average capacity of a mosque is 532 persons, with a mean of 68 parking spaces; this reflects that one

parking space is available for 8 persons. Almost all of the mosques share parking spaces with their neighbors on peak hours.

The use of mosques is only dominant on weekly Friday prayer, whereas during the rest of the week daily prayers, five times a day, are attended by a very small number of Muslims. In the surroundings of 6 mosques, where appropriate sites are available, Muslim-community oriented business are also found.

Planning policies and mosque development

Municipalities are increasing restrictions on locations of places of worship, and intend to locate these on arterial or minor arterial roads by keeping a minimum separation distance between places of worship, ranging from 230 meters to 800 meters. 8 out of 9 municipalities view places of worship as part of residential zones, while the remaining one has site specific zones. 5 out of 9 municipalities permit places of worship in light industrial zones.

Among the 9 surveyed municipalities, only one, the City of Etobicoke, mentioned a minimum lot area for places of worship, which it sets at 2,016 m². A maximum lot coverage was mentioned by three municipalities and varies between 20% to 33.3%. Minimum required lot frontage, which was mentioned by three municipalities, ranges from 20 meters to 30 meters. 4 out of 9 municipalities have height restrictions for places of worship which range from 8.5 meters to 20 meters, although the church spire and belfry are excluded. Two municipalities allow gross floor area to vary depending on whether the place of worship is located on an arterial road; in these two municipalities places of worship can have gross floor area up to 2,325 m² if located on an arterial road, while on a road other than an arterial or minor arterial road the maximum gross floor area ranges between 1,393.5 m² to 1,400 m².

Different municipalities have different standards for calculating parking requirements for a place of worship. These are related to number of seats, total gross floor area or floor area devoted to worship only. The City of Toronto has lowest parking requirements for places of worship in residential districts: it requires one parking space for 40 persons. Out of 9 municipalities, 3 have related their parking requirements with number of seats; among these one also relates it to gross floor area in the worship hall. These three municipalities require 1.0 parking spaces for 4.5 or 5 seats. 4 municipalities have related their parking requirements to total GFA of the places of worship, and 2 also relate it to the GFA in the worship hall. The parking requirements of these 4 municipalities range between 1.0 parking spaces per 7.5 m² to 28 m² of total GFA of the place of worship. Five municipalities have based their parking requirements on GFA of the worship hall, and 3 also relate it to total GFA or with number of seats. Parking requirements of these 5 municipalities range from 1.0 parking spaces per 3.2 m² to 9.5 m² of the GFA devoted to worship only.

6 out of 9 municipalities use the word "Places of Worship" instead of "Church" to accommodate various religious backgrounds. Minarets and domes have not been mentioned in any zoning by-law for height exemptions. Therefore, these have to be translated to spire and belfry in order to satisfy the zoning regulations. Set back and yard requirements can hinder the mosque orientation towards *qibla* on small lots, and these require minor variance approvals.

The most common objections raised by local residents opposing the development of a mosque were related to land use compatibility, parking, traffic, noise, height of the building, and loss of industrial or business image of the area. In 8 out of 19 cases, of mosque development, such opposition was observed. Such opposition led mosque developers to make extra efforts to obtain municipal approvals.

On the whole it can be concluded that the planning policies of different municipalities are accommodative of mosques. But, applicants have to satisfy their neighbors, site *qibla* direction within the specified setback and yard standards, struggle with parking calculations, and label certain mosque features differently in order to fulfill zoning by law requirements. Nevertheless, after every first application of mosque development at a municipality, the planning staff becomes familiar with the needs of a mosque. A successful completion of a mosque sets a precedent within the planning process which makes it easier for the next mosque to go through the planning approvals.

Some of the recommendations of the report for municipalities are as follows:

1. Those municipalities still using the word "church" should replace it with "Places of Worship", to accommodate all religious backgrounds.
2. Mosque minarets and domes need to be mentioned in zoning by-laws for exceptions to height restrictions.
3. Different parking arrangements should be considered for mosques, including shared parking, off-site parking, on street parking and tandem parking. Parking calculations may be based on 1 parking space for six worshippers or 1 parking space per 8.4 m² of floor area devoted to worship only, whichever is greatest.
4. Reduced parking requirements should be considered if a mosque is well served by transit.
5. Municipalities should allow mosques/ places of worship on major roads and at the periphery of industrial areas.

Some of the recommendations for the promoters of mosques are as follows:

1. Since the Muslim population is spread and establishment of a neighbourhood mosque is not feasible, every new mosque should be developed as a regional/*Jamia* mosque, and its future use should be carefully determined.
2. In order to provide good accessibility, mosques should be located on arterial or minor arterial roads.
3. Locations well served by transit can enhance the use of a mosque. Therefore, the developers of a mosque should search for such sites.
4. Sites at the periphery of industrial areas or close to shopping malls are appropriate for mosques, because such areas can absorb excessive peak hour parking.
5. New sites for mosques should be sought in municipalities which have flexible parking standards.
6. Preliminary consultation with the planning staff is necessary to check the appropriateness of a potential site for mosque development.

ABSTRACT

Muslim population has increased significantly during the 1980s in the Greater Toronto Area. In 1991, 105,970 Muslims were living in the GTA, comprising 72.80% of the Ontario Muslim population. Muslims are mostly concentrated in Metro Toronto municipalities, but they are spread throughout the urban area and are not forming any religious enclaves.

The first mosque was established in a disused church in Toronto in 1967, and since then 31 mosques have been established in the GTA. Mosques are located in different types of buildings. A few are newly built, while others are located in disused churches, in industrial buildings, in single family dwelling units, and in other types of buildings. Most mosques are accessible to the Muslim population despite being located away from concentrations of the Muslim population. Except mosques in disused churches, most of the mosques are located on or close to major arterial roads. Only newly built mosques provide exact *qibla* direction for prayer and have minarets and domes. Muslims of 8 different ethnic origins have established their own mosques, and 75% of the mosques are of Sunni Muslims. Most of the mosques also act as cultural centres and provide other facilities to the Muslims. Mosques which have been established during last five years are comparatively larger in size.

Average lot area and gross floor area of a mosque is 3,458 m² and 1,155 m² respectively. The average capacity of a mosque is 532 persons, with an average of 68 parking spaces. Mosques are only used to capacity during Friday weekly prayer.

Municipalities are increasing restrictions on the location of places of worship, and intend to locate them on arterial or minor arterial roads by enforcing a minimum separation distance between the places of worship.

Different municipalities have different standards for calculating parking requirements for a place of worship. These are related to number of seats, total gross floor area or floor area devoted to worship only.

Minarets and domes have not been mentioned in any zoning by-law for height exemptions. Therefore, these have to be labeled as spires and belfries in order to satisfy zoning regulations. The most common issues which were raised by local residents to oppose the development of a mosque were related to land use compatibility, parking, traffic, noise, height of the building, and loss of industrial or business image of the area.

By and large, planning policies of different municipalities are accommodative of mosques. But, applicants have to explain or translate mosque requirements for satisfying planning policies. A successful completion of a mosque sets a precedent which makes it easier for the next mosque to go through the planning approvals process.

The report concludes with recommendations to be considered by municipalities and the promoters of mosques.