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**OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT NO. 115
PLACES OF WORSHIP
TOWN OF MARKHAM**

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, February 19, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Notice be given to approve Amendment No. 115 to the Official Plan of the Town of Markham, Places of Worship.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an overview of Amendment No. 115, Places of Worship.
- Evaluate Amendment No. 115 in terms of Regional Official Plan Policy and recommend approval.

3. BACKGROUND

Amendment No. 115 revises the Town's policies for places of worship by deleting the use in Business Park Areas, establishes new provisions for reserving sites and new parking requirements and recommends specific design features for sites located in the Markham Town Centre.

3.1 Trends and Issues

Some of the issues resulting from these trends include the need to:

- Determine the number of places of worship required by population.
- Determine the best locations for these facilities, such as on regional roads and within urban areas.
- Determine average site and building size.
- Review parking requirements.

3.1.1 Studies

The Town of Markham recognized the significance of places of worship to its residents, and their importance to the creation of a healthy community. To ensure that the Town's policies meet the needs of its citizens and reflect the most current practices, Council authorized a Places of Worship Background Issues and Options Study in May 2001.

Some of the study's key findings include:

- Places of worship are appropriate in the urban areas.
- Functions performed by places of worship include uses such as day care centres and assembly halls.
- The need to increase the site size from 1 to 2 hectares, in order to accommodate a larger building and an increase in parking demand.
- Preferred location to be on a Regional road or a major collector.

Following the Background Study Town staff held an open house providing an opportunity for members of the public to give input into the study. In addition, staff met separately with religious organizations in order to understand the planning and development process and related issues from their perspective. Staff also met with land developers in order to discuss the Town's current site acquisition policy.

Further to the public consultation process the Town prepared the Future Policy Report providing recommendations that resulted in Official Plan Amendment No. 115, adopted September 30, 2003.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The planning process undertaken by the Town was thorough and transparent and has resulted in a sound planning policy framework for places of worship. The process, background report and new policy, should be shared with the other area municipalities as a good example of town-wide policy for places of worship.

4.1 Regional Official Plan

The Regional Official Plan directs places of worship to the urban areas as identified on Map 5. Regional Official Plan policies encourage institutional employers to be an integral part of the community. Section 3.3.1 states that institutional uses should be located to support the centre and corridor structure of the Official Plan.

Amendment No. 115 is consistent with the intent of the Regional Official Plan. Locating places of worship in the urban area and where possible on Regional roads will utilize the existing and future transportation infrastructure and other community facilities located within urban areas.

4.2 Changes to Existing Policies

The Town's existing policy permits places of worship in all non-open space designations except agriculture, rural areas and neighbourhood commercial designations. The Places of Worship study concluded that the Town's policies were appropriate with the need for some minor refinements.

Official Plan Amendment No. 115 maintains existing policies, although it deletes places of worship as a permitted use in the Industrial (Business Park Area) designation. Refinements to policy include the establishment of detailed criteria for the location and evaluation of future applications for new or expanded places of worship.

The new criteria includes:

- Site plan and zoning approval is required for each new facility.
- Sites shall be located at an intersection, where possible.
- Parking and traffic studies are required.
- An OPA is required if site is greater than 2.5 ha.

This criteria represents good planning. The Region will continue to comment on site plans and specifically address issues related to Regional roads and traffic issues. The Region is the approval authority for Official Plan Amendments, including those required under Amendment No. 115.

4.2.1 Markham Town Centre

As a Regional Centre with higher densities, compact urban building forms and plans for extensive improvements to public transit, it was recognized that special policy direction was required for Markham Centre.

Guidelines for this area include:

- Places of worship may be located on arterial, collector or local roads.
- Urban design guidelines should address the possibility of free standing buildings or part of a mixed use development.
- An OPA shall be required if site is greater than 0.8 ha.
- Parking assessments are required.

Amendment No. 115's guidelines for places of worship are consistent with Regional Policy 5.3, which encourages creating a well-designed system of centres to focus residential, institutional and business activities.

4.2.1.1 Site Reservation Policy

The consultation process allowed the Town to review their existing policies, which provided a revised approach to site reservation. The Town's site reservation policy, under Amendment No. 115, includes:

- One place of worship to be identified for every 6000 persons at the Secondary Plan stage.
- Sites will be reserved for up to 5 years, pre-zoned with a holding pre-fix.
- Site price will be based on the fair market value of serviced low density residential land.
- Sites will no longer be held in escrow, rather they will be reserved through the subdivision agreement process.

As the approval authority on Secondary Plans, the Town's site reservation policy is consistent with the Region's Community Building Policy, Section 5.2.7 which promotes a balance of uses to serve a diverse population.

4.2.1.2 Parking and Transportation Considerations

The Places of Worship Study determined that there are few new places of worship that serve only the local community. Most places of worship, both large and small, serve regional-scale congregations, which primarily arrive by car. The Town's current parking standard of 1 space per 6 seats has been revised through Official Plan Amendment No. 115 to 1 space per 4 seats.

In addition to revising the parking requirement the study recommends that new sites should be located on arterial or major collector roads. This allows more parishioners to utilize transit facilities, which is consistent with the Region's Transit Policy of providing service to all residents, where possible.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

Official Plan Amendment No. 115 is consistent with the "quality communities for a diverse population" goal of Vision 2026. In recognizing York Region's diverse population the policies within the Place of Worship Study enables Markham to respond to the residents needs and foster a strong sense of community.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A review of financial implications related to places of worship was carried out to include property assessment, development charges and other fees. In addition, the impact on municipal services and the financial significance of using industrial land for places of worship was examined.

The review concluded that places of worship provide a range of services to their congregation and to the community as a whole. Places of worship do not create any significant impact on services, and contribute through development charges to the provision of hard services and area specific costs. Although they are largely exempt from taxation, places of worship contribute to the fabric of the community in many ways.

Places of Worship are exempt from the Regional Development Charges By-law up to a maximum of 5,000 square feet or the principle area of worship or whichever is greater.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Approval of Official Plan Amendment No. 115 will revise the Town of Markham's Official Plan policies regarding places of worship, including criteria relating to the location and approval of new places of worship. The recommendations of this report are consistent with the position of the Town of Markham.

7. CONCLUSION

Places of worship are an important part of community building and contribute significantly to the health of the community. The process, study and policy changes behind Official Plan Amendment No. 115 has resulted in strong policy directions for places of worship. In addition, this Amendment provides an appropriate policy framework based upon thorough and detailed studies. This policy framework should be shared with the other area municipalities as an example of good planning policy for places of worship.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.