

# **PLANNING FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP**

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*Facilitating the Development of Urban Churches*

*A Case Study of Hamilton, Ontario*

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Churches are important institutions in Canadian cities that are frequently not given adequate consideration by municipal governments. They are seldom included in planning documents and as a result often face struggles when developing new facilities. A consequence of this treatment in planning policy has been a trend of churches and other places of worship developing their facilities outside urban areas where no communities exist and consequently, their ability to do effective ministry is compromised. This report was completed to address the question: How do planning policies support or impede the development of urban churches? Subsequent questions that were addressed included: How can planning policies be improved to encourage the development of urban churches? How have existing policies impacted church developments in the past? And how can planning policy address other obstacles to urban church development? It was found that policies could be developed to benefit both municipalities and church groups by facilitating the development of urban churches.

A qualitative case study of church developments in Hamilton, Ontario was implemented for this report. The Methodology included a literature review, a policy review with descriptions of best practices in urban church development and a description of the Hamilton context, and a research questionnaire to obtain information about the development experiences of Hamilton churches. The structure of this report included a background section that made the case for urban churches; a research section that gathered information on the policies, their impacts, and possible alternatives; and a discussion that resulted in eleven recommendations for municipalities to consider, and two recommendations for church groups.

### **Background**

The report begins by articulating a definition of urban churches and giving rationale for why they are a desirable form of church development. Urban churches are those that exist within proximity-based communities and have a sense of being connected to their neighbourhoods. They are desirable from the perspectives of both municipalities and church groups for various reasons. Municipalities benefit from urban churches because they provide many social services that would otherwise have to be provided by the municipal government, they contribute to a sense of community within neighbourhoods, and they provide significant intangible benefits that far outweigh any short-term losses in tax revenue. It can also be argued that churches should be included in community planning exercises because they are protected under the laws of Canada and Ontario.

An argument is also put forward for why churches should prefer urban locations. Churches are mandated to be stewards of the earth and should therefore prefer a more sustainable form of development if one is available. Christians are called to love their neighbours including benevolence towards the community. Because churches in urban settings have been shown to have greater potential for effective outreach to their communities, they should be preferred by

Christian congregations. Finally, churches are called to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city” (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV), which can only be achieved when the church is present in the city.

## **Findings**

The findings of this report were derived from a best practice review of Markham, Brampton, and Oakville; a policy review of the City of Hamilton; and a research questionnaire.

The Town of Markham is the first example of a policy review for places of worship to be included in this report. It was initiated in 2002 and included the following key recommendations that were adopted by Town Council:

- That place of worship development be restricted in “Agricultural” and “Business Park Area” designations
- That specific place of worship development criteria be developed
- That a site reservation policy for places of worship be maintained that reserves one place of worship site per 6,000 residents
- That clear definitions be developed for the terms ‘place of worship’ and ‘auxiliary use’

Significant contributions of the Markham case include the recognition that places of worship are important parts of the community and should be planned for; and the establishment of location, development criteria, site acquisition, transportation, and zoning as critical policy areas when planning for places of worship.

The City of Brampton released its review of places of worship planning policies in 2008 and included the following recommendations that were also adopted by its Council:

- That a site reservation policy be implemented, reserving at least one site per 10,000 residents
- That separate location policies be developed for large and small places of worship
- That accessory and auxiliary uses be differentiated and that accessory uses be allowed as part of the place of worship while auxiliary uses require additional approval
- That one parking space be required for every 4 persons of worship capacity

The most significant contribution of the Brampton case is that it showed how a permissive policy context is inadequate to produce desirable church development trends. This is because of a variety of other factors that make many urban sites unattainable to church groups. Brampton demonstrates how municipal policy can be implemented to help churches overcome these obstacles.

The final case in the best practice section was the Town of Oakville. While Oakville found a less active approach to planning for places of worship to be appropriate, it contributed most profoundly with its emphasis on design guidelines for places of worship. Oakville released its initial study in 2011 and it included the recommendation to develop specific design guidelines

to assist places of worship in their development. These would clearly express the Town's expectations for development proposals and ultimately expedite the process.

The policy review of the City of Hamilton revealed that the City does not plan specifically for places of worship, and that while the policy framework is generally quite permissive to places of worship there is little to assist them in their development.

Respondents to the research questionnaire who had recently experienced the development of a church in Hamilton indicated a number of important elements that contributed to the formulation of the recommendations of this report. It was made clear that location was important to church groups as the two most commonly identified factors of the decision were access for congregants and access for the wider community. Positive aspects of the development experience in Hamilton that were identified by respondents included friendly and helpful City staff, and the general permissiveness of City policies. Some negative aspects that were described include difficulty competing with developers to acquire available land, lack of appropriately sized sites for church development, high parking requirements, a lack of clarity on building requirements, a lack of communication between City departments, and a general sense of unhelpfulness within municipal policies.

## **Recommendations**

After gathering information from all three primary sources an analysis was conducted and recommendations were put forward. The recommendations are general in nature, as any changes to City policy would require further study. These recommendations are intended to overview what would be an improved policy framework related to church development in Hamilton. The recommendations for the City of Hamilton include:

**Recommendation #1:** That the municipal government study and understand the vital role of churches in its communities and plan for them accordingly.

**Recommendation #2:** That the municipality provide adequate information regarding church development policies and contacts in an accessible manner.

**Recommendation #3:** That places of worship not be included as a permitted use in Business Park, Industrial, Agricultural, or other similar Official Plan land use designations

**Recommendation #4:** That large and small churches be differentiated in policy and that appropriate location criteria for each be developed

**Recommendation #5:** That places of worship be considered in community planning exercises and that sites be designated for their use

**Recommendation #6:** That terms such as place of worship, accessory use, auxiliary use, worship area, etc. be given clear and specific definitions in the Zoning By-Law.

**Recommendation #7:** That accessory uses be considered as part of the place worship and require no additional approval, and that auxiliary uses be subject to zoning approval.

**Recommendation #8:** That design guidelines be created specifically for places of worship.

**Recommendation #9:** That a site reservation policy be implemented.

**Recommendation #10:** That shared parking agreements, on street parking, transit access discounts, and other potential strategies be studied; and that policies be implemented to allow for alternatives to on-site parking.

**Recommendation #11:** That parking requirements for places of worship be reviewed, and that future policies be based on worship area instead of gross floor area.

Two additional recommendations were put forward for church groups considering the development of a new worship facility. They are:

**Recommendation #1:** That churches understand the importance of the location decision.

**Recommendation #2:** That churches deepen their understanding of the development process and seek expert advice as needed.

## **Conclusion**

This report was written as a result of concerns relating to the development trend of churches locating outside of urban areas. It was found that while policy may not always cause this trend, it could be implemented to curb it. If the City of Hamilton and other municipalities implement the recommendations of this report it is reasonable to expect more churches to locate in urban areas that maximize their potential for ministry in addition to offering more benefits for the municipality.

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## 1 Introduction

Planning for the development of urban churches is a critical exercise from both a land use planning perspective and from the perspective of Christian groups hoping to construct new facilities. When long-range planning is not part of the church development process the likelihood of meeting municipal planning goals diminishes and churches are often less well equipped to achieve their own goals and objectives.

The municipality is in a strategic position to affect and improve the quality of church developments. Churches must abide by municipal planning policies and exist in an environment largely controlled by the municipal government. When municipalities view church developments as an integral part of community wellbeing and create policies that facilitate the development of urban churches, they will experience positive outcomes. This report is an investigation into the effectiveness of policy as a tool for encouraging the development of urban churches. It urges both municipal governments and faith communities to pursue urban locations for new church developments.

The structure of this report is in three major parts: an introduction that includes a description of this study and the issues surrounding the development of urban churches (Chapters 1-3), a review of the research undertaken for this report, including a case study of Hamilton, Ontario, and its findings (Chapters 4-6), and a discussion of possible actions to improve existing conditions in Hamilton, with a list of recommendations (Chapters 7-9).

### 1.1 Problem Statement

The topic of this report was chosen because of a growing trend in Canada—churches being developed far from established communities and other amenities. This trend is alarming because it results in less effective church ministries and contributes to suburban sprawl. The topic, therefore, is significant within the literatures of both urban planning and faith communities.

### 1.2 Research Question

The primary research question being investigated in this report is:

- How do planning policies support or impede the development of urban churches?

Subsequent questions that arise when discussing the primary research question include:

- How can planning policies be improved to encourage the development of urban churches?
- How have existing policies impacted church developments in the past?
- How can planning policy address other obstacles to urban church development?

### 1.3 Urban Church Defined

In order to discuss the merits of urban churches and policies that would make them feasible, it is necessary to first establish what, exactly, an urban church is. To answer this question it is helpful to turn to the literature on contemporary forms of development in North America.

Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck (2000) are leaders at the forefront of progressive urban planning and describe a dichotomy in the way that cities are built today. According to their research, growth tends to occur in the form of either the traditional neighbourhood or suburban sprawl. Traditional neighbourhoods were the predominant form of growth in North America until the post World War II period, which is when individual home ownership and private automobiles became synonymous with the 'American Dream,' and the baby boom was at its peak. The need for affordable land and exponentially increasing individual mobility allowed people to leave traditional neighbourhoods and establish homes in the suburbs. The suburbs soon replaced traditional neighbourhoods as the most prominent living environment. Recently some of the shortcomings of suburban development have been described in the literature under the new moniker of sprawl. As Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck (2000) put it:

Suburban Sprawl, now the standard North American pattern of growth, ignores historical precedent and human experience. It is an invention, conceived by architects, engineers, and planners, and promoted by developers in the *great sweeping aside of the old* that occurred after the Second World War... Sprawl is not healthy growth; it is essentially self-destructive. Even at relatively low population densities, sprawl tends not to pay for itself financially and consumes land at an alarming rate, while producing insurmountable traffic problems and exacerbating social inequity and isolation (4).

Urban sprawl is problematic, and is generally characterized by five prominent features that are described by Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck (2000, 5-7). The identifying features of urban sprawl are:

1. Housing Subdivisions—Pods or clusters of exclusively residential developments are common in sprawl. The result of housing subdivisions is a complete reliance on automobile use for all trips from home as nothing is close by.
2. Shopping Centres—Shopping malls, strip malls, and big box stores are found in sprawl environments as they cater only to automobile users. They usually feature massive parking lots and expansive layouts, as their peripheral location means land is less costly than urban sites
3. Office Parks—Also known as business parks, these developments are used exclusively during the workday.
4. Civic institutions—This includes town halls, places of worship, schools, and other public facilities. Traditionally these buildings were the focal points of most communities, but in

sprawl they are relegated to peripheral land not taken up by the other features of sprawl.

5. Roadways—This last component of sprawl is critical. Roadways are what connect all the other features and make daily life possible. Because roads are so heavily relied upon, congestion is a constant problem. Roads in sprawl settings tend to be large, fast moving, and lacking consideration for any mode of transportation besides the automobile.

This report is about churches, and explores what this particular land use looks like in an urban setting. Churches are included in “civic institutions,” the fourth defining feature of sprawl, along with other places of worship, town halls, and schools. When traditional neighbourhood development was the primary form of growth, churches were generally built at the centre of a neighbourhood for both the convenience of congregants and to be a focal point in the community (Jacobsen, 2006). The difference between this format and the one typical of sprawl is that the location of churches is not *within* communities but on their peripheries. As for a definition of urban church, it may be easier to define what it is not. If a church is in an environment containing the five characteristics of sprawl, it is not an urban church. What makes a church urban is its connection with its surroundings and a sense of being within its community.

Because a sense of being within a community is difficult to quantify or measure, it can be difficult to differentiate urban churches from other church styles. It is sufficient to say, however, that churches are best located where a community exists around the facility and where there is a natural relationship between the church and community. If a church finds itself isolated and unable to indicate a proximity-based community that it is a part of, then that church is not urban and is not situated to maximize its ministry potential.

## **2 Methodology**

### **2.1 Description and Rationale**

This report is a study of the impacts of planning policies on the development of urban churches. In order for this project to be of a manageable scale it was necessary to determine specific methods and establish limitations to the scope of the project. Selected methods are qualitative in nature and a case study approach was implemented. Components of the research include a background section overviewing arguments in favour of urban churches, a review of best practices, a review of Hamilton planning documents relating to church development, and a targeted research questionnaire that was distributed to representatives of churches in Hamilton with recently constructed facilities. The analysis of this data resulted in the conclusions and recommendations of this report. In this chapter each portion of the methodology will be explained in terms of how it was implemented and why it was selected. Steps taken to ensure the quality of the research design will also be discussed.

#### **2.1.1 Qualitative Research**

A qualitative research method is typically construed as emphasizing words over numbers. It is characterized by an emphasis on inductive approaches to understanding the relationship between theory and research; an interpretivist epistemology, which means emphasizing individuals' interpretation of reality instead of proven facts exclusively; and an ontological position described as constructionist, which understands the social reality to be a continuously evolving phenomenon (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). Qualitative research is useful for gaining empathy towards various points of view, and it contributes to a deep understanding of all issues, as those involved in the development process perceive them. It is common for qualitative research to involve relatively small samples with large quantities of information attached to each subject. That characteristic fits well into the context of this report because there are a limited number of church developments that have occurred recently in Hamilton, and because the complex nature of location and construction decisions require a thorough analysis of each case.

#### **2.1.2 Case Study Method**

Case studies are common in qualitative and quantitative research because they allow the researcher to observe a potentially complex theoretical issue in a tangible and manageable context. A case study can be defined as "a research design that entails a detailed and intensive analysis of a single case or at most two or three cases for comparative purposes" (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, 381). Case study research "allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2009, 4).

The specific case study to be used in this report is of Hamilton, Ontario. Reasons for the selection of Hamilton include its considerable size and consequent volume of development; the



existence of urban, suburban, and rural land with development potential; and the availability of necessary information for this study to succeed. More specifically, this report will be investigating the development process for places of worship in Hamilton between 2005 and 2010. In that time five building permits were issued for the new construction of church facilities and four churches were actually constructed. Those four churches form the basis of the analysis and will be used to determine the successes and failures of Hamilton planning policies relating to church development. Recommendations and conclusions of this report were drawn based on the experiences of those church developments.

### **2.1.3 Research Components**

The qualitative case study approach comprised three major parts: a review of relevant literature, a review of municipal planning policies, and a questionnaire distributed to the four churches that were developed in the specified timeframe. Each component is discussed below.

#### ***Literature Review***

As stated by Yin (2009, 3), “in any good research project the path begins with a thorough literature review and the careful and thoughtful posing of research questions or objectives.” A literature review can be used to reveal methodological or theoretical approaches to the research area, develop an analytical framework, determine important variables for inclusion in the research, and add credibility. It puts research in context and demonstrates the importance of the project (Bryman and Teevan, 2005). The literature review plays a vital role in this report as it supports the assumptions made at the outset and ensures the issues being studied are legitimate concerns. During the literature review phase of this report it was determined what an urban church is, why they are a desirable form of church development, and that they are becoming a rarity among new church developments. The literature review functions as impetus for this projects’ research question and shows the relevance of this report to a contemporary planning issue.

#### ***Municipal Policy Review***

The second stage of this project was a thorough municipal policy review. This consisted of a review of City of Hamilton policies relating to the development of places of worship as well as a best practices review. The Hamilton policy review provided context to the church responses that were obtained in the next phase of research, while the best practices review brought to light other approaches to church planning as possible alternatives for recommendation. While the goal of the Hamilton policy review was to summarize the approach taken to church planning by that city, the best practice review aimed to outline a variety of effective policy approaches for consideration.

#### ***Targeted Research Questionnaire***

The final study component to be completed before the analysis phase commenced was a questionnaire distributed to representatives of the four churches included in this study. Contact

was made with a representative of each church—someone who was a member of the congregation and had been involved in the development process in some capacity. A representative of each church was sought out who could comment on questions related to both the impact of facility location on ability to achieve the church’s mission and goals, as well as technical information on the actual development approval process.

The nature of the questionnaire was more similar to a typical interview than survey, as the questions encouraged participants to share their thoughts and ideas as they would in a semi-structured interview. Using a questionnaire allowed research to be conducted in a more timely and cost-effective manner while still providing high quality information for analysis. The questionnaires were distributed and returned by email. All of Queen's University’s stringent guidelines for research ethics were complied with when involving outside participants in this study including the protection of their identities. A sample research questionnaire is attached to this report as an appendix.

After the literature review, municipal document review, and questionnaires were completed, the next phase of project was data analysis. Attention was paid to factors that led churches to choose urban, suburban, or exurban locations. The effectiveness of policies in meeting municipal goals and potential policies that could lead to a more sustainable urban form was also considered.

## **2.2 Quality of the Research Method**

To ensure that this report was of high academic quality certain tests were used. These tests, which are outlined by Yin (2009), include: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

Construct validity is often challenging to overcome in case study research. It is concerned with whether or not the factors included in analysis are the correct operational measures of the concepts being studied (Yin, 2009). In this report, the relationship between municipal policies and church development decisions is where construct validity may be called into question. To ensure that the findings of this study are accurate the data was triangulated using multiple sources. Academic literature described trends, which were upheld by both the policy review and questionnaire components.

Internal validity is similar to construct validity in that it questions the relationship between factors, however internal validity specifically questions whether causal relationships are true and if an extraneous factor is not actually responsible for variations in the dependent variable (Yin, 2009; Bryman & Teevan, 2005). In this report findings are described in detail and the questionnaires were designed allow participants to identify all variables impacting location decisions. Future studies could strengthen the understanding of relationships described in this report.

Generalizability is often regarded to be synonymous with external validity. This test questions whether findings are relevant in contexts other than the study area (Yin, 2009). It is better to view the context of this report in terms of political jurisdiction instead of geography, as this report is concerned with how policies impact development decisions regardless of geography. While generalization is frequently problematic in case study research, this report is relevant wherever planning policy impacts the form of church development. Further studies in different geographical and policy contexts would strengthen claims of external validity contained in this report.

The final test of research design quality is reliability, which relates to the concept of repeatability. To test reliability one must ask: were this study conducted in a different geographical or policy context would a similar conclusion have been reached? Or, has this methodology been proven to produce accurate findings in other contexts? The goal of testing reliability is to minimize impacts of research error and bias on results (Yin, 2009). Similarities between trends outlined in the literature and study results are indicative of reliability. As a result, similar studies would reach similar conclusions, and the findings of this report can be described as reliable

Bias is a primary concern within the reliability test and must be addressed to ensure quality in the chosen research method. No study or researcher approaches a project without preconceived notions and values related to the subject matter. Minimizing the impact of bias on this report, therefore, is a more realistic goal than eliminating it altogether. Mitigating bias consisted of reinforcing claims and assumptions through academic literature and being open to all possible responses from research participants. Minimizing the potential for bias was a significant impetus for the literature review, and the design of questions posed to research participants was carefully constructed to not guide their responses.

It is important for the sake of the credibility of this report to be intentional and transparent in outlining the perspective of the researcher. As both a planner and a member of the Christian community the topic of this report concerns me on a professional as well as personal level. As a planner I want to see a more sustainable urban form become the norm in Canada, and as a Christian I want to see churches thrive in a setting that maximizes their potential for ministry. With that stated, this is a professional quality report that builds an evidence-based, methodologically sound case for improving the built environment. Statements made in this report are reinforced by academic or professional literature and the recommendations of this report are appreciable regardless of personal ideology or beliefs.

### **3 Benefits of Urban Churches**

The purpose of this report is to identify ways in which new church developments can be encouraged to locate in urban settings. In so doing, it assumes that urban churches are better for their communities than churches in peripheral or exurban locations. This assumption is based on the literature and can be argued from both the points of view of churches themselves and the municipal governments that oversee their development. This section will describe how urban churches benefit their communities and why they should be preferred. It is organized to first describe rationale from the municipal perspective—that is why municipalities should desire urban churches, and later explains why the churches themselves benefit more from urban locations.

#### **3.1 Municipal Perspective**

There is no doubt that Canadian cities have greatly benefited from having churches in their urban areas. They add value to neighbourhoods by providing services to poor and otherwise disenfranchised citizens and help build strong communities. Because of the services and other benefits provided by urban churches, in addition to the sustainability advantages of any urban development over a suburban one, municipalities should use their power to facilitate the development of urban churches. This section will review several specific arguments in favour of urban church development from the municipality's perspective. Reasons for the municipality to encourage urban churches that will be discussed include: the social services they provide, their contribution to strong communities, the benefits of churches outweigh any potential losses, and the existence of legislation to include places of worship.

##### **3.1.1 Churches Provide Social Services**

Churches are well known for their social consciences and ability to deliver services to the members of their communities most in need. Studies have shown that as many as 92% of Christian churches are engaged in some sort of social service (Ley, 2008). These services vary by city and individual church, but the most common reported services in one study were food pantries, clothing closets, and soup kitchens (Ebaugh & Pipes, 2001). Other services that are also prevalent include provision of health care services, tutoring children, prison ministries, substance abuse programs, and provision of housing to the elderly (Sherman, 2003).

It has been argued that churches and other religious institutions are losing their significance in Western societies because of the rise of secularism (Ley, 2008). While it must be acknowledged that the proportion of the population involved with religious groups has decreased, the Christian church in Canada is growing in terms of real numbers. What is more important to this specific criticism is the fact that 80% of services offered by Christian congregations are received by non-members of the church, so members are not the only people who experience benefits from churches (Ley, 2008).

A church's ability for local outreach increases with proximity. When a church is situated in a community it is common to see higher benevolence to its neighbours than similar churches would offer if not in a community context (Price, 2000). Furthermore, churches have been known to improve the reputations of depressed or decaying neighbourhoods and increase the level of population stability. They also contribute to an appearance of orderliness. This affects the quality of future developments in the neighbourhood and can increase real estate values (Kinney & Winter, 2006).

In a society that is increasingly politically conservative, municipalities should appreciate non-government providers of social services more than ever. Churches and other faith-based organizations may be able to offer alternatives to government funded programs if the political climate limits a municipality's ability to offer them. This system has proven to be quite successful in some American settings, where government spending tends to be more limited than in Canada (Farnsley, 1998).

### **3.1.2 Churches Contribute to Strong Communities**

Churches offer benefits to their communities beyond social services. Many church buildings function as community centres open to groups unaffiliated with the Christian faith. One of the greatest benefits churches offer a neighbourhood is community. It has been found that community cannot be built, but must form naturally (Jacobsen, 2003b). Seaside, Florida is a town that was built using New Urbanist ideas with the intent of creating an environment where a sense of community would thrive. It located houses near the street, emphasized sidewalks, put porches on the front of all houses, and implemented a number of other planning strategies to stimulate communal bonds and interaction among neighbours. The community has performed well economically for the developer, but lacks the community atmosphere that was so integral to the initial plan (Jacobsen, 2003b). What would have helped Seaside in its development of community, and would also benefit other cities, is a community church. This example shows that while a built environment conducive to neighbourliness is important, without a catalyst true community may never develop on its own.

Churches have traditionally played a large role in North American society as gathering places and have functioned as community builders. When churches are absent from a neighbourhood the important role they once played is often not picked up by another institution. and community suffers as a result (Jacobsen, 2006). Hamilton has long said that downtown revitalization is a high priority for its staff and councilors, and given that churches can "1) grow community, 2) promote community service, 3) attract people to live downtown, 4) draw private investment, and 5) add beauty to the physical appearance of community" (Van Pelt & Greydanus, 2005, 30), it makes sense for the City to encourage urban church development as a method to fulfill this goal.

### **3.1.3 Churches' Intangible Benefits Outweigh a Loss of Tax Income**

Places of worship are valuable assets to cities that ought to be a desired form of development by municipalities. Studies conducted by municipalities themselves have found that “Places of worship are an important part of community building and contribute significantly to the health of the community” (Markham, 2003a, section 7). Despite these findings, many cities appear to be less than enthralled by the possibility of new church developments in their urban areas. Proponents of urban church development claim that this is due in large part to the tax-exempt status of places of worship in Canada (EFC, 2010). While it may be true in the short-term that a church generates less municipal revenue than a commercial enterprise, a broader perspective reveals that although the social benefits provided by churches are less tangible, they far outweigh any losses of tax revenue. The Town of Markham investigated the value of places of worship to their communities and concluded “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 community in many ways” (Markham, 2004, section 5).

### **3.1.4 Churches are Protected by Canadian Law**

Various pieces of legislation have been interpreted as mandating municipalities to provide churches for its residents. The primary provincial legislation related to this issue is the Ontario *Planning Act* (1990), and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) speaks to it at a federal government level. Municipalities, which fall within the jurisdiction of the provinces, must comply with the regulations and policies of these legislative documents.

Section 2(a) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees the freedom of conscience and religion. The guarantee of religious freedom, while not defined or given scope in the charter itself, has been interpreted by various judicial decisions as placing no unnecessary burden on one's personal beliefs or ability to practice his or her religion (EFC, 2010). This section of the *Charter* is meant to “Protect from state-imposed costs or burdens that interfere in more than a trivial or inconsequential way with religious belief or practice” (EFC, 2010, 5). In terms of the development of church facilities, because the *Charter* governs all municipal actions, no zoning by-law or other policy can unfairly prohibit a church from being constructed. Municipalities can, however, restrict church developments in certain areas on the grounds of incompatibility with surrounding built forms or land uses. If the purpose or effect of a by-law is interpreted by a judge as being “To interfere with ‘the ability of adherents to live in accordance with their religious beliefs’” (EFC, 2010, 12), then the by-law is incompatible with the *Charter* and would likely be quashed if brought to court.

Provincial legislation deals more directly with matters of urban planning and is also subject to the *Charter*. The most prominent piece of planning legislation in Ontario is the *Planning Act* of 1990. This *Act*, while not dealing specifically with churches or places of worship, does mandate

the inclusion of social and cultural amenities in community plans. Churches can and should be considered a social or cultural amenity (Hoernig, 2006) and thus should be accommodated in municipal plans. Section 2 of the *Planning Act* defines provincial interest as including “(i) the adequate provision and distribution of educational, health, social, cultural, and recreational facilities.” In section 16 the *Act* states that Official Plans “(a) shall contain goals, objectives, and policies established primarily to manage and direct physical change and the effects on the social, economic, and natural environment of the municipality.” These policies compel municipalities to ensure adequate social and cultural facilities are provided, and since churches fall easily under the umbrella of social or cultural facilities it is therefore mandated that municipalities allow church buildings to be constructed without undue additional requirements, and may be interpreted as meaning policy should be in places to facilitate their development.

### **Section Summary**

This section has overviewed some reasons why municipalities should encourage the development of urban churches. Churches provide many important social services, help build community, offer more benefits than costs to the municipality, and there is legal impetus to plan for churches. Clearly, a compelling argument exists in favour of a municipality supporting urban church development. This report will now turn its attention to church perspectives on this debate: how church groups also benefit from urban locations.

## **3.2 Church Perspective**

Christians and Church groups are called to “Fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28, NIV), “Love your neighbour” (Matthew 19:19, NIV), and “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city” (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV). Each of these commands can be interpreted as rationale for church groups to prefer urban locations. Christians should care for the earth (which is the meaning of the word subdue in the context of Genesis 2:28), and therefore support sustainable forms of development, Christians are commanded to love their neighbours, which should motivate churches to locate in settings where there is the greatest opportunity to have a positive impact on community, and Christians are called to seek the welfare of their city, which can be understood to mean contributing to the economic and social wellbeing of their communities. This section of the report will review each of these three rationales for Christians to prefer urban church locations.

### **3.2.1 “Fill the Earth and Subdue it”**

When the first man appeared in the creation narrative it was mandated that he take care of God’s earth. *The Bible* states clearly: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15, NIV). It is also commanded to Adam and Eve to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28, NIV). In this passage the term subdue should not be understood as meaning to exploit or conquer, but rather to cultivate and benefit from the fertility of the land. Based on these passages and others many Christians have felt a strong need

to be stewards of the earth—an idea that is parallel to the contemporary concept of sustainability. Christians, therefore, should prefer sustainable forms of development, and this applies especially to church buildings because they are a physical representation of the church community.

Genesis 1:28 says, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’” (NIV). As rulers over the other earthly creatures, humans are called to protect their habitats. The *NIV Study Bible* comments on this verse “Humankind goes forth from the hands of the Creator under his divine benediction—flourishing, filling the earth with their kind, and exercising dominion over the other earthly creatures. ... As God’s representatives in the creaturely realm, they are stewards of God’s creatures. They are not to exploit, waste, or despoil them, but to care for them and use them in the service of God and humankind” (1973, 6).

There is a significant amount of literature condemning suburban development for its lack of sustainability. Even when buildings themselves emit few pollutants, the built form of the suburbs is conducive only to the automobile as a transportation option, which is the least sustainable mode (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000). Therefore, Christians should on grounds of environmental stewardship prefer the more sustainable alternative of urban church development.

### **3.2.2 “Love Your Neighbours”**

Another rationale for church groups to seek urban church locations is the commandment to love your neighbour. This command taken from a *Bible* passage in which Jesus answers the question “Which is the greatest Commandment in the Law?” by saying, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22: 37-39, NIV). Given the importance of the command to ‘Love your neighbour as yourself,’ church communities should consider how their church’s location contributes to this cause. Evidence has been collected that shows a positive relationship between an urban church location and its ability to provide services to the surrounding community (Price, 2000). Churches have social responsibilities for their communities, and should therefore locate where one exists (Ebaugh & Pipes, 2001).

Church groups must realize that their facilities are valuable to the community because of their usefulness as a meeting place for various groups. Many cities are devoid of adequate public meeting spaces and rely on churches to provide those facilities. Community groups are important to community wellbeing and should be supported by churches regardless of whether they are affiliated with that church (Ebaugh & Pipes, 2001).



### 3.2.3 “Seek the Peace and Prosperity of the City”

The third and final rationale for churches to prefer urban locations to be discussed is perhaps the strongest. Many churches teach that it is a duty of all Christians to be a positive influence in the world, and Christians who seek to live out this duty usually do so through positive attitudes, actions that put others first, and donations to worthy causes. One author argues that this command should also be fulfilled through the obvious physical presence of Christianity—its churches. Jacobsen (2003a) states that “(Christians) need to think seriously about the values and truths that are conveyed by our church buildings and make sure that they are biblically and not just culturally informed” (115). Jacobsen is implying in this quote that church buildings should be representative of the biblically informed ideals of aesthetic appeal, community access, and cultural engagement. In doing this the city will be greatly benefited.

The culture of contemporary land development emphasizes maximized profit margins, cutting costs, and getting the most ‘bang for your buck.’ Churches often fall into this mindset despite its potential negative impacts on the image of a congregation. Churches should not in all cases go for the cheapest form of development when it comes to their worship facilities. There are situations when an aesthetically pleasing and well-located church offers significant benefits to its community. Jacobsen (2003a, 114) explains: “There is a particular value in beautifully designed and quality built structures set within a coherent and eloquent city plan. Such civic treasures bring pleasure and delight to our daily lives, and they nurture in us communal and civic values.” This statement refers not only to aspects of church design but to location as well. The economic reality of Canadian cities is that urban land is generally more valuable than land in the suburbs or on the urban fringe. However the investment of additional funds to make a well-designed urban church possible may generate significant intangible benefits, making the added expense worthwhile.

Churches are called to create wholesome community as part of their mandate to seek the peace and prosperity of the city. A negative byproduct of suburbanization and automobile oriented development has been the loss of proximity-based community. Theorist Frederick Tönnies’ 1877 discussion of this dichotomy is in terms of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Where *Gemeinschaft* is “Roughly, the community of the village, based on mutual aid and trust, and centred on family, neighbourhood, and friendship.” *Gesellschaft* is “The association of the anonymous city, based on individual self interest and contract” (Gorringe, 2002, 164). Cities have crept away from the former with the development of modern suburbs and found themselves predominantly in the latter, where real community is often absent. Gorringe (2002, 164) explains, “The Church has often seen its role in light of this analysis as providing some glimmer of community where otherwise it is absent.” In order for churches to fulfill this important role it is imperative that they locate where the built environment does not make *Gemeinschaft* unachievable.

**Section Summary**

Many arguments can be made for why churches should prefer locations in urban areas instead of in isolated suburbs or exurbs. In this section three rationale for the development of urban churches were included: Christians are called to take care of the earth and should therefore desire the sustainability of an urban location, Christians are commanded to love their neighbours and urban churches are better able to provide important services to their communities, and finally churches should seek to improve the environment of the city by being a visible and active presence in it.

It has been demonstrated that both the municipality and churches themselves have good reasons to prefer urban locations for new church developments. This report will now turn its attention to the planning policies that can make this preference a reality.

## 4 Best Practice Review

An effective approach to establishing strategies for evaluating and improving existing policies is to study the actions of others. In doing this, one is able to view all stages of a policy—the impetus, its implementation, and consequences. Policies can then be measured for their effectiveness in a specific context. While it is never guaranteed that what worked in one place will generate the same results in another, a best practices review will at the very least generate ideas for future policy directions.

There is the potential for confusion when using the term ‘best practices.’ The term will be used in this report, however, because of its widespread application in planning rhetoric and familiarity among people of various backgrounds. To ensure clarity, a definition of ‘best practice’ for the purposes of this report is as follows: A policy, practice, or procedure that has proven effective at obtaining its objectives in at least one context and can be reasonably expected to perform well in other contexts as well.

This section is organized to emphasize the context and overall goals of each municipality’s policy direction. As such, each municipality is allocated a separate section. Context, practices and policies, and lessons are discussed for each. The municipalities included in this chapter are all located in Ontario and have recently reviewed, or are in the process of reviewing, their place of worship planning policies. They include the Town of Markham, City of Brampton, and Town of Oakville.

### 4.1 Town of Markham

The Town of Markham has taken an active role in the development of places of worship in its communities. Unlike many municipalities in Ontario, Markham views places of worship as being important to the maintained health and vibrancy of communities, and as such views them as being within the “Municipal mandate of providing community services” (Hoernig, 2006, 88). While much can be learned about specific practices from the Markham example, perhaps the greatest lesson is the City’s generally positive attitude towards church development.

#### 4.1.1 Urban Context

Markham is an incredibly multicultural city. According to the 2006 census, Markham has a population of about 260,000. Of this population 58.5% claim an unofficial language as their mother tongue, 56.5 % are immigrants, and 65.4% are a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2007). Markham also has a relatively wide range of religious affiliations, which is a trend that continues to grow. In the 1991 census it was reported that 62.5% of the population claimed affiliation with Christianity (either Catholic or Protestant). By 2001 that proportion had dropped to 56.1%, but the absolute number had remained steady. Religious affiliation with Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Sikhism all increased significantly (Hoernig, 2006).

Markham is a rapidly growing community that is expected to continue to increase in population for the foreseeable future. This is due in part to its proximity to Toronto and its growing employment sector. The expected pace of growth in Markham is an average of 4,000 people per year until 2031 (Markham, 2010). As Markham's population has increased, the number of places of worship has grown accordingly. In 1981 Markham had a population of 77,000 and had 38 places of worship. By 2001 the population had grown by 283% to 218,000. Places of worship had increased by 192% to 73, with the average floor area increasing by 433% (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2002). With this past experience in mind, it is safe to assume that the demand for places of worship will continue to increase in the Town of Markham.

The built form of Markham is quite suburban in most places. Most developments in the town are primarily oriented to automobile access and little emphasis has been paid to active transportation or public transit. Recently the planning culture in Markham appears to have shifted somewhat to emphasize a more progressive and sustainable urban form. This is evident in establishment of several New Urbanist neighbourhoods in the city such as Cornell, Angus Glen, and Markham Centre. These developments show that the Markham Planning Department is interested in improving and updating their approaches to planning in Markham.

#### **4.1.2 Review of Policies**

In 2002 the Town of Markham began a comprehensive review of its planning policies for places of worship. A report was commissioned by the Town in recognition of the important role of places of worship and the need for up-to-date policies regarding their development. Stemming from this commissioned study was a staff report that recommended Markham's Town Council endorse the recommendations of the study, and finally an Official Plan Amendment was passed in 2004 enacting those recommendations. The Town's 2002-2004 overhaul of its places of worship planning policies also included the enactment of By-Law 2003-301, which updated parking requirements for places of worship.

The 2002 commissioned study and subsequent documents were organized by policy type. Each type of policy was intended to address four main issues that were identified in the study. The questions asked were:

- Should new places of worship be permitted outside the Urban Area?
- What revisions to existing policy within the Urban Area and additional policy directions are required in the Official Plan to guide development of Places of Worship?
- How should the Town's site acquisition policy be updated?
- What parking standards and other transportation related controls should be used for places of worship? (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2002, 75).

Each policy was described in their study and given a recommendation for future action. This section will be organized similarly. The significant policies to be discussed here relate to: location, development criteria, site acquisition, transportation considerations, and zoning.

### ***Location***

Before the 2002 commissioned study was completed, places of worship were allowed to develop in almost all land use designations in the Urban Area. They were also permitted in the “Hamlet” designation of rural Markham provided the development was sufficiently small in scale. Places of worship were not allowed to develop in designated “Agricultural” areas. Noteworthy policy directions since the 2002 report included the maintenance of existing policies prohibiting places of worship in designated “Agricultural” areas, restricting place of worship development in the “Business Park Area” designation, and allowing places of worship to develop in “Heritage Main Street Area” designations, provided they receive zoning approval and meet heritage requirements.

### ***Development Criteria***

The development criteria that churches had to adhere to before 2002 were general in nature and not specific to places of worship (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2002). This proved to be problematic and called for a reevaluation of development criteria. In the old policies five specific problem areas were found, including:

- Appropriateness of site size for determining necessity of planning approval,
- Need for clearer direction on locating new or expanded facilities,
- Need to address auxiliary uses,
- Need for the Town’s role in place of worship development to be included in the Official Plan, and
- Need to pay more attention to externalities and other issues that arise from place of worship development.

The Official Plan Amendment (Markham, 2003a) that followed this report addressed the issues by bolstering the Town’s ability to effect place of worship developments. It implemented additional requirements to site plan evaluations including a list of criteria that must be met before approval will be granted. This formalized the development approval process and made clear what the Town’s expectations were. Criteria included: “Land use designation, location in terms of adjoining road(s), impacts on the surrounding area, access, traffic, parking, landscaping, buffering, site and building design” (Markham, 2003c).

### ***Site Acquisition***

The Town of Markham includes a site acquisition policy for places of worship in its Official Plan. This policy is intended to assist places of worship in their efforts to obtain land and develop worship facilities on it. It is described as exceeding any other policy of its nature in the Greater Toronto Area (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2002). Prior to 2002 the policy had been only moderately successful, however, as most sites for places of worship were being acquired through regular transactions. It was recommended in the 2002 report that the intent of the

policy be maintained, but that it be updated to the point where it becomes a useful tool that churches would use to their benefit.

The policy that was recommended in 2002 and included in the 2003 Official Plan Amendment addressed issues of number of sites, zoning, site price, and holding of sites in escrow.

- Number of Sites: It was stipulated that one site should be reserved per 6,000 residents.
- Zoning: Sites would be given a holding prefix to their zoning designation that would remain for five years.
- Site Price: A price for the land would not be determined by the Town.
- Holding of Sites in Escrow: Sites designated for places of worship would not be held by the Town, but by the vendor and sale of land would be privately arranged.

The most significant change between the policy described above and the preexisting policy was the removal of set prices and holding sites in escrow. These changes were intended to make the Town's site acquisition policy more usable by places of worship and lessened the role of the municipality in the process.

### ***Transportation***

Transportation, and parking in particular, is a perpetually perplexing issue when planning for places of worship. For this reason, parking was given special consideration in the 2002 report. It was found that approximately half of the places of worship in Markham were experiencing some sort of parking deficiency despite being developed in accordance with the existing parking requirement of one parking space per six seats or 17.5 metres of gross floor area. It was found that parking issues were most severe when churches were in residential settings, due primarily to the fact that most commercial or industrial uses were filing fewer complaints about neighbour churches—possibly due to the fact that many did not operate on Sundays. Furthermore, the study found that individual cars were the primary mode of transportation to places of worship and alternatives such as public transportation or carpooling were either not feasible or too inconvenient to be viable solutions. A review of other municipal parking requirements showed that Markham had one of the lowest standards, and it was found that Markham's parking requirements were in need of updating.

The report recommended four specific updates to the Town's transportation policies related to places of worship.

- A traffic impact study should be completed for any place of worship requiring 100 parking spaces or more.
- A parking study should be done for any place of worship requesting reduced parking requirements
- Parking study guidelines should be developed
- New places of worship should be located on main transportation corridors such as arterial or major collector roads.

- Parking requirements should be set at the greater of one parking space per four seats or nine square metres of net floor area.

The recommendations were approved and included in an Official Plan amendment.

### **Zoning**

When the 2002 commissioned study was conducted there were several zoning by-laws being used in Markham, with each one controlling development in a defined area within the Town. The report found several issues with this system including a lack of usable definition of the terms ‘place of worship’ or ‘church,’ variation of permitted uses in similar zones, and inconsistent site standards. Based on these issues, the study recommended a review of zoning be completed with an updated definition of place of worship and improved development regulations.

In response to this recommendation the Town of Markham did take steps to provide clear definitions of places of worship as well as auxiliary uses. This allows zoning to appropriately address the varying issues of different places of worship.

#### **4.1.3 Lessons from Markham**

The Town of Markham has been very active in the development of places of worship in its urban areas. In addition to the policy actions described in the previous section, the Town has made resources available for developing churches through their website and by providing adequate contact information. As part of the introduction to the Official Plan Amendment (Markham, 2003a), the Town reiterated its commitment to the development of places of worship, saying:

The Town of Markham has long recognized the significance of places of worship to its residents, and the need to provide appropriate places of worship sites within the community. The consultant report recommended that the Official Plan make reference to the Town’s commitment to continue to work with faith communities to develop places of worship through various means including:

- Identification of place of worship sites in new Secondary Plans, and rezoning;
- Implementation of a site reservation policy for places of worship in new residential communities; and,
- Rental of Town facilities to worship groups, where appropriate (section 4.1.5).

This commitment is second to no other Ontario municipality and is an example of how church development can be facilitated. Markham invested significant resources into updating its place of worship planning policies and states “This policy framework should be shared with other area municipalities as an example of good planning policy for places of worship” (Markham, 2004, section 7). The merits of each specific policy enacted by the Town of Markham can be debated, but what is certain is that by approaching places of worship development as being

within the municipal mandate of providing community services, churches are more able to locate where their benefit to surrounding communities is maximized.

A further contribution made by the Town of Markham is the establishment of five critical policy areas for places of worship planning. These include: location, development criteria, site acquisition, transportation, and zoning. The five criteria of good place of worship planning policy will form a basis of analysis in this report when evaluating Hamilton's policies.

## **4.2 City of Brampton**

Like Markham, Brampton views places of worship as essential community services (Hoernig, 2006). The result of this position is that Brampton also considers the adequate provision of places of worship to be within the mandate of its planners. This section reviews how that position affects the Brampton policy context.

### **4.2.1 Urban Context**

Brampton is a predominantly suburban city within the Greater Toronto Area. It is well known for its multicultural population, particularly the significant East Indian community (Brampton, 2010a). Brampton had over 430,000 residents in 2006, with about 100,000 of that population being added since 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2007). This high growth rate (average 6.6% growth per year) is expected to continue for the foreseeable future (Hoernig, 2006).

Brampton's population was almost entirely of British descent in the mid twentieth century, and it remained very high until the 1990s when significant changes to the ethnic mix happened through immigration. Between 1991 and 2001 the number of people with certain minority religious affiliations (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist) jumped from 9% of the population to 20.5% (Hoernig, 2006). In 2006 immigrants represented nearly half of the total population (Brampton, 2010b).

As a result of the increasing religious diversity of Brampton, in addition to its overall population growth, the demand for new places of worship has grown. Places of Worship in Brampton now tend to be larger than ever, require more land, serve regional congregations, and have more significant impacts on their surroundings. It is for these reasons that the City of Brampton determined there was need to update its policies regarding place of worship development (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008).

### **4.2.2 Review of Policies**

Brampton has been criticized recently for its lack of control over unsustainable development. A recent news report described Brampton as "plowing ahead with plans that will make it the hot spot for horizontal growth — a.k.a. sprawl — in the Greater Golden Horseshoe" (Gombu, 2011). Despite this overall tendency to prefer outdated policies and sprawling forms of development, Brampton has one of the most progressive planning departments in Ontario when it comes to planning for places of worship.



Like Markham, the City of Brampton recognizes “the important role faith groups play in contributing to the quality of life in the community. In particular, the City actively supports the development of Places of Worship in new residential areas” (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008, i). The most notable policy supporting that statement is Brampton’s longstanding site reservation policy for places of worship (Hoernig, 2006). This policy, however, has not always produced the desired result of more community-based places of worship, and consequently City Council directed staff to reexamine the issue.

The process of commissioning a place of worship study and policy review began in 2005. By 2006 a consultant had been hired and in 2008 the findings of that study were presented to the City in the form of a discussion paper. The process was completed in 2009 when an Official Plan Amendment was approved. One of the recommendations was that policies relating to places of worship be reviewed periodically to ensure they continue to reflect the needs of a constantly changing city.

The discussion paper (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008) identified four key issues in places of worship planning: site reservation; number of sites, location, and site size criteria; parking; and accessory and auxiliary uses. A summary of each issue is included in the following sections along with their recommended policy direction.

### ***Site Reservation***

The original site reservation policy was created because the City of Brampton acknowledged the importance of the social and spiritual contributions of places of worship. The goal of the policy was to ensure places of worship had opportunities to locate in new residential areas. It never limited places of worship to reserved sites, but was intended to make the development of community-based places of worship a viable alternative (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008). The policy contained a clause that included a time frame for the site to be reserved, and afterwards it would revert to residential zoning. Despite the City’s best intentions with the policy, the consultant’s discussion paper noted that most new places of worship had not chosen reserved sites for development. It identified four problems with the policy:

1. Pre-zoning reserved sites to revert to residential zones inflated the cost of land and made most sites unattainable by religious groups;
2. The reserve period of three year was not adequate time for religious groups to purchase the land, and it was short enough that some developers found it economically beneficial to hold the land for the three year duration and develop it afterwards for residential use;
3. Reserve sites tended to be too small or unsuitable for place of worship development; and
4. Many faith groups were unaware of the site reservation policy or available properties (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008).

Based on these problems and other analysis of the policy, the discussion paper recommended the following actions:

1. That the City continue to reserve sites for places of worship in new developments,
2. That the three year reservation period be maintained,
3. That a Zoning By-Law amendment be required to build residential units after the reservation period, in addition to other requirements, and
4. That a group be established to monitor the effectiveness of place of worship policies (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008).

The rationale behind maintaining a three year limit to site reservation with the additional requirement that sites undergo Zoning By-Law and Official Plan Amendments was to ensure there was no financial incentive for developers to maintain ownership of land for the reserve period and develop it later, while still avoiding potential negative impacts of large vacant sites within developed neighbourhoods for long time periods.

#### ***Number, Location, and Site Size***

The Brampton Official Plan (2006, section 4.8.8) states: “The City of Brampton shall encourage the location of Places of Worship sites throughout the City in accordance with identified needs as a means of strengthening the spiritual and social fabric of the community. Places of worship sites shall be compatible with and complement existing and abutting land uses, be a good fit in residential areas, and be designated in areas where they can derive mutual benefits from compatible land uses.” This statement makes clear the fact that Brampton wants places of worship to locate in areas where they can benefit surrounding communities, as long as good planning practices are upheld. The question of how place of worship development should be limited to ensure good planning without making their development process overly complicated or cumbersome was a topic for significant discussion in the consultant’s discussion paper (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008).

The study found that places of worship were not evenly distributed throughout the city and some large areas were nearly void of places of worship. The existing policy had been to reserve one place of worship site for every 10,000 population. This was found to be appropriate as long as it was viewed as a minimum and places of worship were not limited to reserved sites.

Because of recent trends towards larger facilities with more regional congregations, careful consideration had to be given to the location and dimensions of reserved sites. The consultant’s study found that very large places of worship (worship area of approximately 10,000 square feet or greater) have much greater potential for compatibility problems. It was therefore recommended that these large places of worship be prohibited on-sites abutting residential uses. It was also recommended that places of worship not be allowed in certain industrial or business oriented land uses as they have little potential for community benefit there, and are incompatible with other land uses in those designations. It was stated, however, that because

of the affordability of sites in those designations, places of worship should be allowed to locate there for limited timeframes as a sort of ‘incubation period.’ This would allow the community to develop somewhat before selecting a permanent location (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008).

Unsuitable site size was identified in the discussion paper as one of the primary reasons places of worship did not develop on reserved sites. The standard size of reserved sites was between 0.6 and 1.2 hectares, which would be suitable for the place of worship alone but not when auxiliary uses and parking are factored in. It was recommended that a variety of site sizes should be available in the site reservation policy to meet the specific needs of each place of worship.

This section also contributed a new definition of the term place of worship: “A place or building or part thereof, including accessory buildings or structures that are used for the regular assembly of persons for the practice of religious worship, services or rites. It may include accessory uses such as classrooms for religious instruction, including programs of community social benefit, assembly areas, kitchens, offices for the administration of the place of worship, a single residence for the faith group leader, and a small scale day nursery, but shall not include a cemetery or more than one dwelling unit” (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008, 21).

### ***Parking Requirements***

The most common complaint from neighbours of places of worship is parking. Negative aspects of inadequate parking supply were identified by the consultants and include safety concerns of congregants having to walk across busy streets and potential neighbour conflict. It was also mentioned that places of worship seldom have adequate on-site parking for occasions that draw larger crowds than is typical. The paper recommended shared parking agreements be encouraged between places of worship and their neighbours, and that parking studies be required before a reduction in parking requirements is granted (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008).

Recommendations related to parking management included:

1. That the parking standard for Place of Worship be deleted and replaced with the following:
  - a) 1 space for every 4 persons in worship area capacity, where worship area capacity shall be calculated as any combination of the following:
    - i. one fixed seat in the worship area per person;
    - ii. 0.5 metres of bench width in the worship area per person;
    - iii. 1.0 square metres net worship floor area per person of non-seating or non-fixed seating areas,
  - b) Where a Place of Worship includes other areas of assembly outside of the worship area, such as halls or auditoriums, 1 parking space per 8 square metres

of assembly area (not including the worship area) shall apply if such requirement exceeds the requirement a) above.”

2. That definition for “Worship Area” and “Worship Area Capacity” be added as follows:
  - a) **WORSHIP AREA** shall mean the net floor areas, whether above or below established grade, within the walls of a sanctuary, hall or meeting room(s) that a faith group uses for the practice of its religious rites or services, including any balcony or other area that, by the removal or opening of any walls or partitions, can expand the area of the sanctuary, hall or meeting room(s), and any choir or musicians area. Floor areas intended solely for the use of the faith group leader, such as the altar or pulpit areas, are not included in the worship area.
  - b) **WORSHIP AREA CAPACITY** shall mean the number of persons for whom the worship area(s) is designed, as determined in the parking regulation. For the purpose of this calculation, fixed seat means any seating that is permanently secured to the floor; non-fixed seating areas are floor areas where no seats are provided or seats are not secured to the floor (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008, 37).

### ***Accessory and Auxiliary Uses***

The last major issue addressed in the City of Brampton’s commissioned policy review was accessory and auxiliary uses. These uses are typically not directly associated with the primary use of the land—that is worship—but are nevertheless important to the religious community. Auxiliary uses are defined as not integral to all places of worship, while accessory uses are (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008). Common examples of auxiliary uses include: private schools, community centres, cemeteries, housing, and banquet halls. Facilities usually located within the main building such as kitchens, classrooms, and offices are considered to be accessory uses and are generally less of a concern. Auxiliary and accessory uses alter the weekly use patterns of a place of worship from a prominent spike in use one day a week to more sustained activity.

The proposed policy direction in the consultant’s policy review consisted of determining what were accessory and auxiliary uses, and allowing all accessory uses. The proper management of auxiliary uses required further study before a policy could be developed, but should be subject to further planning regulation.

### **4.2.3 Lessons from Brampton**

The City of Brampton’s understanding of the importance of places of worship and their impact on social and spiritual wellbeing of communities was the rationale behind their policy review. Therefore, Brampton reiterates what Markham demonstrated: when cities acknowledge the role of places of worship in their communities it becomes reasonable for them to plan for their inclusion in developing neighbourhoods.

An important lesson from Brampton’s policy review is the usefulness of policy in overcoming economic or other obstacles that often keep places of worship out of urban areas. Brampton found that many places of worship were unable to obtain urban properties because of high costs and small site size, despite a relatively permissive policy context. Through policy, however, they found it possible to reduce the effects of those obstacles. Land price and site sizes were controlled through the site reservation policy and increased the likelihood of a church being able to obtain and build on those sites. Land price is derived from its highest and best use, that is the use that generates the highest economic benefit (Hanink, 1997). If a site reservation policy limits potential uses of the land, the highest and best use is reduced and land costs will tend to go down. An understanding of economic principles is invaluable when proposing solutions to the problem of place of worship exclusion from urban areas. Brampton also included policies that dictate minimum sizes for reserved sites and ensured a suitable site existed for most new churches. This understanding of the specific needs of churches contributed to the effectiveness of the policy.

### 4.3 Town of Oakville

In 2009 the Town of Oakville adopted a new Official Plan titled *Livable Oakville* (Oakville, 2009a). This Plan is, at time of writing, under appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board so not in effect as of yet. During the preparation of the Plan, places of worship were identified as important contributors to their communities, and it was determined that “places of worship policies within all land use designation will be considered through further study” (Oakville, 2009a, section 6.8.1). This statement led to initiation by Council of a *Places of Worship Land Use Study* (2011) that reviews how city policies affect the development of places of worship in Oakville. This section reviews how Oakville, a city that differs significantly from Markham and Brampton in terms of its ethnic diversity, is proposing to improve its policies relating to places of worship.

#### 4.3.1 Urban Context

Unlike Markham and Brampton, Oakville is composed primarily of Canadian citizens who were born in Canada. This group comprises 68% of the total population (Oakville, 2009b). Oakville is characterized by its relatively affluent population. The median household income in Oakville as measured by the 2006 *Census of Canada* was more than \$32,000 greater than the Ontario median. Oakville is also above the Ontario average in other areas such as educational attainment, mobility, and knowledge of official languages (Statistics Canada, 2007).

The Town of Oakville expects to see its minority population grow in the near future, as immigration to Canada remains high. Recent studies have found that 86% of Oakville residents are religious, and that 28 different religions are practiced within the city (Oakville, 2011). As the city becomes more diverse demand for places of worship will increase, making this a strategic time to develop effective policies for places of worship development in Oakville.

### **4.3.2 Review of Policies**

As mentioned previously, the Town of Oakville approved its *Livable Oakville Plan* in 2009, and it will be in effect after appeals have been adjudicated. This Plan included a brief section on places of worship and stated that further studies would be completed. The *Places of Worship Land Use Study* was released in February 2011 in partial fulfillment part of the *Livable Oakville Plan* commitment. The places of worship study is pending public consultation, revision, and Council approval before the policies it outlines can go into effect, but the document overviews an approach to planning for places of worship that is useful for the purposes of this report. Existing Town of Oakville policies will not be addressed in this report, as they do not offer the same level of innovation that is included in the new study and do not reflect the desired future direction of Town policy.

The *Places of Worship Land Use Study* (Oakville, 2011) includes four types of policy recommendations, and each will be reviewed in this report. Recommendations are categorized as Official Plan recommendations, Zoning By-Law recommendations, Secondary Plan recommendations, and Urban Design Guidelines and Standards recommendations.

#### ***Official Plan***

The *Places of Worship Land Use Study* (Oakville, 2011) found that in order for places of worship to fit into the growth management and intensification goals of the *Livable Oakville Plan* (Oakville, 2009), policies that handle their development must be reviewed. Recommendations for the *Livable Oakville Plan* included:

- Introduce a definition of ‘place of worship’ in the *Livable Oakville Plan*,
- Ensure underlying land use designations match those of the surrounding community to maintain the existing and planned character and function of the area.
- Maintain size criteria for place of worship uses between ‘community’ and ‘institutional’ scaled uses within the *Livable Oakville Plan*.
- Increase the community use site size criteria to 2.5 hectares from 2 hectares for community scaled place of worship uses.
- Permit places of worship in employment areas in the ‘Office Employment,’ ‘Business Employment,’ and ‘Business Commercial’ designations.
- Provide a policy to permit place of worship uses in plaza and school type configurations on-sites greater than those permitted by the community use policies in all land use designations subject to size considerations (Oakville, 2011, 88-89).

These recommendations emphasize a lessening of controls placed on place of worship development thereby making approval for churches easier to obtain. The approach is different than that of Markham and Brampton in that no policies proactively encourage church development in certain areas, but passively allow church development to happen with fewer restrictions.

### **Zoning**

The zoning recommendations made in the report are not policy-specific, but rather speak to the desired direction of future zoning amendments and reviews. Recommendations include:

- Introduce a definition of ‘place of worship,’ ‘place of worship-accessory use,’ ‘place of worship-auxiliary use,’ and ‘worship area’ in the Zoning By-Law.
- Permit places of worship uses in all zones with the exception of industrial type zones and natural area type zones.
- Develop consolidated parking standards and shared parking arrangements.
- Permit accessory uses and auxiliary uses to places of worship if they meet zoning standards and are deemed compatible. Accessory uses which are sensitive should not be permitted in employment areas.
- Develop a size consideration in the zoning by-law for place of worship uses in plaza and employment condominium type configurations.
- Develop urban design guidelines in coordination with the Comprehensive Zoning By-Law review for places of worship in all contexts (Oakville, 2011, 89).

The strongest emphasis within these recommendations is placed on creating clear definitions of various terms and updating parking requirements. Parking is a common issue related to planning places of worship and the Town attempts in its report to find policy solutions that assure adequate provision of parking while minimizing effects on built form. Some ways the Town tries to do this is creating per person parking requirements that can be tailored to the different needs of religious groups, having separate standards for different urban environments, pursuing shared parking agreements wherever possible, and considering parking for auxiliary and accessory uses separately.

### **Secondary Plans**

The primary recommendation of the secondary planning discussion contained in the land use study is that existing policies be maintained, and that a site reservation policy not be adopted. The recommendation regarding site reservation includes the following qualifying statement: “However, it is recommended that the policies of the Plan be monitored with regards to the provision of places of worship and, should the need so arise, consider the adoption of a site reservation policy approach through the full exploration of such an approach having broad consultation with all relevant stakeholders” (Oakville, 2011, 93). Reasons for not including a site reservation policy initially include: “The new permissions for places of worship in all land use designations, the availability of land within the *Livable Oakville* Plan area, the diversity of needs for place of worship communities making choosing sites which will be taken up by faith groups difficult, and concerns around resident expectations” (Oakville, 2011, 33).

### **Urban Design Guidelines and Standards Recommendations**

It is recommended in the land use study that place of worship design guidelines be created to encourage religious groups to design facilities to fit into their urban contexts. Design guidelines help religious communities understand the goals of the Town and provide list of suggestions that will ultimately help church groups design high quality facilities. According to the land use study, design guidelines should:

- Provide direction for places of worship in both growth areas and stable residential areas as identified in the *Livable Oakville Plan*
- Provide direction on the building orientation to the street or other landscape features where appropriate
- Provide direction for how to incorporate accessory and auxiliary uses where permitted
- Provide direction for the location of parking facilities in all built form contexts
- Provide direction for how to integrate pick up and drop off areas
- Provide direction for how to best promote pedestrian circulation on and to the site
- Provide direction on techniques to create compatible build form to adjacent uses
- Provide direction on how and where to incorporate and position a mixture uses in mixed-use designations and main street type areas (Oakville, 2011, 94).

#### **4.3.3 Lessons from Oakville**

One of the guiding principles of the *Place of Worship Land Use Study* (Oakville, 2011) was recognition of the importance of protecting a church's ability to fulfill its mission. It was stated in the report that the role of planners in the church development process is writing policy that recognizes the breadth of community interest while not interfering with a group's mission statement. Such a policy is imperative for the successful planning of urban churches.

The emphasis on design guidelines is also an important contribution by the Town of Oakville to good planning practices for places of worship. The design guideline priorities outlined in the land use study seek to ease the development process of places of worship by listing practical suggestions to building a facility that is functional and appropriate given its context. The creation of design guidelines specific to places of worship is a practice that other municipalities would be wise to replicate.



## 5 Hamilton Policy Review

In order to understand the development experiences of churches in Hamilton it is important to learn about the policy framework in which they operate. Such knowledge is also essential when making recommendations to improve the existing policy structure. This chapter, therefore, aims to provide an overview of current policies of the City of Hamilton as well as future policy directions that relate to the development of places of worship. It provides a context to subsequent chapters looking specifically at the development experiences of Hamilton churches. The goal of this policy review is not to summarize the entire regulatory framework that must be complied with for a church development application to be approved, but rather to illustrate the approach that Hamilton takes to planning for places of worship. Included in this review are summaries of policies in the Official Plans, zoning by-laws, and other policy documents that relate to church development.

### 5.1 Demographic Profile

Before engaging in a review of the Hamilton policy context it is important to gain an understanding of the City of Hamilton. Doing so will assist the analysis by allowing comparisons to be drawn to the cities included in this report as best practice. It will also aid in projecting future demand for places of worship.

Hamilton is a relatively large city and is continuing to grow. It ranks as the ninth largest city in Canada with a recorded population of 504,559 in the 2006 census. Hamilton added nearly 15,000 people between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2007). The median household income in Hamilton was about \$5,000 less than the Ontario median in 2006. 25.4% of Hamilton residents are immigrants to Canada, totaling 126,485 people. 16,565 of those immigrants came to Canada between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2007). 82% of the Hamilton population is religiously affiliated, and there is an increasing need for diverse places of worship as the population is becoming more diverse through immigration.

In terms of urban form, Hamilton contains significant urban, suburban, and rural areas. The City amalgamated several surrounding communities in 2001 and by doing so extended its jurisdiction to include much agricultural, rural, and natural land; as well as many suburban peripheral neighbourhoods. It is essential that Hamilton's policy context address the variety of needs in the City given its diverse population and land use patterns.

### 5.2 Official Plan

An Official Plan is a document that overviews the goals and objectives of local government relating to future development and land uses. Common features of an Official Plan include: objectives and policies to manage future growth, land use designations, measures to protect the natural environment, and policies to ensure the timely provision and adequacy of services.

Official Plans typically look 20-30 years ahead and attempt to ensure positive developments in that time frame. Tools often used to implement the goals and objectives of Official Plans include zoning by-laws, secondary plans and neighbourhood plans, site plan control, and special studies (Hodge, 2003).

The City of Hamilton has two relatively new Official Plans that were designed to replace former plans of the now amalgamated towns. The new Plans are referred to as the Urban Hamilton Official Plan and the Rural Hamilton Official Plan. The Rural Hamilton Official Plan was completed in 2006 and received approval from the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in 2008. At time of writing, this Plan is under appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board. The Urban Hamilton Official Plan was completed in 2009 and is pending Provincial approval. While neither of these Plans has been officially implemented they will be reviewed in this report because both will soon be law and should therefore be used as a basis when recommending actions, and because they summarize the City's current development goals. This decision poses some challenges, as these Plans were not in place during the development of the participating churches of this study. In cases where participants in the study refer to specific policies, those policies will be examined.

The Rural Hamilton Official Plan (2006a) applies to all land within the City of Hamilton jurisdiction that lies outside the Urban Boundary. The main land uses included in this Plan are Agriculture, Specialty Crop, Rural, Mineral Aggregate Resource Extraction Area, and Rural Settlement Area. Because of legislation that emphasizes sustainability and the City's own sustainable development goals many of the rural landscapes in Hamilton are protected, and development is limited in those areas. Places of worship are not dealt with specifically in the Plan but are included in the 'institutional use' category. In the rural area only small-scale places of worship are permitted, and they must devote 5% of their land to park space.

The Urban Hamilton Official Plan (2009) relates to all areas within the Urban Boundary and, similar to the Rural Hamilton Official Plan (2006a), does not include specific policies for places of worship. It includes places of worship with 'Community Facilities' and considers places of worship to be an 'Institutional Use.' The Plan encourages Community Facilities in neighbourhoods, stating that community facilities are "an integral part of the fabric of the City and fundamental cornerstones that make communities complete. They make neighbourhoods livable and support a high quality of life by providing space and amenities for a host of services, programs, and activities" (City of Hamilton, 2009, 33). Places of worship, as an institutional use, are allowed in most land use designations within the Urban Boundary. It is noteworthy that there are no policies in place to encourage the development of urban churches, only policies that permit their development. Other Community Facilities include parks, libraries, recreation centres, and schools—all of which are publicly provided. This means the City is able to ensure an appropriate number are built when the population grows. As a result they can be planned well in advance. Conversely, because places of worship are the responsibility of faith groups to

construct they are not considered as early in the planning process and consequently religious groups are often unable to obtain urban properties in Hamilton.

### 5.3 Zoning By-Law

Zoning is “an approach to specifying the kinds of uses and things that would be appropriate in the various zones, or districts, of the city” (Hodge, 2003, 83). It typically works in tandem with an Official Plan to implement its goals and objectives with specific regulations on the forms of development and permissible land uses in each zone. At the time of writing this report Hamilton is in the process of updating its zoning by-law. As a result each former municipality (Hamilton, Ancaster, Dundas, Flamborough, Glanbrook, and Stoney Creek) is still subject to different policies. The information available regarding the new Zoning By-Law, as well as policies contained in the zoning by-laws of the former municipalities, is generally in line with the policies of the new Official Plan. That is, places of worship are permissible in most land use zones, however, no special treatment or specific place of worship policies exist. Churches are considered to be ‘Public Uses’ in the old Zoning By-Law (Hamilton, 1950), and must comply with the policies related to that designation.

### 5.4 Other Studies and Policy Documents

The City of Hamilton has never conducted a thorough policy review or study of places of worship development within its boundaries. Despite being a growing community with an increasingly multicultural population such a study has never been deemed necessary. This section will review the implications of the studies that have been completed by the City that relate, or should relate, to place of worship development.

The development of new Official Plans involved several background studies including the *Cultural Heritage Resource Policies Background Paper* (Hamilton, 2008). It recognizes the importance of churches to the City’s heritage. There is concern, however, over the viability of these heritage structures as many of them have experienced declining congregations and financial difficulties in maintaining their aging facilities. Most heritage churches are consistent with traditional neighbourhood designs and exist in urban areas. It is important to note that the decline of certain urban churches does not necessarily indicate the overall decline of religiosity or even urban places of worship as viable development model. The number of religious participants increased in Hamilton by 26,000 between 1991 and 2001 despite a decline in percentage of religiously affiliated residents (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Hamilton’s *Vision 2020* (1991) outlines the City’s downtown revitalization goals and contains almost no reference to church or religion in general, that is despite the presence of over 140 active churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples within its planning area (Van Pelt & Greydanus, 2005). The planning document *Vibrant, Healthy, Sustainable Hamilton* (Hamilton, 2003) contains a reference to the “need to support the role of spirituality and morality in

embracing and supporting *Vision 2020*" (18). That statement is the only reference to faith communities found anywhere in official Hamilton documents regarding urban revitalization (Van Pelt & Greydanus, 2005).

The City has completed some urban design documents (for example: Hamilton, 2006b; Hamilton, 2004) but again there is little or no reference to churches or other faith communities anywhere within them.

## **5.5 Planning for Places of Worship in Hamilton**

To summarize this section it is fair to say that the City of Hamilton does not plan specifically for places of worship. No documents have been identified that provide any sort of guidance for, or regulation of, church development. The policy context in Hamilton can, however, be described as relatively permissive—there are few areas where churches are not allowed to be constructed. The City has also gained a reputation for partnering with religious groups on a variety of causes, however the lack of sufficient policy regarding church development led one author to proclaim "(Hamilton) city government, however, does not appear to be fully aware of the potential resource base represented by established religious communities or institutions... 'Departments exist in city government to represent every other group in the city—from the disabled, to gays and lesbians, to the transgendered. But there is no department devoted to church relations'" (Van Pelt & Greydanus, 2005, 18). In the sections that follow the development experiences of churches in Hamilton will be described and possible improvements to the policy context will be put forward.

## 6 Development Experience of Hamilton Churches

In order to gain an understanding of the development experiences of Hamilton churches, an in-depth questionnaire was distributed to recently developed churches in Hamilton. Churches were determined eligible for inclusion if they had been issued a building permit on or after January 1, 2005 and had subsequently developed a facility. Individuals were identified to participate on behalf of their church if they were members of the church and had been involved in the development process. Traditions represented in this section include the Roman Catholic Church, Christian Reformed Church, and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The questions that were asked specifically targeted information regarding to the goals and mission of the church and how they are affected by the church's location choice, factors that helped or impeded site selection and subsequent development, and the overall perspective of the planning process in Hamilton. While there was some variation in experiences between church developments, several trends were identifiable and contributed to the recommendations of this report. This section will describe the development experiences of Hamilton churches, and is organized based on the three focus areas of the questionnaire.

### 6.1 Impact of Church Missions and Goals on Facility Development

Respondents identified two general areas of focus in their descriptions of church missions and goals. They were to 1) serve their congregants by providing a location for communal worship and fellowship, and 2) serve the church's surrounding community by being an uplifting, Christian presence. With both of these goals, church facility location was of utmost importance. It was important in all cases that the church be near existing congregants but also visible and accessible to the wider community.

Accessibility was identified as very important both in terms of church members and non-members living nearby. All responding churches stated that they chose sites located where neighbourhood impact could be more significant. As one respondent stated, "The location allows us to be the church in a place, a neighbourhood seen to be a potential new area of the city unreached by a local church" (Respondent 1). Accessibility to congregants was an important consideration and limited the search area of relocating churches. Congregations reported to have built a relationship with their surrounding communities, so leaving the general area was not an option in relocation. Accessibility of non-members was a consideration as most churches reported to have chosen sites that were easily reached by the general public. This meant being near major roadways and intersections for suburban churches and being on transit routes in more built up, urban locations.

Visibility is a highly ranked criterion among church communities, so they sought out locations that would be easily identified and located. One respondent described a balance between being in a community yet visible and accessible to passersby on major thoroughfares. Another

respondent indicated the importance of being in a location near nature. Much of the ministries of the particular church were related to prayer and meditation, so a relatively secluded location with natural surroundings was prioritized over accessibility. This was not, however, a common theme in participant responses.

## **6.2 Furtherances and Impediments to Development**

Of the participating churches in this report that had purchased new land for their facilities, all were forced to face the reality of having few site options for their building. It was often the case that few or no properties could be found that met their initial search criteria within their budgets, so they had to compromise on some aspects of the development. Respondents reported that the permissive nature of Hamilton policies towards churches meant that few sites were discounted as a result of regulation, but other factors made the purchase and development of land difficult. These factors included high costs, lack of appropriate sites, and high on-site parking requirements that reduced the potential size of facilities.

In Hamilton there are no policies to assist churches in facility development, so land was purchased at market rates. This put churches in competition with other, more lucrative forms of land development. Churches reported frustration at a lack of reserved sites for what they felt is an important community facility. Church groups were forced to purchase sites that were not ideal because better sites were simply beyond their budget.

Availability of land was another issue, particularly for churches trying to locate in urban areas. Respondents from both urban and suburban churches claimed to have faced limited options and purchased the only property that could have possibly accommodated the church facility within their limited search areas. One commonly reported reason for churches to face such a limited number of appropriate sites was the on-site parking requirements. Churches in Hamilton must provide adequate on-site parking, which occupies space and therefore necessitates very large properties for any substantial place of worship development. Some respondents found this requirement to be excessive.

## **6.3 Perspectives on the Planning Process**

Most of the participants in this research reported having had a generally positive experience when navigating through the development application process. The majority of questionnaires cited helpful and courteous City staff as a main reason for this perspective. Respondents that held more critical perspectives of the development process indicated again that their frustrations were targeted more towards City staff and apparent disconnects between departments than City policy. Some specific criticisms include high parking requirements, lack of communication between City departments, a lack of consideration for churches in City Plans, inflexibility in its development standards, and a lack of financial assistance to churches that fulfill a vital community need.

Churches reported that if parking requirements had been reduced they would have been able to build larger facilities capable of offering more benefits to their communities. Parking requirements for places of worship in the Zoning By-law is 1 space per 10 square metres of gross floor area (Hamilton, 2005). A single parking space typically requires 23-37 square metres of space (Leung, 2003), so for every square metre of space inside the facility at least two square metres will be required for parking.

Some respondents indicated frustration with the City as a result of apparent disconnects between departments. An example was described where plans had been approved and construction was underway before a fire department official reviewed the drawings and identified changes that had to be made. The respondent stated, “the fire department later came onsite to do their inspection and we had to change much of what was on the approved drawing... all at our cost and with threats of fines if we didn’t comply” (Respondent 4).

A lack of flexibility was also identified as an obstacle to construction, as staff were unable or unwilling to allow minor deviations from their interpretations of regulations. “It seemed that the city departments did not care whether we were a church or a factory. Their goal was to apply the rules without any flexibility to the ultimate use of the property” (Respondent 4) was how one respondent described the Hamilton approach to development approvals. Some respondents felt differently about this process, as one said “I believe that the application related to the construction of a church that provided many opportunities for all members of the family to participate resulted in the (City of Hamilton’s) sincere desire to see the project completed” (Respondent 3). That respondent described a situation where the City went so far as to relocate utility infrastructure to aid the church’s development. Clearly a willingness of City staff to accommodate the development had a significant impact on the overall experience and perspective of churches on the development process.

Some respondents indicated that financial assistance from the City would have been appropriate given the level of community services churches provide. This was mentioned primarily in relation to land acquisition. Because some churches were competing against mostly residential developers for land they were unable to acquire the most appropriate land for their facilities. “Builders and developers would prefer to build and sell homes, and were not all that amenable to selling land to a church where they would lose the house building profits” (Respondent 2), said one respondent. Another stated, “In reality developments are not laid out with space for volunteer driven and funded churches”(Respondent 1). The general feeling among all respondents was that the City should set land aside for places of worship. This sentiment is summarized in the words of one respondent: “We would have liked to see some sections of a grass roots development set aside for churches so that they are better planned into the community.”

## 7 Discussion

The previous three chapters represent the findings portion of this report. It included a best practices review of Markham, Brampton, and Oakville; a review of Hamilton policies regarding church development; and an investigation into the development experiences of churches in Hamilton.

The best practices review identified a number of interesting policies that could potentially be adopted by Hamilton to improve its policy framework. Important lessons for Hamilton to be mindful of when evaluating its policies were taken from each community. Markham demonstrated the importance of including places of worship early in the planning process and reserving community-oriented sites for them. Markham also demonstrates an appropriate perspective for municipal governments to have on churches—that they are vital community facilities that should be encouraged. Furthermore, Markham established five key policy areas for successful place of worship development including: location, development criteria, site acquisition, transportation, and zoning. Brampton took a similar approach to Markham in that it saw the benefit of places of worship and developed a system of incorporating them into early planning exercises and reserving sites for them. Brampton showed how permissive policies are not enough because of economic or other factors, and that effective policies help places of worship overcome those obstacles. Oakville is the most recent city to develop place of worship policies, in fact they are still being developed at time of writing this report. Oakville demonstrated how design guidelines could assist churches in understanding how to develop quality facilities that fit within policy regulations.

In the review of Hamilton policy it was revealed that the City of Hamilton, in effect, does not plan for places of worship. The policy framework is generally quite permissive in that places of worship are allowed in nearly all zones and land use designations, but no policies were identified that specifically assist churches in their development.

Finally, representatives of recently developed churches participated in the research for this report by reporting on their church's experience navigating the development application and construction processes. The most common responses were that churches have difficulty acquiring property in Hamilton because of competition with more profitable development options, appropriate properties for church development are difficult to come by when search areas are limited, and that there should be more flexibility for churches in Hamilton development regulations.

In this section the issues identified by respondent churches and in the Hamilton policy are analyzed with the practices of Markham, Brampton, and Oakville in mind. Issues will be discussed within the framework established by the Town of Markham's commissioned *Places of Worship Study: Background Issues & Options Report* (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2002). The major policy components of that report are: location, development criteria, site acquisition,



transportation, and zoning. For the purposes of this report location characteristics includes Official Plan and Zoning recommendations, and one category has been added to this list that relates to the general policy framework and understanding of how church planning should be approached. This chapter includes recommendations to address the issues that were identified in the previous sections of this report and included in the discussion. They are informed by the best practices and represent actions that can be taken by the City of Hamilton to facilitate the development of urban churches. Recommendations are also put forward to Christian groups considering a new development project.

## 7.1 Approach to Church Planning

What sets Markham, Brampton, and Oakville apart from other Ontario municipalities that have been less active in creating place of worship planning policies is their recognition of the role churches and other religious facilities play in community development and wellbeing. Markham states, “the Town of Markham has long recognized the significance of places of worship to its residents, and the need to provide appropriate place of worship sites within the community” (Markham, 2004, 4.1.5). Brampton declares in its policy review “the important role faith groups play in contributing to the quality of life in the community. In particular, the City actively supports the development of Places of Worship in new residential areas” (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008, i). Finally, Oakville opens its Places of Worship Land Use Study by saying “Places of worship are an important asset to all communities throughout Oakville. For many, they contribute to a higher quality of life and are a vital part of complete communities” (2011, ii). Hamilton and other municipalities should also recognize the vital role churches play and incorporate that mindset into their development policies.

### **Recommendation #1:**

That the municipal government study and understand the vital role of churches in its communities and plan for them accordingly.

Furthermore, the Town of Markham is intentional in providing adequate information to church groups considering a development project. On the Town website there is an overview of policies, a listing of reserved sites, and contact information for Town staff involved in the place of worship planning process. Providing clear and accessible information would benefit churches greatly and would also streamline the development process, as appropriate contacts would be made much faster.

**Recommendation #2:**

That the municipality provide adequate information regarding church development policies and contacts in an accessible manner.

**7.2 Location Considerations**

It has been made clear in this report that location is a very important consideration when developing churches. This report has demonstrated that the benefits of urban church locations are profound and ought to be encouraged by the municipal government. It is important for churches, as they often function as community facilities, to be situated in a central community environment and not isolated (Leung, 2003). Churches reported location as an important consideration when developing new facilities, as it is closely connected with the two most commonly identified aspects of church mission statements—that they 1) serve their congregants by providing a location for communal worship and fellowship, and 2) serve the church’s surrounding community by being an uplifting, Christian presence. Municipalities must consider these goals and do what they can to enable churches to fulfill them.

While access and visibility is important for the viability of churches, it should not be granted at the expense of a community context. The municipalities included in this report allow places of worship to locate in nearly all land use designations. Designations that do not include places of worship as a permissible use are typically industrial or business focused and would not make for desirable church locations. The Town of Oakville differs from Markham and Brampton in that it does allow places of worship to develop in business and industry oriented designations. Sites in those areas are typically more affordable for places of worship and are generally larger than other available properties. In a city that does not have a site reservation policy it may be necessary to allow churches to grow in these areas despite the diminished opportunities they present, but the findings of this report indicate that policy options exist that mitigate obstacles to urban church development. Therefore it is unnecessary and unadvisable to permit places of worship in Business Park, Industrial, Agricultural, or other incompatible land use designation.

**Recommendation #3:**

That places of worship not be included as a permitted use in Business Park, Industrial, Agricultural, or other similar Official Plan land use designations

It must be noted that not all places of worship are the same and because different churches have different impacts on their surroundings they may not be appropriate in the same locations. Markham adopted a policy that encourages places of worship to locate on collector and arterial roadways instead of within communities. One must be mindful of the fact that Markham’s main concern in its policy review and one impetus for the commissioned report was

related to impacts of very large places of worship. The report states clearly, “In May 2001, the Council of the Town of Markham authorized the initiation of a Places of Worship Study. The purpose of the Study, as set out in the Terms of Reference was: ‘...to undertake a review of Town policies relating to places of worship, and in particular large scale, regional places of worship...’” (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2002, 1). Brampton, conversely, recommends that only large places of worship be kept on the periphery of neighbourhoods and small ones be allowed within. This is viewed as the superior approach as it caters to the needs of larger churches that serve a more regional congregation, while still allowing neighbourhood churches to exist. It is desirable for communities to contain churches within them; however, the externalities of very large places of worship make it better to locate them in arterial and collector streets.

**Recommendation #4:**

That large and small churches be differentiated in policy and that appropriate location criteria for each be developed

The City of Hamilton’s policies relating to church development have been characterized in this report as being permissive in nature, and the findings of this report indicate that it is advisable for them to remain so. Churches should, however, be encouraged to locate in or near residential neighbourhoods. The City of Brampton aims to distribute places of worship throughout its urban area by ensuring available sites exist in all neighbourhoods. In order to accomplish its goal Brampton designates properties early in the planning process for places of worship. Through Official Plans and secondary or neighbourhood planning documents cities would benefit from including designations for places of worship in addition to their inclusion as permissible uses in other land use designations.

**Recommendation #5:**

That places of worship be considered in community planning exercises and that sites be designated for their use

In terms of zoning for places of worship, the majority of discussion revolved around developing definitions for place of worship and related themes, and developing appropriate regulations for auxiliary and accessory uses. In a multicultural society defining places of worship is often not as straightforward as one might think, so it is important for the application of the by-law that all terms be clearly defined.

**Recommendation #6:**

That terms such as place of worship, accessory use, auxiliary use, worship area, etc. be given clear and specific definitions in the Zoning By-Law.

Consideration should be given to how supporting uses such as residences for religious leaders, schools, daycares, and conference facilities should fit within the zoning context. The City of Brampton addressed this issue by defining accessory uses as those vital to the ongoing operation of the place of worship, and auxiliary uses were those that were not vital. It then determined what uses were accessory and what were auxiliary. Accessory uses would be permissible as part of the place of worship facility while auxiliary uses require specific zoning approval. A similar approach would be appropriate in Hamilton.

**Recommendation #7:**

That accessory uses be considered as part of the place worship and require no additional approval, and that auxiliary uses be subject to zoning approval.

### 7.3 Development Criteria

The most significant impact of the Town of Oakville *Places of Worship Land Use Study* (Oakville, 2011) on this report is its recommendation that design guidelines be devised “to guide and encourage places of worship to be built to a form which conforms to existing policies and regulations, and is compatible with existing and planned neighbourhoods” (Oakville, 2011, 93). The purpose of the design guidelines would be to provide direction on a number of issues that can be difficult for church groups to navigate. These include appropriate building design and placement suggestions in various urban contexts, provision of accessory and auxiliary uses, and on-site movement including vehicles and pedestrians. Markham’s policy review (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2002) also identified issues associated with a lack of specific development criteria for places of worship. Municipalities do themselves and local church groups a disservice when they do not clearly articulate what their expectations are for site plans and building design. Developing design guidelines specifically for places of worship will infuse transparency into the development process by informing church groups exactly what is expected, it will ensure churches are designed in accordance with planned or existing neighbourhoods, and it will increase efficiency in the approval process by gathering all development requirements into a single convenient package. Churches that participated in this study expressed exasperation over miscommunication between City of Hamilton departments and a seemingly uncoordinated site review process that resulted in development delays and unexpected expenses. These problems could be addressed through proper design guidelines.

**Recommendation #8:**

That design guidelines be created specifically for places of worship.

#### **7.4 Site Reservation and Acquisition Policies**

Site reservation is potentially the most intriguing policy option contained in this report. It may also be the most complex and controversial policy option. Essentially site reservation policies force developers to reserve certain parcels of land for places of worship so as to ensure urban locations are available to congregations looking to develop new facilities. It has been implemented in both the Markham and Brampton cases, and was considered for Oakville but not adopted.

The examples of Markham and Brampton identify two advantages to a site reservation policy, and there are drawbacks as well. The main advantages are that 1) site reservation allows the municipality to plan places of worship into communities from the start, thereby ensuring sites remain available in the most beneficial locations for the community as well as for churches; and 2) site reservation helps churches overcome certain obstacles to urban site development such as high lands costs and availability of appropriate sites in limited search areas. These advantages are important to this study because they align with the goals of most church developments as well as the most commonly reported difficulties faced by churches undertaking a development project.

Urban land economics teaches that land is only as valuable as its highest and best use (Hanink, 1997), so limiting the permissible land use of certain properties to places of worship only will have the effect of bringing the cost of that land down to a level that is attainable for some churches. In both Markham and Brampton it was possible for reserved sites to divert back to other land uses if no religious group acted to purchase it, which could lead to some developers finding it advantageous to hold land for the duration of its reserved period and then develop it as another use. This situation was remedied by the City of Brampton through a policy where land would have to go through costly amendment processes of the Zoning By-Law and Official Plan before reverting to another designation, which eliminated possible financial gain by simply waiting out the reservation period (Macaulay Shiomi Howson, 2008). Another possible mitigation strategy for this situation would be for the municipal government to regulate negotiations and sales agreements between church groups and vendors.

Site reservation policies should be in place, and much can be learned from the consultant's comments on issues with the former Brampton policies to ensure they are effective. Issues included inadequate sites being reserved, developers being unwilling to negotiate with church groups, and a lack of information regarding the policy being communicated to church groups. If these potential problems are avoided through proper implementation and monitoring of the

policy the desired effect of more churches choosing urban locations can reasonably be expected.

**Recommendation #9:**

That a site reservation policy be implemented.

## **7.5 Transportation Issues**

Transportation is an important consideration in all aspects of planning and planning for places of worship is no different. The most significant transportation issue that comes up much more often than any other when discussion places of worship is parking. Parking is an important consideration when designing church facilities because it is the dominant mode of transportation in Canada. Parking can be problematic, however, because it requires significant amounts of space and contributes little to the functionality of the church. A single parking space, when one factors internal circulation space into the equation, requires 23-37 square metres (Leung, 2003). Parking is particularly problematic in higher density urban areas where properties tend to be smaller and land values higher. Some respondent churches indicated that parking was a concern and policy reform on that issue was in order. To address this issue it is advisable for a municipality to review its parking management policies and potentially implement alternatives to on-site parking. Some strategies that have proven effective include shared parking agreements, on street parking, and transit access discounts (Litman, 2006).

Shared parking agreements occur when uses with differing peak demand periods are located near each other and agree to share a parking facility. Churches typically experience peak parking demand on Sunday mornings, when most other uses do not require their full parking capacity. This makes churches excellent candidates for shared parking agreements, and if one can be reached the number of required on-site spaces should be reduced. On street parking is a strategy that is most useful in very urban locations. Typically downtowns and high-density neighbourhoods accommodate parking demand on street. This may be in addition to or in place of on-site parking requirements. When churches are located where on street parking is available, the number of on-site spaces should be reduced.

Finally, transit access discounts are implemented when parking requirements are reduced due to proximity to public transit. If a church is located on a bus route or other transit option it can be expected that a portion of congregants will be arriving by that mode, and parking requirements should be reduced accordingly. In addition to reducing the parking lot area this strategy could also encourage transit use, which is known to be a more sustainable transportation option than the private automobile. Shared parking agreements, on street parking, and transit access discounts are three potential transportation management strategies that could be applied to churches to reduce the need for on-site parking and therefore reduce

the burden on churches to provide it. Further studies should be completed to identify other potential policies to reduce on-site parking requirements.

**Recommendation #10:**

That shared parking agreements, on street parking, transit access discounts, and other potential strategies be studied; and that policies be implemented to allow for alternatives to on-site parking.

The City of Hamilton’s policies for calculating parking requirements for places of worship are in need of review. Currently the City Zoning By-Law (2005) requires one parking space be provided per every 10 square metres of gross floor area. When calculating parking requirements the findings of this report indicate that it is better to use worship area or seating capacity as a measure instead of gross floor area. In a typical church setting the worship area and other parts of the building are seldom used simultaneously, so measuring parking need by counting both does not provide an accurate result. A recent study done for the City of Toronto on parking requirements for places of worship (IBI Group, 2009) recommended parking requirements be calculated on a per 100 square metres of worship area basis.

**Recommendation #11:**

That parking requirements for places of worship be reviewed, and that future policies be based on worship area instead of gross floor area.

## 7.6 Advice for Church Groups

The primary focus of this report has been the policies that regulate church development. While municipal government does have much impact on church location and development, it must not be overlooked that it is up to churches to initiate the development process and determine the goals and priorities of their development project. When a church approaches the development process with a clear idea of what they want their facility to look like and an understanding of municipal policies and procedures the probability of them attaining their desired facility increases. This section provides some insights into the development process for the benefit churches considering a development project.

### ***Understand the Importance of Location***

This report has found that urban locations increase the potential of effective ministry and outreach. Churches located within communities are better situated to “Fill the earth and subdue it,” “Love your neighbour,” and “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city.” It is often the case that peripheral locations are less expensive and have fewer regulations put on them,

but those benefits are outweighed when the effectiveness of ministry is factored into the location decision.

**Recommendation #1:**

That churches deepen their understanding of the importance of the location decision.

***Understand the Development Process and Seek Expert Advice***

Because there is a significant and often complicated development process in most Ontario municipalities it is worthwhile to pursue expert advice and assistance when developing a facility. There may be some flexibility within policy regulations of which only someone familiar with the specific regulations and culture of that municipality would be knowledgeable. By acquiring expert planning advice, the specific development goals of the congregation may be more attainable.

**Recommendation #2:**

That churches deepen their understanding of the development process and seek expert advice as needed.



## 8 Recommendations

This report has found that churches are significant contributors to community wellbeing and that they are far more effective when located in urban settings. It has demonstrated that, from the perspectives of both Christian groups and municipalities, efforts should be made to facilitate the development of urban churches. The research components of this report laid out the policy framework of the City of Hamilton, the development experiences of new churches in Hamilton, and some policy alternatives that have been implemented in other Ontario municipalities. After analyzing all of this information, eleven recommendations have been put forward to the municipality and a further two recommendations for churches considering a development project.

The recommendations of this report are general in nature, and are intended to spur further study. It is recognized that for a municipality to enact changes to its policy framework significant studies must be completed that go beyond the scope of this report. These recommendations, therefore, do not include specific details on policies, but rather propose a new policy direction for the City of Hamilton that will result in improved planning for churches and other places of worship. The first two recommendations for municipalities relate to the overall approach to church planning, and subsequent recommendations relate to specific policy options that the City of Hamilton should consider. The recommendations for churches are intended to assist them when they consider facility development and to encourage them to pursue locations that maximize their potential for ministry.

### 8.1 For Municipalities

The findings of this report have resulted in the following recommendations for the City of Hamilton, and are applicable to other municipalities seeking to develop appropriate planning policies for church development:

**Recommendation #1:**

That the municipal government study and understand the vital role of churches in its communities and plan for them accordingly.

**Recommendation #2:**

That the municipality provide adequate information regarding church development policies and contacts in an accessible manner.

**Recommendation #3:**

That places of worship not be included as a permitted use in Business Park, Industrial, Agricultural, or other similar Official Plan land use designations

**Recommendation #4:**

That large and small churches be differentiated in policy and that appropriate location criteria for each be developed

**Recommendation #5:**

That places of worship be considered in community planning exercises and that sites be designated for their use

**Recommendation #6:**

That terms such as place of worship, accessory use, auxiliary use, worship area, etc. be given clear and specific definitions in the Zoning By-Law.

**Recommendation #7:**

That accessory uses be considered as part of the place worship and require no additional approval, and that auxiliary uses be subject to zoning approval.

**Recommendation #8:**

That design guidelines be created specifically for places of worship.

**Recommendation #9:**

That a site reservation policy be implemented.

**Recommendation #10:**

That shared parking agreements, on street parking, transit access discounts, and other potential strategies be studied; and that policies be implemented to allow for alternatives to on-site parking.

**Recommendation #11:**

That parking requirements for places of worship be reviewed, and that future policies be based on worship area instead of gross floor area.

## **8.2 For Churches**

Recommendations have also been formulated for churches that are considering a facility development project:

**Recommendation #1:**

That churches understand the importance of the location decision.

**Recommendation #2:**

That churches deepen their understanding of the development process and seek expert advice as needed.

## **9 Conclusions**

In this report it has been found that churches play a vital role in the wellbeing of communities. It has been demonstrated that both municipalities and church groups should prefer and seek out urban locations when new church facilities are to be developed. This report has shown that it is important for municipalities to implement policies that contribute to the ability of Christian groups to develop their facilities in urban locations, and that churches should be a factor in any long-range planning exercise.

By investigating the policies of three municipalities progressively seeking to improve their planning processes for places of worship, reviewing the policy context in Hamilton, and learning about the experiences of recently developed churches in Hamilton this report has been able to put forward recommendations for the City of Hamilton regarding potential changes to their church planning policies. If these recommendations are adopted by the City, it is reasonable to expect that churches will experience fewer obstacles in their development processes, and better results will be realized both from the standpoints of the City and its churches.

This report has been investigative in nature and has identified several areas where improved policies are necessary for the continued wellbeing of Hamilton's communities. The field of planning for places of worship would benefit from future research that focuses on the implementation of the policies recommended in this report. It was not the intention of this report to develop functional policies for the City of Hamilton, but rather to inform City officials of the issues facing urban church development and identify possible solutions that would facilitate the development of urban churches.

This report was motivated by observations of an alarming trend where churches tend more and more to locate outside urban areas. The result of this trend is the diminished ability of churches to fulfill their mandate to "Fill the earth and subdue it," "Love your neighbour," and "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city." Municipalities also suffer as a result of this trend because the positive impacts of churches on communities are not being experienced to their full potential. The recommendations of this report aim to stop this alarming trend and return church developments to a mode that maximizes the potential benefits of urban churches.

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## Appendix—Research Questionnaire

The following is a sample of the questionnaire that was distributed to participants in the research for this report.

### Instructions:

*Please complete this questionnaire by answering all questions with as much detail as possible. If you are uncomfortable or unable to answer a question please leave the space blank. Once completed, please save the document and send it via email to justin.adema@queensu.ca. Any questions related to the completion of this questionnaire can be directed to justin.adema@queensu.ca.*

**NOTE:** Questionnaires will be included in the analysis only if accompanied by a signed copy of the attached informed consent form.

Participant Information	
Name of church:	Your role in development process:
Role in church: (select one) <input type="checkbox"/> Church Leader (Priest, Pastor, Elder, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Member of congregation or regular attendee <input type="checkbox"/> Non-member and not a regular attendee	
Do you wish to receive a copy of the final report: (select one) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Research Questionnaire
1. Please describe the goals and/or mission of your church.
2. How does your church's physical location affect its ability to meet its goals and/or mission?

<p>3. When plans for your new church facility were created, what were the main considerations for selecting a site?</p>
<p>4. Please describe how each of the following factors impacted your church's location decision:</p>
<p>4.1. Cost of land</p>
<p>4.2. Availability of appropriate sites (size, lot configuration, access, etc.)</p>
<p>4.3. City planning policies that had to be taken into account (such as Zoning By-Law, Official Plan, Design Standards, Parking Requirements, etc.)</p>
<p>4.4. Church goals and/or mission</p>
<p>4.5. Other factors</p>



5. Please describe your church's experience in the development application and approval process. Was the process easy or difficult to navigate? Was it a generally positive or negative experience?

6. Please describe any City of Hamilton policies or protocols that were particularly challenging or helpful in this process. (It is not necessary to include policy numbers; a description of the policy or protocol will suffice)

7. What would have changed in your church's development had municipal policies not been a factor?

8. Given your experience, would you recommend any changes to the City of Hamilton's policies that relate to church development? If so what would you recommend?

9. What is your overall view on how church development is handled by the City of Hamilton?

10. Additional Comments

*If you would like to make any additional comments about the development of your church or your experience in the development application process please do so here.*