

Aga Khan Museum and Ismaili Centre as alternative planning model for mosque development.

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ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism is widely celebrated in Toronto as a cornerstone of our society. When multiculturalism moves outside festivals and food, groups make spatial claims of citizenship and identity, the experience is somewhat different. There is no doubt that some racialized minorities have fared well in the Greater Toronto Area. Their growth is no longer confined to low-income enclaves within the City of Toronto but into city suburbs. This growth comes with the increased demand for spatial citizenship through culturally suited social, recreational, commercial and religious space. It is here where the experience of multiculturalism changes.

The inherently political and contentious process of land use planning and its response to individual groups needs for certain type of developments is the broad focus of this paper. The paper looks at how the practice of planning in the Greater Toronto Area has responded to social diversity in cities by studying the specific process of mosque development for Muslim Canadians.

Mosque development has faced challenges in the planning arena through staunch opposition that often hides behind legitimate planning technicalities to express the personal distaste for a group of people. My goal was to understand the role of planning departments in recognizing and responding to the rise of these conflicts in land use development.

The paper examines the development process of five specific traditional mosques in the Toronto area to identify disputes and challenges. These are compared with a different type of Islamic development--the Aga Khan Museum, Park and Ismaili Centre--to better understand how features such as multifunctionality, scale and status appear more acceptable to planning and the general public producing fewer obstacles in its development as compared to traditional mosque development. I look at how wealth, starchitecture, the framing of the development as cultural rather than a religious, and the support of local organizations contribute to the success and acceptance of a project, as compared to traditional mosque developments.

The paper is organized into three sections: 1) a review of the Aga Khan development in order to understand the purpose and the development process; 2) an examination of the development of more conventional mosques in the Greater Toronto Area with an emphasis on the challenges in such developments; and 3) an analysis elucidating some material concepts and themes that emerge from the case studies in order to facilitate in improving the planning process for mosques.

FOREWORD

Land use planning is a process that governs and organizes city services, uses and people. It is also highly impactful on human social life. In a globalizing world, cities become the torch bearers of multiculturalism where broader level policies are manifested in lived experiences of its citizens. Though multiculturalism in a city like Toronto is applauded, tensions rise when groups cross paths and compete for spatial citizenship and recognition. The demand for social, cultural, recreational, religious spaces find themselves at centre of disputes in the municipal arena in planning departments. The purpose of my studies was to understand the effectiveness of urban planning in the Greater Toronto Area in responding to the demands of multiculturalism, while trying to understand the cogency of land use planning in creating opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and improving the overall social experiences through communities.

My Major Paper studies specifically the development of mosques in the Greater Toronto Area. It traces the development and planning process of five specific traditional mosques, and the Aga Khan development project in order to identify the experience of a cultural development as it moved through the process of urban planning. The objective was to understand how planning departments and municipal governance respond to the needs of racialized groups seeking acceptance for a specific type of development.

The research topic touches all components of my plan of study: urban planning, multiculturalism, ethnocultural enclave formation.

The practice of urban planning significantly influences the ways in which humans experience space. The experience consists of social, physical, political, economical and environmental elements that are subject to influence by the built environments. My paper looks at the social relevance of buildings in cementing a groups social, cultural and religious identity, and in the creation of a community. It quickly becomes apparent how decisions made in planning offices can mobilize or impact society.

International migrations have diversified cities. In response to the rise of social diversity, some countries have adopted multicultural policies that are favorable and provide greater recognition of the immigrant that was not awarded previously. In Canada such policies recognize the rights of immigrants and their right to preserve their cultures in their new countries. However, there has been a disconnect in the way this is addressed in the process of municipal governance, more specifically though land use planning. The increasing social diversity in cities is not met with the adoption of equally diverse precedents and measures for evaluation of development proposals. My paper tries to understand how the planning process address culture specific developments by looking at some mosque controversies through the Greater Toronto Area. My paper engages in

concepts of acceptance, representation and rights to space of Muslim populations as they negotiate rights to spatial recognition by challenging staunch opposition that hides behind legitimate planning issues.

Ethnocultural enclaves refers to the higher concentration of certain racialized groups in a specific geographical area, hence creating what is referred to as an ethnoburb. Ethnocultural enclaves are an increasing reality of global cities, where settlement patterns of racialized populations tend to be in the form of nodes, with a high concentration of certain groups occupying various areas of the city. This formation of ethnoburbs is interesting for reasons such as their historical formation, migration patterns and relationships with forces such as real estate, politics and social exclusion. They are interesting for they can potentially influence social, political and economic outcomes of their areas through increased representation. The concept of ethnoburbs eases a group right to spatial recognition. The paper does not explicitly explore this concept, however stresses the importance of community, both in representation and support in the success of a development.

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We will seek to demonstrate that spiritual insight and worldly knowledge are not separate or opposing realms, but that they must always nourish one another, and that the world of faith and the material world are the dual responsibilities of humankind (His Highness the Aga Khan, 2009).

INTRODUCTION

My research paper examines the development of mosques as Islamic places of worship in comparison to an unconventional Islamic development that has recently shaped Toronto's landscape - the Aga Khan Museum and the Ismaili Centre. By changing the narrative to a museum and cultural centre, is mosque development deemed more acceptable in a proposed community? Or is there more to this project that brought it to its successful acceptance and celebration as recreational centre for everyone in Toronto? Are there biases or insensitivities in our planning system that expose vulnerable groups to discrimination while they try and seek out a place to practice their right to religious and cultural freedom, or are some fears exasperated and expressed without cause?

The Aga Khan Museum and the Ismaili Centre are interesting religious and cultural facilities, different from other Islamic developments that dominate the western landscape. Where a traditional mosque or Islamic centre has come out from a community's realization and efforts to construct a permanent home for their constituents to worship in, the Aga Khan Museum and Ismaili Centre are both a large scale internationally and locally funded cultural, recreational and religious facility. The key difference, however, is what the development has to offer to the

broader community – international recognition, magnificent architecture, recreational gardens, and a world class museum in an otherwise desolate landscape in close proximity to the Toronto downtown core. The Aga Khan Museum and the adjoining garden open itself to the broader community, not just the individual worshipers that belong to the Ismaili community.

Built in 2014, the physical embodiment of these buildings takes on multiple roles. They are a museum, Islamic Studies center, prayer hall, and public garden. The Aga Khan Museum is the first development of its kind in North America to showcase the cultural and scientific contributions of Muslim civilizations through centuries of Islamic history. The Museum features more than 1000 permanent artifacts from the personal collections of Prince Shah Karim Al Hussein Aga Khan IV and his family. These artifacts include “portraits, textiles, miniatures, manuscripts, ceramics, tiles, medical texts, books and musical instruments reflect more than ten centuries of human history and a geographic area stretching from the Iberian Peninsula to China” (Artlyst 2014). The Aga Khan Museum, separate from the Ismaili Centre, presents itself as an educational institute that uses art as a medium to engage local communities with forgotten or overlooked histories of Islamic cultures across a diverse landscape over a period of ten centuries. Meanwhile the Ismaili Centre represents itself as a place for social and intellectual growth, and celebration of cultural diversity before identifying itself as a place of worship for the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslim community. As a religious institute, it is a place of worship for the Ismaili Muslims. As such, these institutions present themselves as places that go beyond the basic/fundamental role that a religious place of worship fulfills—spiritual observance.

Through architecture, the buildings infuse a particularly modern character and act as a landmark to an area that has had a relatively dull landscape. Through function, it is a community-oriented facility that invites the Greater Toronto Area to recreate with a fine collection of ancient Islamic artifacts and a privately funded grand public garden. This development serves as an educational example of a different kind of religious development that merits a discussion on alternative or innovative form and functions of a mosque, or religious centre, and how they belong in the broader community.

Upon their inception, the Aga Khan Museum and Ismaili Centre immediately became celebrated by mainstream media and politics – in fact, so celebrated that it inspired then Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper who was leading a ban campaign on the niqab to come out to the facilities inauguration ceremony. This development occurred quite differently than a “regular” mosque that have been

dragged through the development process and seen tremendous community resistance.

Given my interests in the development of mosques in western cities, I found this contrast of unprecedented celebration to be intriguing, considering that a typical mosque development often leads to feelings of alienation and resentment amongst all parties involved.

How is a multi-functional religious centre like the Aga Khan Museum with dedicated prayer space, a cultural recreational facility and a public park a better fit for the future of religious development projects in Toronto? How is this form of development equally defined and perceived as more acceptable to planning institutions and local community? What factors contributed to this form of development being more appreciated than a conventional mosque development?

My research examines the development of a community center, the Aga Khan Museum and adjoining Ismaili Centre in order to better understand how and why its multifunctionality, scale and status appear more acceptable to planning and the general public. I argue that wealth, starchitecture (the growing popularity of celebrity architecture), the framing of the development as a cultural rather than religious project, and the support of local organizations contributed to the success and particular acceptance of the project.

My research therefore asks: Are the Aga Khan Museum and Ismaili Centre an alternative model for conceptualizing mosque development as they are presented as 'cultural centers' with dedicated religious space? Can this model offer insights that can help overcome some of the challenges faced by Muslim worship places in the Greater Toronto Area? Can this model serve as inspiration for future Islamic developments to evolve into complete centers offering more amenities to their constituents than just worship? Are there any lessons to be learnt from the way this project moved through the planning process, that can help with the processing of other mosque developments?

METHODOLOGY

My research seeks to elucidate the range of planning practices surrounding mosque development by comparing the development of the Aga Khan Museum and Ismaili Center to other more traditional (and contested) mosques development in the Greater Toronto Area. For that purpose, I selected 5 local mosques based on

their high degree of controversy and availability of documentation. Where two mosques were widely discussed by scholars on the subject of mosque development in Toronto (detailing commonly sighted planning problems in their development), three were highly controversial and dominated planning and media discussion in the Greater Toronto Area.

My research is based mostly on literature review, archival work in planning documents, review of media articles, and interviews with professionals. In order to learn more about the development of the site, I sifted through the City of Toronto's planning files to get an understanding of how the project grew from its initial proposal to its completion. I further reviewed media sources including news articles, websites, and videos to develop a greater understanding of what the project is, what the buildings offer, and to learn the attitudes of the community towards this development. I have engaged in conversations with various individuals involved in the development of Aga Khan Museum and Ismail Centre, like Toronto planners, architects, and some staff involved in handling the development of the project. I also conducted multiple visits to the site. Although no formal interviews were conducted for this research, some points of analysis draw from previous conversations – particularly with a City Planner for Toronto overseeing the application, an Executive Officer Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited who managed the development process of the development on the Aga Khan side; an architect working with Moriyama & Teshima Architects, the Canadian architect and planning firm overlooking the project; and a representative of ISIJ Toronto, overlooking the development of the Jaffari Village project. While I am not able to use direct citations, I nevertheless acknowledge these previous conversations when they have fed my analysis.

My fieldwork is supported by a literature and media review that informed the section surrounding the development of mosques in the Greater Toronto Area. The literature review helped to identify some of the common themes in resistance against mosque development applications, and the way in which they have been handled by politicians and planners. The media study has helped to further explore specific disputes that have taken place in the Greater Toronto Area to further understand the common complaints, and the state of mosque developments in Toronto city-region.

My paper is organized in 3 sections. I first review the development of the Aga Khan Museum and the Ismaili Centre in order to understand its purpose and development process. I then focus on the development of more conventional mosques in the Greater Toronto Area with a particular emphasis on the challenges in such development. I then conclude with an analysis trying to understand what makes

one type of development more successful over the other, and identify three areas of planning that merit further exploration in order to overcome some of the common challenge faced by controversial developments.

1. THE AGA KHAN MUSEUM AND ISMAILI CENTRE

The Aga Khan Museum and Ismaili Centre are relatively new additions to Toronto's cultural/religious landscape located in an unlikely residential and industrial neighborhood of Don Mills in Toronto. The buildings in the large park now serve as a city landmark if not national landmark abutting the Don Valley Express Way. The Museum is located on the site of the former Bata Headquarters designated heritage building prior to acquisitions by the Aga Khan Development Fund. The nearest public amenity to the facility is the Ontario Science Museum located approximately 1.4 kilometers south-west and the Shops at Don Mills mall North-West.

With a tab evaluated to \$300 million, the Aga Khan Museum and the Ismaili Centre are known for their impressive sculptural architecture and scale visible from the adjoining highway and even more so when experienced more closely. The two buildings are respectively designed by world renowned architects, Fumihiko Maki and Charles Correa, respectively from Japan and India. The museum building uses elegant geometric shapes and materials, with a carefully crafted all white Brazilian granite façade, and pyramid shaped domes, one in glass, and another in same materials as the rest of the building. The two buildings are situated in a 6.8-hectare park designed by Lebanese landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic. The whole project was over-sought and coordinated by Toronto-based architectural and planning firm Moriyama and Teshima.

The project was initiated almost a decade before its completion, after the site was acquired for the Ismaili Centre around 2003 (Lam 2013). As Lam (2013) states, “[s]hortly after, the adjacent site with the 1964 Bata Building designed by John C. Parkin became available and the AKDN's [Aga Khan Development Network] vision for a campus came to be expanded.” It took a year of studies and consultation with the Bata family to repurpose the site. With the consent of Sonja Bata, the demolition of the former shoe headquarters proceeded in 2007 to allow the new development (Lam 2013). Although there was great resistance against the removal of the previous architectural feat, the site was handed over given the expansive

and powerful vision of the Aga Khan Museum, the park and the Ismaili Centre. Funding came directly from His Highness the Aga Khan -- the hereditary spiritual leader of the Ismaili faith --and its followers (there are approximately 100,000 Shia Ismaili Muslims in Canada and 15 million Ismaili Muslims worldwide) (Lam 2013). The whole development serves as a reflection of the "longstanding relationship of the Aga Khan with Canada, and an appreciation for the country's commitment towards pluralism and cultural diversity" (the.ismaili 2014).



Figure 1: North Eastern Areal View of the Aga Khan Museum (East), Park (Middle) and Ismaili Centre (West).
(Source: Kaloon Photography, theismaili.org. September 5, 2014, accessed January 31, 2021)



Figure 2: North Western View of the Aga Khan Museum, Park and Ismaili Centre
(Source: Sabrina Lakhani, December 5, 2014, accessed January 29, 2021)

1.1. The Aga Khan Museum

The Aga Khan Museum is a 10,500 square-meters building located on the eastern side of the property. According to its mission statement, the Aga Khan Museum (2017) serves the sole purpose of showcasing an appreciation for the “artistic, intellectual, and scientific heritage of Muslim civilizations across the centuries from the Iberian Peninsula to China.” The Aga Khan Museum is the first museum of its kind in North America, solely devoted to Islamic Art (Javed 2010). The 10,000 square-meters building located at 49 Wynford Drive in North York was designed by famous Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki, who has also worked on the expansion of the United Nations building and Tower 4 at the former World Trade Centre sites in New York City, among other globally recognized buildings (Javed 2010). The large building serves as an addition to Toronto's art scene by providing a world class museum facility to tourists and local residents, including “two exhibition galleries, areas for art conservation and storage, a 350-seat theatre, and two classrooms” open to the public at the price of an admissions fee (Aga Khan Museum 2017).

Architect Fumihiko Maki drew his inspiration from the concept of light to design a modern and efficient 10,500 m² museum with four preliminary functions: exhibition spaces; a 350-seat auditorium; classrooms and workshops; and library and media-centre. These spaces revolve around a central 13-metre-high double glass outdoor courtyard with a traditional intricate *mashrabiya* (geometric) pattern that acts as the heart of the building, bringing together the various spaces (Urban Toronto 2017) (Denman 2015). The tricolor mosaic floor is made of lapis granite from Namibia,

limestone from France and the same white Brazilian granite found on the building's exterior (Denman 2015).

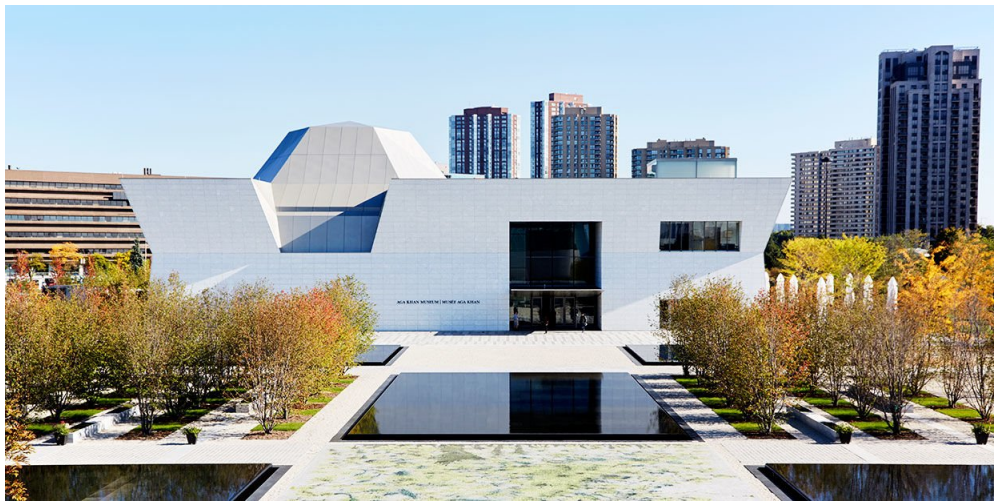


Figure 3: Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada
(Source: Aga Khan Museum Official Website, 2020, accessed January 31, 2021)

The Museum's "mission is to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the contribution that Muslim civilizations have made to the world heritage. Through education, research, and collaboration, the Museum will foster dialogue and promote tolerance and mutual understanding among people" (Aga Khan Museum 2017). The museum shares strong international ties to institutions such as the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, while remaining committed to building relationships with Canadian institutions and communities (Aga Khan Museum 2017).

On September 12, 2014, the Aga Khan Museum was officially inaugurated by then Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Highness The Karim Aga Khan IV, the spiritual leader of the 15 million Ismaili Muslims worldwide (Aga Khan Museum 2017). The Aga Khan and the Canadian Ismaili community actually share a relationship that extends back to 1972, when Canada welcomed a significant Ismaili refugee population from Uganda as they were expelled by ruling despot Idi Amin (Whyte 2014 A). This particular relationship stems from a friendship that was forged between the Aga Khan and former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, the Aga Khan and Ismaili community (Whyte 2014 A). As a testament to this relationship, in 2010, the Aga Khan was granted honorary Canadian citizenship by then Prime Minister Stephen Harper at the announcement ceremony for the Wynford Drive project (Whyte 2014 A). As part of the opening ceremony address, The Aga Khan reflected on this close relationship and stated: "The complex we inaugurate today is animated by a truly

pluralistic spirit... it reflects the deep-set Ismaili values and pluralistic commitments that are so deeply embedded in Canadian values... [and] the opening of the Ismaili Centre and the museum, however, is the bricks-and-mortar embodiment of shared values" (Whyte 2014 A).

Museum Director Henry S. Kim, former curator administrator at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, explains that Toronto came as a second choice after London which was later deemed to be inappropriate given the rigid building regulations preventing the type of building the developer wanted (Whyte 2014 B). Kim suggests that Toronto came up for clear reasons as both the Aga Khan Development Network and Canada carry shared values of multiculturalism (Whyte 2014 B). However, Moez Rajwani, vice-president of the Aga Khan Council of Canada, stated that "[t]he Museum is for Canada and it's for the world. It's about encounters between different kinds of people: all kinds" (Whyte 2014 B).



Figure 4: Main Art Hall, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada
Source: <https://kubikmaltbie.com/project/aga-khan-museum/>, accessed January, 2021)



Figure 5: Main Art Hall, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada

(Source: <https://kubikmaltbie.com/project/aga-khan-museum/>, accessed January, 2021)

The Museum opened with a collection of 1,000 art and artifacts, of which some 200 pieces make the permanent installation and belong to the personal collection of the Aga Khan Family previously housed in Geneva and London (Taylor 2015; Whyte 2014 B; Urban Toronto 2017). The goal, according to the Museum Director, is to generate a broader interest in Islamic heritage and art, as other galleries and museums in North America generally have smaller collections of Islamic art on display (Whyte 2014 B). As stated in Urban Toronto (2017) report on the Museum, “[w]hile some North American museums have significant collections of Muslim art, there is no institution devoted to Islamic art. In building the museum in Toronto, we intend to introduce a new actor to the North American art scene. What happens on that continent, culturally, economically and politically, cannot fail to have worldwide repercussions – which is why we thought it important that an institution capable of promoting understanding and tolerance should exist there.” Kim explains that Islamic art is not religious art but art of Muslim civilizations, and therefore the complex is an active museum with programming of performing and contemporary art (Whyte 2014 B). As Kim argues, the Islamic world has been virtually missing in cultural institutions throughout North America (Whyte 2014 B). Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Islam has been at the forefront of every Western mind for all the wrong reasons. Islamophobia has branded Muslim immigrant populations as a threat (Whyte 2014 B). In building this museum, the Aga Khan Council for Canada and the Aga Khan Development Network sought to address these vilified images and stereotypes of Islam and Muslim people by using

this cultural platform to engage in a public discussion and appreciation of the highly sophisticated societies that Islam created (Whyte 2014 B).

In the words of Whyte (2014 B), "The Aga Khan targets ignorance's as the source of conflict between Islamic peoples and the Western world." Muslims make up a quarter of the world's population, yet there remains a very limited and stereotyped understanding of the place of the Muslim world in world history commented Shafique Virani, a core faculty member at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs (Whyte 2014 B).

1.2 The Ismaili Centre

The Aga Khan Museum site also includes the Ismaili Centre. The 8,500 square meters architecturally unique building with the emblematic large glass pyramid shaped dome was designed by architect Charles Correa. Situated on the western portion of the site, the Centre serves as the communal space or *jamatkhana* for religious, social and cultural gatherings for the Ismaili Muslims in the Toronto area. While the spiritual place of the Ismaili community, the Centre also seeks to foster interactions with the broader community (the.ismaili 2014). The Toronto Ismaili Centre is in fact one of only six (in the world, and the second in Canada) that serve as permanent markers of the Ismaili communities in the cities in which they reside. The Ismaili Centers are designed to encourage spiritual enlightenment, to promote the intellectual and spiritual understanding of Islam, and to create a positive attitude towards the societies in which it is located. The Centers "endeavor to share Islam's values of peace, humanity and the shared responsibility for advancing the common good with the broader community in the countries in which they are located" (the.ismaili 2014).

The Ismaili Centre varies from a traditional mosque in that it houses a variety of uses besides the congregational prayer space or *jamatkhana* reserved for the religious tradition and practices of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims (the.ismaili 2014). The *jamatkhana* is coupled with other spaces for social, educational and cultural activities to support the tradition of a *masjid* (mosque). The concept of the Ismaili Centre stems from the understanding that the "prominent features of Muslim religious landscape has been a variety of spaces of gathering co-existing harmoniously with the *masjid*, which in itself has accommodated a range of diverse institutional spaces for educational, social and reflective purposes" (the.ismaili 2014). As stated before, building bridges between diverse groups with the goal to promote democracy and pluralism is part of the Ismaili faith and Aga Khan Council of Canada.



Figure 6: South Western View of the Ismaili Centre, Toronto, Canada
(Source: Haris Khan, January 30, 2021)

The Toronto Ismaili Centre was designed by architect, planner, and activist Charles Correa, whose work has included low-income housing. Correa has been a recipient of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, the Praemium Imperiale of Japan and the Gold Medals of the Union of International Architects (the.ismaili 2014). Correa drew inspiration for the Centre from traditional Islamic architecture but combined it with more contemporary elements. It is said that Correa was concerned with “expressing on the one hand the age-old heritage of the Ismaili community and on the other the newfound aspirations as proud citizens of Canada” (Urban Toronto 2017). He did so through the architectonic language of the building as well as the contemporary materials (concrete, steel, glass) used. The highlight architectural element of the Centre is the bold, jewel-like frosted glass dome that sits on top of the prayer hall (Urban Toronto 2017). Although modern in its appearance, the use of a glass roof above the main prayer hall draws from the many traditional domes in the Islamic world (the.ismaili, 2014). While the dome allows for natural light during the day, at night the prayer hall casts a warm glow from within to its surroundings. Interestingly, the central prayer hall is both the most private space in the building and yet it is the most visible to the public from the Don Valley Parkway Highway, thereby acting as a strong symbol of the Ismaili presence in Toronto and in Canada (Urban Toronto 2017).

Sitting next to the Aga Khan Museum, the Ismaili Centre extends beyond the conventional mosque as a place of worship seen in the North American context. The Centre becomes multifunctional as it acts a place for congregation and supplication, but also as a symbol of identity for the community while recognizing the hardships of their community in Canada. As stated by Mawlana Hazar Imam

at the opening of the very first Ismaili Centre in London in 1985, the Centre is “a bridge between the culture of the community's roots and that of its future as well as a symbol of the hopes of people who have lived through change and turbulence and have ultimately found security” (Urban Toronto 2017).

The Centre hosts many events ranging from policy forums, cultural exhibitions, award presentations and intercultural dialogues between the Ismaili community members and the larger public.

1.3 The Aga Khan Park

The third element of the Aga Khan Museum and Ismaili Centre is a park spreading over 6.8 hectares. The Aga Khan Park officially opened in 2015, a year after the inauguration of the Museum and Ismaili Centre (Denman 2015). Designed by Beirut-based landscape architect, Vladimir Djurovic, in collaboration with Toronto-based Moriyama & Teshima Architects and Planners, the park is situated between the Ismaili Centre and the Aga Khan Museum, and is completely opened to public. The park unites the two distinctive buildings by using elements of Islamic garden traditions while, reflecting the surrounding buildings, fusing it with contemporary notions of the North American urban design. The park serves as an outdoor extension of the Museum and *Jamatkhana*, as it becomes the background for temporary exhibits, classes, public gatherings and weddings (Alimohamed 2010). The park features a formal central space of five reflecting pools and wide gravel pathways with narrow tree-lined alleys, while its edges are more organic parkland furnished with benches for restful experiences (Taylor 2015). The park's green spaces are conceived as extensions of the indoor spaces, being spaces of spirituality, contemplation, and reflection. Keeping in line with its surroundings, the park also represents the pluralistic and spiritual values of the Ismaili community. As pointed out by Alimohamed (2010) the park is also a perfect fit for the multicultural Don Mills community as it provides beautifully landscaped park amenity to the neighbourhood.



Figure 7: Aga Khan Park, Eastward view Facing the Aga Khan Museum
(Source: Janet Kimber, Apollo Magazine, May 15, 2020, accessed January 31, 2021)



Figure 8: Aga Khan Park, Facing West towards the Ismaili Centre
(Source: Kate Taylor, Globe and Mail, May 28, 2015, Accessed January 31, 2021)

Gardens have a significant place in Islamic history, and for that reason they have evolved into being one of the defining features of Ismaili Centers internationally. Upon selection, the spiritual leader Mawlana Hazar Imam tasked Vladimir Djurovic

to tour the world's most beautiful Islamic gardens (Thawer 2010). Djurovic found his inspiration from the gardens of Alhambra in Spain and Humayuns Tomb in India (Thawer 2010). Djurovic used the concept of the *char bagh*, a traditional Persian four-part configuration, thought to depict the gardens of paradise and to emphasize sensory experiences of feelings. Islamic gardens are characterized by water, symmetry, scented plants, and the interplay of light and shadow (Thawer 2010). Inspired by traditional gardens but committed to contemporary materials, Djurovic articulated the formal part of the park around five black granite reflecting pools. With 1,600 meters of paved walkways, the 2,300 m² park is said to be a "green performance space" (Denman 2015). Djurovic also had to research, adapt and select plant materials adapted to the local climate and for their biodiverse capacities to attract birds, butterflies, and animals year-round (Thawer 2010). Wanting to create an immediate effect, 1200 mature trees were planted (Denman 2015). According to Djurovic, park features work together to create the most pleasant experience for the visitor: "'It's not just the water, or the trees. It's the relationship of everything. It's what you will feel when everything is right and everything is working together. Hopefully this place should feel special and will have a meaning'" (Thawer 2010). This relationship is explained by the spiritual leader of the Ismaili Community, Mawlana Hazar Imam: "'one of the issues in the Islamic world is the relationship between and ability to create and what we see of that creation. Nature is one of the evidences of God's creation'" (Thawer 2010).

Hence, the park is not an afterthought but rather "'a reminder of the abundance bounties of God by witnessing the ever-changing and everlasting beauty of nature'" Imam (Thawer 2010)). The park was actually built at great expense since it sits over a 600-car underground parking garage (Lam 2013). The park has since garnered many prizes in landscape architecture (Aga Khan Museum 2017).

2. MOSQUE DEVELOPMENT IN GREATER TORONTO AREA

Places of worship, given their societal role of a communal place for ethnocultural groups, affirm a group's identity in urban space. Places of worship allow individuals of a particular faith to exercise their religious obligations. With global migrations, we have seen tremendous growth in culturally diverse cities; giving rise to now second generations of citizens with dual or even more national attachments. With such

diversity, and permanent affixation to their local landscape, comes the need to express cultural and religious identity.

The mosque is a place where Muslims offer their daily prayers, congregate weekly for Friday prayers, reflect during the holy month of Ramadhan, and celebrate the major holidays – Eid-Al-Fitr and Eid-Al-Adha. With the growing Muslim population in the Greater Toronto Area, and the now well-established presence in the city, the need for a house of worship has risen; and mosques have shifted to focus on enhanced aesthetics, opting for quintessential building style emulating traditional mosques with domes and minarets of their country of origin. However, the affiliation of these developments with Islam and the mere physical attribute have set these sites up for greater controversy in the public realm.

Mosque developments have received relatively the same resistance in most western cities. A mosque in predominantly non-Muslim societies usually comes with concerns and fears of nimbysism. A fear attributed to a lack of knowledge and a phobia of Islam and the perceived "invasive" character of the building. As the Muslim populations in western cities continues to grow and their presence becoming permanent, the need for religious spaces keeps growing. Even in a time where many modern nations support and celebrate diversity, Islamophobia is rampant. While existing mosques continue to encounter threats and vandalism in North America, new mosque developments meet harsh resistance from their local communities in municipal offices.

2.1 Mosque Development Controversy

With the rising number of Muslims in the Greater Toronto Area, the need for a suitable place of worship has increased. The resulting developments seem to open doors for controversy in diverse city-regions like Toronto. Experiences of animosity, alienation and resentment often extend from the public consultation process of planning leading to heated debates in council meetings, protests making their way to newspaper headlines.

Land development is inherently a political process. Private development can have permanent implications on the physical and socio-economic landscape of not just that site, but the broader region. Taking birth in the planning department of a municipality, a private development can quickly and easily be hijacked for political expression of public bodies, individuals or groups who see the municipal planning process as their only means of political engagement in order to express their personal discomfort with the rapidly changing environment around them.

As stated by legal scholar Mariana Valverde (2012, 192). "All manner of disputes about who and what belongs in the city, or who the city belongs to, are regularly funnelled through low-level legal mechanisms, such as municipal business licensing or zoning law, that are not designed for such tasks. Unfortunately, in increasingly cosmopolitan cities, these outdated and cumbersome legal machineries are often the only ones available for citizens to engage in public discussions about such issues as the relationship between global terrorism of the 9/11 type and their local mosque."

Valverde (2012) explains there is an absence of appropriate space to air concerns about rights to a city; one's feelings about international politics and rapid local change. These conversations often find themselves taking place in low level legal mechanisms such as business licensing or zoning law where local citizens hide behind legal mechanisms to express concerns, hesitations and fears of rapid local impact of international politics.

The prescriptive elements of planning make it easy for individuals to manipulate terms to advance their personal or political agendas -- whether it is that of the applicant or of the opposing group of individuals. Although some arguments might very well be legitimate as in the case of parking which often tends to increase congestion (who doesn't dislike congestion), one must assess whether the increase in car traffic around a mosque for a few hours every Friday is really nuisance enough to merit challenges at higher levels in the planning process. In this section, I review some examples in order to understand and identify key issues that mosques face as they move through the planning and development process in a multicultural city-region like Toronto. The goal of this review is to understand whether the experienced hardship is attributed to the act of planning, the opposing groups (local residents), the political climate, international politics, or individual groups that are putting the proposal forth -- or is it a combination of all of the above that leads to the type of issues experienced by mosque developers in the region.

Mariana Valverde (2012, 194) makes an interesting point when she affirms that most "mosques are not funded by global capital, at least not in Toronto, but the governance process that determines whether mosques or minarets are allowed to proceed is the same one that also gives us the bridges and tunnels and signature waterfront spaces that have an open to public design process, but financing is shrouded in secrecy."

The planning process can, perhaps, carry inherent biases in the way it subjugates all developments to a single Eurocentric legal yard-stick, limiting flexibility when

needed to push aside certain types of developments. In some cases, not having an understanding of the needs and functioning of a mosque, the planning department can impede a groups' right to religious and cultural expression in the city. Further, the public process of planning invites or solicits community feedback to support or oppose private development in a municipality. In theory this practice is remarkable as it empowers local residents to control the future development of their city; however, in reality public consultation is generally limited and provides only a small sample of local populations opinions. This process tends to reflect the views of a very limited group of local residents that choose to participate in expressing their views towards proposed developments.

Isin and Siemiatycki (1999) explain that land use in cities is inherently a political and contentious process for it is a process of claiming space, citizenship and identity. They explain that the rapid shift in the immigrant as the "other" in global cities to increasing immigrants' rights to citizenship and space has further increased the conflict in the arena of land use and zoning. This is because the process of land use and zoning in Canada brings with it the mechanism which encourages the protection of existing uses through provincial statute that makes public consultation, conformity with existing uses through bylaws, zoning and reducing undue negative impact on neighbouring properties a priority when considering land use changes. As Qadeer (1997, 12) writes, "Ironically... the very participatory procedures meant to give citizens a voice in planning provide the convenient means for some local groups to resist the accommodation of others' divergent needs and tastes. Public hearings on planning regulations have often turned into the tools of NIMBYism and ethno-racism."

Valverde (2012) discusses how national immigration policies have real impact through a rapidly changing local demographic which produces conflict in the municipal arena. For Valverde (2012, 205), "In the absence of public education and public discussion about the process of "diversity," residents, who often feel very strongly about their street, their neighbourhood, and their city, but lack information about migration patterns, immigration policies, and cultural practices of certain co-citizens, are liable to becoming suddenly mobilized in a reactive and uninformed manner whenever a specific change—say, a mosque needing planning permission for a new minaret—appears on the immediate horizon. Once motivated to get out of the house to attend such a site-specific meeting, they will then discover that those who called the meeting, worried that 'considerations other than planning' might derail the process and generate too much heat, usually insist on restricting the discussion."

Valverde points to the dilemma of actors involved in municipal governance process of planning and the ultimate conflict between what planning ought to be versus what it ends up being. Valverde (2012, 205) further suggests "If a zoning hearing is not the right place to talk about how people feel about changing patterns of migration and settlement, where can one talk about these things? The mismatch between what people want to talk about and what the legal framework allows and requires has predictable results."

Residents often feel dissatisfied and claim they are not heard by city hall, while planners and other experts air concerns about public's emotional response to development applications. While municipal politicians are left divided — "on the one hand, they do want to engage with their constituents... and depending on their politics, they want to either validate or critique prejudices against newcomers. But on the other hand, they know that a planning process is supposed to stick to buildings, parking, and parks" and worry their political re-election due to populist views as a response to decisions made in municipal offices (Valverde 2012, 205).

The public participation process of planning becomes one of few opportunities for citizens to engage in politics expressing their personal beliefs and fears arising from a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape in a global city. The implications of international policy and immigration become real when one culture seeks to affix their identity onto a new landscape by making demands through land use changes.

The explosive rise of anti-Muslim sentiments promoted in the media have promoted Islamophobic views amongst local residents. The global spreading of Islamophobic politics have led to the creation of fears in local individuals confounded in certain stereotypes about Muslims. The repercussion of such politics inevitably extends to the arena of planning as Muslims seek accommodation through mosque developments. Planning becomes highjacked to express personal political views and opposition towards certain groups by citing ill-conceived planning parameters to deem certain types of development *unfit* for the local area.

The applicants for a mosque development are often ordinary people from various walks of life. Their goal is to establish a place of worship for Muslims in the community to fulfill their religious obligations. It is rare for applicants have a political understanding of the planning and development process. Guided by a culturally traditional image of what a mosque ought to be, the development seeks to create soaring minarets and large domes in low density suburban neighbourhoods. The proposed monolithic and exotic structures conceived from the applicants' imaginations and their longing for home does not always pay attention to the local

context in which the mosque is situated; although, where one has a right to religious expression, the right to cultural expression exists too.

As the applicants navigate through the confusing and at times hostile world of planning on a strict budget, they may often misunderstand or even mistake legitimate planning issues to be rooted in Islamophobia. Both finances and lack of awareness contribute to a failure in seeking professional consultation from a planner that may better guide the process and seek approvals to facilitate the development. The applicants' lack of experience with planning and politics may contribute to their feelings of alienations and nimbyism in some cases. In some cases, the development proposal may perhaps be lacking serious consideration for the local context that need be addressed in order to secure support from the planning department and local residents. However, recent rise in Islamophobia in western societies plays a role in an inclination to feel a disapproval is rooted in anti-Muslim sentiments. Islamophobia is no longer something that is suggested, or implied, instead it has become explicit and witnessed through a series of violent and fatal events globally since 2011, and particularly between 2016 and 2019. While I started this research trying to identify whether planning was subliminally perpetuating discrimination or Islamophobia, it is now backed by real world events where explicit Islamophobic acts have manifested through violent shootings in Quebec City in 2017 and in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019.

Still, as Valverde (2012, 194) rightly points out: "if one places the mosque disputes in Toronto in comparative perspective, it becomes clear that the 'Diversity is our strength' city motto is not wholly empty, since, at least in publicly available sources, there were no attacks on Islam as such in and around Toronto -- in contrast to much of the discourse prompted by the 'ground zero mosque.'" But specific cases in the Greater Toronto Area nevertheless sees tension and opposition as demonstrate in the following cases.

2.2 Islamic Trust Foundation, Mississauga

In 1995 The Canadian Islamic Trust Foundation bought a large property just off the Queen Elizabeth Way Highway in Mississauga. At the time of purchase, the Foundation was misled by their real estate agent into believing the site was zoned to allow for a place of worship 'as of right.' The property was larger than the Foundation required for a mosque, so they decided to add additional related operations including a social hall to generate revenue from weddings and similar events, a travel agency specializing in trips to Mecca, and a private Muslim school.

The Foundation was unaware that each of these uses have separate land use designations under planning law.

What is interesting in this case is that the opposition to the development began without having rudimentary planning rationale to support it despite the presence of a planning issue that does not permit the construction of a place of worship. The opposition from its inception involved at first the city's officials and then residents who expressed personal anxieties against the development of the mosque.

The controversy began in 1996 when the Foundation ran advertisements in the local newspaper soliciting contributions for the acquisition of land to build their mosque. The advertisements caught the attention of the mayor's office and the founding members of the Foundation were invited to attend a meeting with Hazel McCallion (Mayor of Mississauga from 1978 to 2014), a local councillor and a planner. This meeting marked the beginning of a series of heated opposition against the development. The fact that the site was not zoned for a mosque was unknown to all parties, yet outright opposition for the development persisted at a personal level (Valverde 2012).

Having overlooked the fact that the site needed rezoning to permit a mosque, Mayor McCallion and her office ended the meeting telling the trustees to find another location for their development while the real estate closing date was just days away (Valverde 2012). It was clear to the trustees that the opposition was based on considerations other than legal planning. Assuming they had legal rights to proceed with the development, they went on to purchase the land. Opposition arose. Mayor McCallion and city councillors called two public meetings where residents expressed very 'strenuous' objections against the development, even though none were founded in legal parameters (Valverde 2012).

Considering that a semi-public high school belonging to the Catholic board situated nearby was recently granted permission, the chances of obtaining an approval for the private Islamic School seemed pretty good. However, the creation of a mosque would require a zoning variance. This fact was discovered by a planner, and the development ultimately saw a refusal by city council. Faced with the theatrics leading up to this, the Islamic Trust Foundation appealed the decision to the then Ontario Municipal Board.

With the prospects of the Ontario Municipal Board's decision-making power, the Foundation made several concessions beforehand in order to secure an approval. The proposed building was downsized from 10,000 square feet to 6,620 square feet,

and the proposed school was downsized to a small, single initial grade 9 class (Valverde 2012).

The opposition quickly mobilized and tried to find legal grounds for their objections along the lines of appropriate building size, risk of traffic jams and insufficient parking in order to demonstrate their antagonism to the development. The Foundation had forecasted and already addressed these issues in their revised plan. The proposal to provide 361 parking spaces was still deemed insufficient by opponents given the fact that no residences abutted the property.

Although the city's official plan encourages the sharing of parking facilities between schools and places of worship, the city's lawyer attempted to argue that "sharing could not take place in this instance because the neighboring Catholic school would be operating at the same time as the Friday prayers at the mosque" (cited in Valverde 2012, 198). To further their defense, the city asks Mayor McCallion to testify at the board hearing. According to Marianna Valverde (2012, 198), McCallion "talked at length about the problems caused by worshippers parking on residential streets -- which was irrelevant, since the property was in a former industrial park now used for a variety of mainly commercial uses."

Ultimately, the Ontario Municipal Board overruled the city's decision and approved the Islamic Trust Foundation's development at a compromise. The developer was asked to eliminate the social hall, add additional parking spots and a fence around the site. The school was approved as is. Valverde (2012) suggests that the Board in keeping up with their perceived role as a reasonable arbiter had to arrive a compromising solution so both sides were satisfied. The decision, with the lengthiest sections on parking and traffic, did add another unusual feature to their report: "a several-paragraph-long description of Muslim religious practices" (Valverde 2012, 199). The information would serve to educate decision makers including Mississauga city lawyers, councillors, and officials including the mayor herself on what goes on inside a mosque. However, as Valverde (2012, 199) argues: "The decision, staying quite far from the usual planning jargon, forcefully conveyed a didactic message about the need to understand rather than condemn minority religions and cultures. Here the OMB, which is known for its highly technical and often unreadable decisions, took the time to not only preach but also perform Canadian multiculturalism."

2.3. Islamic Foundation, Scarborough – East York

The second case, also from 1995, illustrates the intercultural tensions between two different racialized groups, and not necessarily Anglo-Saxons or Christians against “others”. In these circumstances, Anglo-Canadian born politicians and civic leaders often called upon to preach multiculturalism, tolerance, and diversity to the less enlightened “ethnics” (Valverde 2012, 200). In 1995, a group of Sunni Muslims forming the Islamic Society of Toronto – East York purchased an unused piece of low-rise industrial land to create a permanent place of worship in Thorncliffe Park Community (Isin and Siemiatycki 1999). This vacant industrial lot was surrounded by unattractive high-rises and located in the former independent borough of East York (amalgamated to be a neighbourhood of Toronto in 1998). The neighbourhood comprised of a significant Greek-speaking population (Valverde 2012, 200).

The first round of opposition argued the city could lose \$91,000 in taxes as a place of worship does not pay any municipal taxes. The area was already seeing a decline, and properties were laying vacant as industries moved out (Valverde 2012). As this argument weakened, the proposal brought forth fierce opposition on the basis of parking. City councillors supported this concern and made headlines when they deemed the parking proposal put forth by the Muslims and the boroughs planning commissioner to be insufficient (Valverde 2012).

Councillors introduced a motion to reverse the municipality's earlier approval and deny the mosque the necessary planning permission. The mosque drew up a parking plan (for Friday afternoons) securing permission from the Greek-Cypriot neighbors who had an unused parking lot to satisfy council of the borough. Some councillors were swayed otherwise to consider the parking proposal insufficient having been pressured by the Cypriot-Greek Association whose citywide headquarter was located adjacent to the mosque property. As suggested by Qadeer and Chaudhry (2000, 18) “The basis of parking calculations was the point of dispute: whether the number of parking spaces should be based on the amount of floor area or praying area.”

Maureen Murray of the *Toronto Star* described the council's refusal to rezone in order to accommodate for parking as “back door discrimination... using rules to keep newcomers out” (cited in Qadeer and Chaudhry 2000, 18). The mayor of East York recognizes that “the parking argument... (is) an unsavory opposition to newcomers” (Barber cited in Qadeer and Chaudhry 2000, 18).

Opposition was also voiced because the congregation is drawn from a large area (with a predominant Greek population), a fact which allegedly negated its status

as a neighborhood institution. A sub-theme of the opposition was also what was perceived as a burdensome tax-exempt (Barber cited in Qadeer and Chaudhary 2000).

The Islamic Foundation of Scarborough was then challenged by a neighboring restaurant owner up to divisional court over the City's 'miscalculation' of parking provisions. The restaurant owner of Greek origin challenged the mosque development on the basis of incompatibility with surrounding land uses. Apparently, the restaurateur attempted to convince the city that the mosque would "adversely affect his liquor sales" but the claim was overruled by the Ontario Municipal Board defining incompatibility primarily in terms of environmental impacts (e.g., pollution, noise, etc.) (Qadeer and Chaudhry 2000). Ultimately, East York Mayor Mike Prue stepped forth to uphold Canadian constitutional rights and diversity and defending rights of the Muslim minority by advocating for Canadian values of tolerance and multiculturalism (Valverde 2012).

2.4. 16th Avenue Mosque, Markham

In 2006, the Islamic Society of Markham applied to build a 28,000 square foot mosque in the North East neighborhood of Markham at the intersection of 16th Ave and Highway 48. The mosque set to be called *Masjid Darul Iman* (House of Believers) was designed to accommodate 500 worshipers with 188 parking spots on site. The main building was designed to stand 43 feet in height with a 70 feet high dome and a tall minaret reaching 135 feet. The nearly two-acre site was previously rezoned for a place of worship in 2003 at the request of subdivision developer Karvon Homes Ltd, and later bought by the Islamic Society of Markham in 2006 (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 A).

The Region's councillor Joe Li described the design of the mosque as resembling the Taj Mahal (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 A). After a yearlong 'tedious' process with the town, the developer submitted a site plan application in 2010 which was approved shortly after. Although the proposal did not require a community meeting, the developer arranged one with the assistance of the local councillor Colin Campbell (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 A). The meeting was attended by about 100 people. Shaffique Malik, representing the mosque, responded to a lot of questions in the beginning but by the end of the evening people seem to welcome the mosque to their neighborhood (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 A).



Figure 9: 16th Avenue Mosque in Markham
(Source: Markham Economist & Sun, September 29, 2011)

The approval of the proposal went on to generate an immediate reaction from the local area residents. Both media outlets and local councillors reported receiving an outpour of calls, emails and comments from frustrated residents expressing their opposition. The discussion even led to creation of online forums (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 A). The basis for opposition ranged from parking, traffic, congestion, overdevelopment, inadequate/outdated bylaws, and conspiracies. A local area resident went as far to say “We are letting the politicians get away with murder, literally, because a lot of us don’t take political interest” (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 B).

The opposition seemed to have begun with local residents feeling betrayed by local politicians for approving the mosque without a public meeting. As pointed out by the Mayor Frank Scarpitti, the mosque site was rezoned in 2003, later purchased by the mosque group in 2006, and therefore a statutory public meeting was not required when the site plan application came forward. The Mayor (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C) also argued that “The site was sitting there for three years, zoned... it was available for purchase by any religious group.” Mayor Scarpitti took several steps to address the frustrations of the area residents, from arranging talks with ward councillor, inviting opposition to one-on-one sessions, offering bus tours of other places of worship in the city, to carrying out a half page ad in the newspaper to clarify the misunderstandings (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C). In his first public response, Mayor Scarpitti took the time to address the overwhelming misinformation that existed around the development, in order to clarify the proposal (Markham

Economist & Sun 2011 C). What was meant to serve as a compliment to the quality of architecture by Councillor Joe Li in relating the mosque to the Taj Mahal only served to heighten fears. Mayor Scarpitti responded stating the mosque on 16th Avenue “may be a closet in the Taj Mahal... There has been misinterpretation of what the project is... It is far from the Taj Mahal, which has over half a million square feet” (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C). Mayor Scarpitti went on to clarify other details of the development including size and number of attendants. The overall building size according to town's staff report is 28,000-sq. ft., of which the worship area is only 10,000 sq.ft. (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C).

Mayor Scarpitti commented saying the mosque is a “local place of worship for people who live in our community” and its size is “comparable” to other places of worship in Markham. “It's by no means the largest” (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C). In the same address, Mayor Scarpitti went on to clarify concerns over the disapproval of the Taoist temple by the City, which happen to fall on the same agenda as the 16th Avenue mosque. The Mayor explained the temple required a rezoning, while the mosque did not. The town did not have the grounds to turn down the mosque application which is entirely compliant with zoning bylaw and recognizing “that legal battle will last a few minutes at the Ontario Municipal Board” (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C).

Mayor Scarpitti questioned whether residents staging opposition would be equally surprised about learning of a church development on the same parcel of land as they were finding out about a mosque. He later asks in reference to a nearby church: “Was it a shock when a church was built in the same neighbourhood that people didn't know about?” (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C). Mayor Scarpitti maintained that although he understood the public's reactions over misunderstanding the size and scale of the development, he could not support their requests for Council to stop the mosque from being built there as the mosque has zoning in place to permit it. In response to criticism over the lack of public consultation, Mayor Scarpitti commended the local councillor Colin Campbell for co-organizing the complimentary community meeting which invited 150 immediately adjacent homes, of which 100 people attended (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C). Mayor Scarpitti acknowledged that more could have been done to seek greater feedback although not required.

Concerns over the number of users of the facility were raised, to which Mayor Scarpitti acknowledged that the mosque made a typographical error stating the mosque would serve 1,600 people instead of the 534 permitted (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C). The Mayor clarified that the figure was for a fundraising event 2 to 3 years ago, and is not the figure presented in their formal application to

the town. The Mayor said he believes the applicants when they said it was a typographical mistake (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C). Hoping the correct information will help ease anxieties, Mayor Scarpitti expressed his willingness to hold a community meeting to discuss further issues, but wanted everyone to have the right information first, especially in the ward 5 and the Greensborough neighborhood (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 C).

The Mosque's Board of Directors took out a newspaper advertisement in the local *Economist & Sun* paper to convey details of their proposed development, as well as to advertise alterations to their original proposal out of good will. The note titled "To our Friends and Neighbors in Markham" said the mosque will be a "local place of worship for our families who live in this community. We wish to reiterate that it will not serve as a regional-scale place of worship, and is comparable in size to other places of worship built in Markham" (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 D). The advertisement explained that the group was attracted to the site because it was pre-zoned for a place of worship, and that they have worked with their architect to develop a visually appealing and high-quality design for the mosque (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 D). The advertisement went on to explain how the Board of Directors cooperated with the Town of Markham to accommodate requests beyond the typical requirements, and that their proposal has not required any exemptions, including parking. To dampen the visual impact of the architecture, they explained that they have reduced the height of the minaret from 135 feet to 100 feet, eliminated two side domes as a good will gesture, and added a live wall along the front edge of the mosque (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 D).

In a town hall meeting following the *Economist & Sun* advertisement, community opposition groups came forth conveying feelings of betrayal stating that they were excluded from the public consultation for the mosque, and that the 'data' used to zone that site for place of worship is outdated. They demanded that the mosque file be reopened and re-evaluated with input from the residents group. Others expressed that the mosque, along with 160 townhomes adjacent to the site and a nearby condo development will add another 1,500 to 2,000 people in 1 square kilometer area, will significantly impact parking, safety, traffic and congestion. They demanded that a moratorium be placed on all area developments to allow time to address residents' concerns and public meetings be held to include all residents (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 B). Mayor Scarpitti responded by offering one on one meetings with opposition groups to address their concerns, and to go on a bus tour with the opposition to view other similar places of worship, while maintaining that planning is a layered process governed by laws.

Council sessions were disrupted several times by protestors demanding that development in the area be halted including the mosque until 'correct' data is used, and residents are thoroughly consulted (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 B). At one of those meetings, 150 people from the Markham Residents for Responsible Community Planning (MRRCP) group stormed Council Chamber demanding that their petition titled "Build Markham Mosque Elsewhere" be taken seriously given its 3,000 signatures (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 E). Markham Mayor Scarpitti being the strongest voice from Council in support of the development, confronted the group for disseminating misinformation, clarifying information, and offering further sessions to meet in order to address fears.

An opposition resident argued that the issue had nothing to do with the mosque itself, as all residents respect all religions, but "this is a question of traffic" (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 E). This resident accused Mayor Scarpitti to be 'hypocritical' as he was seen on a front-page last week "planting trees while allowing existing mature trees and vegetation on mosque site to be destroyed" (Markham Economist & Sun 2011 E). In a response to the rhetoric around the development, Mayor Scarpitti brought attention to the fact that the opposing group had not shared the traffic study (conducted in June while school was still on) with its members which they submitted to the town in August.

The Markham Residents for Responsible Community Planning group accused the city of acting in bad faith and having wasted taxpayers' time and money in the miscalculation of the parking requirements and development approval of the mosque—even though the correct calculation does not result with a need for increased parking, the mosque voluntarily reduced their net worship floor area to address the concern. Moreover, this opposition took after the application has already been approved to proceed as is. Mayor Scarpitti admitted that the technical error was due to an outdated formula used to calculate parking requirements for places of worship. He explained the formula is inconsistent with the one used by the Ontario Building Code which does not deal with municipal parking requirements. Where the 2003 Places of Worship Study recommended dividing the net area to calculate capacity, the wording in the places of worship parking bylaw incorrectly said to multiply. This error could not be advertised by the Town, as it may have resulted in a rush to put in applications before the bylaw was corrected (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 A). Markham Residents for Responsible Community Planning's President Phil Richardson argued that their calculations demonstrated a net area of mosque to be greater than that reported and, according to their calculation, 220 parking spots are required rather than the approved 188 -- therefore the site plan approval for mosque should begin again (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 A).

Mayor Scarpitti confronted the group for putting out misinformation about the mosque, and that this is the last time he will let the group speak at Council without being on the agenda (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 A). The flawed bylaw for places of worship with no fixed seats was corrected in 2012, however Regional Councillor Jim Jones said he doesn't support the amendment "because it doesn't go far enough" (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 B). Jones insisted: "The formula is OK, but the problem is what is calculated in the worship area... you gotta look at precedents in the other mosques of similar size. If history repeats itself, they could triple the attendance of the prayer area over time" (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 B).

Additional premises for opposition came forward including, support for a mosque in Markham, next to St. Brother Andre Catholic High School (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 C). Phil Richardson president of the Markham Residents for Responsible Community Planning affirmed that "the group felt more strongly than ever that the mosque was incorrectly and inappropriately approved in principle" and reiterated that "[i]t should be struck down, rescinded and invalidated. Change it now. A lot has changed over 10 years" (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 B). It was argued that "severe" parking and traffic issues need to be considered and addressed, which even led another resident to state: "They are playing games with us... [in reference to changing numbers of mosque including parking miscalculation and typo of 1,600 worshippers]... its more a community center than a place of worship" (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 C). Yet for another local resident "the mosque simply doesn't comply with the town's architectural guidelines to be 'sympathetic' to the existing buildings in nearby heritage district" (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 C). The same resident suggested the north east corner of Major Mackenzie Drive and Hwy 48 could be better suited for the development (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 C).

The Markham Residents for Responsible Community Planning additionally presented findings about two Toronto mosques to comparatively argue that mosques with similar square footage tend to accommodate a greater number of congregants. A resident contended that after visiting the mosque in Scarborough on Nugget Avenue, "They are using the entire building -- the Imam told us himself. So it doesn't matter if we reduced the worship area" (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 B). Another resident whose house backs onto the mosque property complained that once built the structure will likely mean a loss of sunlight, and add gas fumes from cars, "day and night we are going to have to live with this... I'm worried about our health" (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 B).

As these debates were going on, the mosque took up temporary operations under the name of Masjid Darul Iman in a commercial plaza just north of the original site. This temporary site was located in a commercial plaza and did not have the required zoning permitting to operate as a place of worship. The Masjid Darul Iman was given a 30-day notice to either comply, relocate or apply for proper zoning through a rezoning or minor variance application. The mosque did apply for appropriate zoning amendment to permit its use as a place of worship until the matter was resolved (Markham Economist & Sun 2012 D). The mosque eventually took permanent operations in an existing building about a kilometer north of where congregating members planned to build the original mosque on vacant land. This new site, a former GE Digital Energy building, was converted into a place of worship after removal of loading docks and a minor variance to existing zoning was approved to add religious uses (O'Neill 2014).



Figure 10: Masjid Darul Iman in Markham
(Source: Bernie O'Neill, Markham Economist & Sun, October 18, 2014)

According to the mosque staff, this new space presented a better opportunity due to its size and price, as compared to the site originally acquired land. "The GE building is on a lot larger than the mosque's vacant 16th Avenue property. It is also farther away from residential properties and has more parking" (O'Neill 2014). The original proposal to construct a traditional mosque consisting of a dome and minaret that was dragged out in delays through the planning process was ultimately dropped in favour of this new opportunity. The mosque was able to secure an interest-free loan from the owner and the mosque would cost \$2.1 million as compared to \$9 million to construct the original proposal on 16th Avenue. The

space was available to worshipers sooner, by conversion of part of the building to a prayer hall, and the remaining building would generate revenue by renting out offices and/or storage (O'Neill 2014).

2.5. Sakinah Centre, Scarborough

Recent changes in the enforcement of Toronto municipal bylaws have put inner-city places of worship under scrutiny. This next case of Sakinah Centre, a repurposed industrial unit in Toronto's Scarborough neighbourhood, was short-lived and shutdown due to bylaw infringement. Through the implementation of a new bylaw and stricter enforcement, The City of Toronto restricted the repurposing of vacant industrial sites into places of worship (Valverde 2017). The star victim of this change became the multipurpose Sakinah Community Centre, Mosque and the in-house Farah Academy.

In January 2016, the Sakinah Community Centre, Mosque and the Farah Academy (all housed in the same complex) located on Birchmount Road in Scarborough was closed down under an "unsafe order" for its "assembly use" (Adler 2016). The Sakinah Centre offered a host of services for the local Muslim community ranging from full time school, mosque, sports, and other activities, all of which were prohibited from the operation for 'assembly' (Adler 2016). Amongst the issues identified with building safety were inadequate emergency lighting and lack of proper fire separation between Sakinah Centre and other building tenants (Adler 2016). The Sakinah Center hoped to address the identified issues to make the building safe and reapply. However, the building department's Deputy Chief building officer commented that permits will still be withheld due the zoning of property as industrial (Adler 2016).

The Sakinah Centre is one of many places of worship that have chosen to locate in the city's increasingly vacant industrial areas due to the lack of affordability of sites predesignated for worship. The industrial sites are attractive to newer and lower income communities and are typically large, ample and cost efficient to house the congregants. They also stand away from residential neighborhoods from where resistance often arise.

The Sakinah Community Centre was purchased just six days prior to the bylaw change in 2013. The bylaw bans schools and religious institutions in industrial areas citing the need to defend employment lands from conversion into places of worship or schools (Adler 2017 A). For Economic Development chairperson and councillor Michael Thompson, the fact that more people are buying up the city's employment

lands for non-employment uses is a big “problem” (Adler 2016). Although Thompson understood that the new occupants were aware that these properties could be converted into worship places when they purchase them, “they've just gone ahead and done what they wanted to do... If they want to establish a school, I think that's terrific [but] they have to find an appropriate location... I wouldn't send my kids to a school which didn't have fire alarms or emergency exits” (Thompson cited in Adler 2016).



Figure 11: The Sakinah Centre in Scarborough
(Source: facebook.com/SakinahCenter, June 7, 2013; Toronto.com 2017)



Figure 12: The Sakinah Centre in Scarborough
(Source: facebook.com/SakinahCenter, June 7, 2013; Toronto.com 2017)

The community center is 72,000 square feet building conveniently located at a major intersection easily accessible by car and public transportation. Its mandate is to address the community's needs with social services, health and fitness activities and education in an Islamic based framework to combat crime, drugs and reduce high-school dropout rates (Adler 2016).

The Sakinah organization made a direct appeal to Mayor John Tory, who responded through email with several options to work with the community center in order to assist them in their transition to 'legal' operations, yet reiterating the authoritative nature of the municipal by-law that resulted from a public consultation in 2013 (Nickle 2017). Among the mayoral suggestions was an offer to assist the mosque in finding another building where they can 'legally' operate in, attempt to rezone the current property, or to work with the community center to create a 'social enterprise' on the property that is permitted (Nickle 2017). Mayor Tory wrote: "I want to make sure that other faith-based organizations do not find themselves in contravention of zoning by-law" adding that he would ask "community media and the Toronto Real Estate Board to ensure that other religious groups are adequately informed" (Nickle 2017).

A rally to Toronto City Hall by a group of 1,000 constituents resulted with the promise of assistance in finding a place to relocate. However, the alternatives shown were either too expensive, too small, or rental units. While facing the shutdown, the Sakinah Centre has had to rent a space for \$13,000 a month while paying \$12,000 in taxes for the unit they own.

When Scarborough-Agincourt Councillor Jim Karygiannis revealed that "last month, the Ontario Municipal Board granted the Canada Kanthaswamy Temple permission to hold services in a warehouse near Sakinah on Birchmount until March 2018, when the temple's permanent home should be rebuilt", the group asked the "City to give us a similar exemption until we've sorted our problem" (Adler 2017 B). However, the views of local Councillor Thompson differ and explicitly accused the Sakinah group for seeing themselves above the city regulations... [for] think[ing] a set of rules for everybody should not apply to them" (Adler, 2017 B).

2.6. Jaffari Village Development, Thornhill

The Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat of Toronto applied to develop a number of projects in and around the existing Jaffari Community Centre that sits on an 11-

hectare (30 acres) property at 9000 Bathurst Street. The community center is situated in the predominantly Jewish neighborhood of Thornhill Woods in Vaughan. The Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat's development application submitted in 2013 requiring rezoning to achieve the plans for two 17-storey residential towers (one to serve as subsidized residences for seniors with assisted living facilities), 61 townhouses, and retail units with the existing Jaffari Community Centre and Mosque at its center (Csillag 2018).

The development proposal saw almost immediate opposition from the nearby community including a 3,200-signature petition opposing the development and political hesitation leaving the application to sit idle for what is now almost five years.

After experiencing the backlash to the initial proposal, Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat demonstrated a strong willingness to work with local residents to revise the plan. The city arranged several meetings between council, developer and the opposing party to try and find consensus on the project before a revision was submitted. City council ultimately rejected the initial proposal within seven months of its submission stating that "insufficient progress was being made and that it wasn't fair to the community to keep dragging this issue out" (Shefa 2014). This move appeared to a rushed decision to curb the noise around an evidently heated development. The Council that should have taken on the role of a moderator seemed to have helped sustain the voice of the loud opposition to address a number of 'planning issues' that make the development on a site that predates the community around it 'unfit.'



Figure 13: Rendering the Jaffari Community Centre Thornhill, Ontario
(Source: Design Stations.com, 2013, accessed April 2018)

The lands of the Jaffari community were obtained twenty years prior to the construction of the homes surrounding it. The large-scale community centre was established in the late 2000s and since has become a prominent feature for the Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat community. "The project is very important to us... it is a realization of a long-awaited dream and the vision of the members of the community, many of whom initially participated in the purchase of this property some twenty years ago" said Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat's president Shabbir Jeraj (Kane 2014). The members of Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat further clarified that some of the housing units built would be dedicated to seniors, some for assisted living and some would be open to renters and buyers. The Jaffari organization said they want to use their money to help build up the community for all members, not just Muslims (Mangione 2014).

However, non-Muslim residents of Thornhill Woods represented by the Preserve Thornhill Woods Association stated that a major development would break City of Vaughan zoning codes, add to traffic congestion, and create a "gated community" atmosphere (Mangione 2014). The Chair of the Preserve Thornhill Woods Association, who happened to live 120 meters from the development, served as the voice for the opposing organization expressing that the development is 'unfit' for the neighbourhood. He repeatedly cited zoning, infrastructure, traffic, parking and congestion as major issues preventing the development, while others have eventually brought up fear of depreciating property values due to subsidized housing, fear of a segregated Muslim enclave, and potentially higher density even in the shape of townhomes. He further expressed that the increased development would stress sewers and add more stress to local schools that are already at capacity (Shefa 2014). In his words (Kane 2014), "the neighbourhood couldn't handle any more density, with Bathurst St. already clogged with traffic and parked cars. Sewer systems and other infrastructure have also reached their limit... add another 1,400 people, another 500 living units, and it's going to create chaos. The infrastructure cannot support it."

Antagonism was shared by other residents. Another resident who "lives across the street from the mosque said she will sell her home if the proposal is approved. 'Why would I want to be next to a refugee community?' asked the resident, adding that "When you pay for a certain kind of property of house in a certain kind of neighbourhood, you want the real estate value to hold" (Kane 2014) .

Soaked in feelings of victimization, the opposition presented themselves as having to fight the City's battle to defend their own neighbourhood. There are feelings of betrayal because the City won't defend its own by-laws in face of the developer

with deep pockets. The tone of defeat and hopelessness continues as members of the Preserve Thornhill Woods Association presented Thornhill Woods neighbourhood to be at capacity and at brink of collapse due to inadequate infrastructure, public transit and roadways. Such point was brought to the attention of local politicians only when the proposal to develop the lands around a Muslim place of worship was put forth. The proposal generated a sudden sense of urgency requiring the formation of the taxpayers' group and fundraising to hire planners and lawyers to fight the case and keep the neighbourhood from collapse (Mangione 2014).

A resident leading the charge against the development commented to CTV News that "non-Muslim residents of Thornhill Woods are worried they will be excluded from the Jaffari development" (Mangione 2014). This resident compared the proposal to gated communities in the United States, adding "some gated communities are based on religion while others are based on income, but either way, the idea isn't appropriate for the GTA... It's not the Canadian way. The Preserve Thornhill Woods Association isn't opposed to a religious-oriented area, they just don't want it to be an area where others aren't welcome" (Mangione 2014). The resident further commented rhetorically that non-Muslims may not be permitted to walk their dogs through the area questioning "could women walk around without head coverings?" even though the developers have clarified that anyone would be welcomed into the area regardless of their culture or dress (Mangione 2014).

Ward councillor Sandra Yeung Racco insisted the development did not reflect the community. Although Racco understands that there is significant opposition towards the proposal, and it could potentially create tension in the community, she defended that "the onus is on the developer to convince the City to approve their proposal. They need to show to us why it is appropriate for us to allow them to come in with high-density residential in that area... I am very aware of residents' concerns... We need to look at it from a planning perspective. I don't want to see one culture pitted against another culture. That's not where we are. The City of Vaughan is a very diverse city" (Kane quoting Yeung, 2014). Racco's position does not appropriately reflect the community members that packed the council chamber, and showed support through petitions.

The initial proposal presented by Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat did not reflect the community and as unanimously rejected by City Council. According to Yeung (Shefa 2014), "there were still a lot of issues like density and height [of condos] and traffic, things that weren't addressed... We have set certain principles that we had already developed with the working group, and we want them to stick to those principles, and we spelled out that we want the character of the community to be reflected." The developer was given five months to submit a revised proposal, or to

appeal the decision to Ontario Municipal Board. Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat maintained that they were optimistic about finding a working solution that the community would agree to, and that they have previously expressed their willingness to work collaboratively with area residents and City staff (Shefa 2014).

The initial proposal with the high-rises was never decided on by the City, the revised version with reduced building height that is within the confines of zoning was approved after being open for a public review through the Committee of Whole subject to a number of conditions (Shefa 2015). A Committee of Whole was created to hold public meetings where residents could come and express their concerns with the proposal. The revised submission called for reduced scale of the proposal, with additional features designed to address major issues of height, traffic, and parking. Given the City's official plan designation for the area is low-rise, the revised plan reduced the height of the two 17-story buildings to 6 and 8 stories, and added a public access road through the development to ease congestion on existing roads, and a proposed parking facility that will be available to the overall neighbourhood as well as neighbouring Waldorf school with whom the mosque already shares a parking agreement (Shefa 2015).

The revised proposal was still not enough for the Chair of the Preserve Thornhill Woods Association, who expressed that although height has been reduced, the density remains and "doesn't conform with the rest of the neighbourhood when it comes to look and feel of the neighbourhood... We're talking about 60 townhomes in an area on a street that has 17 houses on it. Everything is really dense" said Koubi (Shefa 2015). The chair further expressed that the planning rationale report indicated the development would be designed with the special needs of the Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat of Toronto's community in mind, which would segregate the Muslim community. Probing the issue further, the chair complained about the availability of only 8 to 10 % of the units in the retirement home to the broader community (Shefa 2015). About attracting Muslims, Kane (2014) writes, "The Jaffari Centre is near Ner Israel Yeshiva of Toronto, an Orthodox Jewish school for boys. The neighbourhood remains predominantly Jewish, although the Muslim community is growing. The units would not be exclusive to Muslims, but the ISIJ [Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat] expects the proximity to the mosque will attract primarily residents of Islamic faith." On the senior retirement homes, Shabir Jaffer, Communications team lead, explained that they're trying to supplement the government resources through their private investment and enhance the vibrant diverse community of Thornhill and Vaughan and therefore "part of the property would be designated for seniors, while another part would be reserved for those needing government assistance, both of any religion" (Mangione 2014). However,

as reported by Magione (2014), "Jaffer is unsure exactly how much it will cost to live in the condos or townhouses."

As Mangione (2014) explains, tensions in the neighborhood predated the actual proposal. Thornhill Woods neighbourhood is home to a diversity of residents (Asian, South Asian, Italian, Israeli, Persian, Eastern European, Black and Jewish -- according to 2001 census data). The Shia Ithna-Asheri Jamaat of Toronto has held ownership of current lands since the early 1990s. That is longer than the amount of time the opposition has occupied their homes in the same neighbourhood. The tension between the Muslim community and the neighbourhood actually comes from the Ontario Municipal Board decision to exempt the mosque from parking bylaw requirements around 2009-2010 when it was constructed. Since then, worshipers attending the mosque have had to park on both sides of Bathurst Street occasionally blocking driveways, and reducing traffic into a single lane in each direction. Further tensions simply rose to the surface with the proposal for the expanded development.

After 28 meetings with City staff and the Preserve Thornhill Woods Association, the final proposal calling for 60 three-storey townhouses, a six-storey seniors' residence, an eight-storey residential building, a new secondary school, and a new park and nature trail along the East Don River was still deemed not 'unacceptable' (Syed 2018). A representative of Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat expressed to reporter Fatima Syed (2018) that "it's gotten to a point where we think we are not making any headway with the residents' association or local citizens," despite addressing every single concern of the 14-page document presented by City staff and the community.

Frustrated, the Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat submitted the initial proposal for the high-rises that was never decided on to the Ontario Municipal Board (as rules were set to change in Spring 2018). Meanwhile the Chair of the Preserve Thornhill Woods Association continues to complain that the development is too dense, too demanding on the local infrastructure, and that there are not enough parking spots to accommodate the increased traffic to the mosque, adding potential stress on public schools and the Don River to his list of issues (Syed 2018). The City of Vaughan has not yet to take a clear stance on the matter to help settle the issue in one way or another.

Scholar Myer Siemiatycki (Syed 2018) commented: "it certainly is unusual for a Council to take four years and more to make a decision in the issue when the proponent of the proposal has so significantly altered their initial plans... it seems longer and more drawn out than it should be." Siemiatycki further noted that a

change in Ontario Municipal Board's authority in municipal development affairs is crucial as local Councils are responsible for regulating land use through zoning and planning. Siemiatycki opined that the Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat's proposal does seem beneficial to the broader community but feels that the resistance is perhaps rooted in the idea of the potential expansion of the Muslim presence in the area. Siemiatycki further observes: "there's an awful lot of vacant land, kind of unsightly vacant land surrounding the mosque... The irony is, having a lot of residents at walking distance to the mosque might reduce the amount of driving and traffic to the mosque... this could be the solution."

For urban scholar Mitchel Kosny, the fact that the process has taken over four years is "inappropriate" and "unacceptable" (Syed 2018 B). "Planning issues are not that complicated... I think we're all dancing around what the issue is here... Parking, traffic, there's a hundred of those things, they're all nice, gentle code for we just don't want it here or we don't like them" (Kosny cited in Syed 2018 B). Kosny believes that it is up to city council to make firm decision on planning issues and help turn suburbs into communities (Syed, 2018 B).



Figure 14: Jaffari Community Centre in Thornhill
(Source: Geo Focus Official Website, Accessed February 2018)

The development proposal sat with Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (formerly the Ontario Municipal Board) until a hearing occurred in mid-2019. The development application was approved by the City subject to recommendations and conditions of a zoning by-law amendment holding provision prior to the tribunal's hearing.

Based on these agreed upon conditions of approval, the City and Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat reached a full settlement. The City issued the approval in the appeal process before the matter was heard at the Tribunal's hearing (Local Planning Appeal Tribunal 2019). The approval was granted for the revised 8-storey condominium building, a 6-storey seniors condominium building with independent and assisted living options, a public road through the development that will connect Knightshade Drive to Apple Blossom Drive, increased natural buffer and planting areas between proposed townhouses and existing residences to the west, relocation and preservation of existing heritage building, and willingness to enter into a public use agreement for the new playing field (Local Planning Appeal Tribunal 2019). The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and Toronto Waldorf School withdrew as parties from the hearing upon satisfactory resolution of their issues through consultations and holding conditions in zoning bylaw amendment (Local Planning Appeal Tribunal 2019).

Final approval was based on evidence that proposed development and draft Official Plan Amendment and zoning bylaw amendment have regard for provincial interest, are consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement 2014, and conform to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2019, the York Regional Official Plan and generally the Vaughan Official Plan as reasonable intensification in low-rise residential, natural and community area, greenlands systems, and being well-supported by a local and regional road network and accessible transit and community services (Local Planning Appeal Tribunal 2019).

This case is significant not only because it spread over many years and for the defense of (Jewish) neighborhood character but also for the evolution of the Muslim community moving from place of worship/community center into other areas of infrastructural and cultural development. On the one hand the Jaffari community held lands well before the neighbouring residential area was occupied and have certain aspirations to cater to the community of worshipers. On the other hand, the predominantly Jewish identity of this residential neighbourhood have certain aspirations of what their neighbourhood would appear like. Nonetheless it was evident that the opposition the development faced was a prime example of cultural intolerance between minority cultures, and the appropriation of planning mechanisms to act out politics of identity and space.

3. PLANNING AN ISLAMIC CULTURAL/ RELIGIOUS COMPLEX

A review of mosque development in the Greater Toronto Area shows that as the city-region continues to diversify, mosque development continues to face challenges. Of the examples referenced above, it can be noted that mosques proposed as late as 2017 experience similar fate as those proposed in the 1990s.

Opponents commonly cite increased traffic congestion, changes to neighborhood character, infrastructure capacity, depreciation of property values, poor use of taxes to veil their NIMBYISM. Legitimate planning issues become hijacked and exploited to express personal displeasure with the proposal.

Parking and building height are regulated under planning legislation and can offer legitimate grounds for development refusals; however, these technicalities can often be negotiated with the City, or through other dispute resolution bodies such as the Local Planning Appeals Tribunal (formerly Ontario Municipal Board). In some of the examples listed above, we have seen how these same technicalities became used to create delays, political tensions and hard refusals for specific development projects, despite the attempts of developers to offer reasonable and sometime significant alterations to their original plans. The reduction of minaret height and dome size in the case of Markham and in the case of Vaughan council's inability to decide on Ithna Asheri Community Center's proposal for almost four years are prime examples of costly and undue delays that mosque developers face while seeking approval for their projects. Attempts to resolve disputes on the basis of technicalities include complete alteration of original plans, yet yield no positive results. The refusals seemingly often stem from community opposition, and then become politically contentious issues seeing political pressures, all while causing undue delays.

Public consultation is a valuable right afforded to community stakeholders in shaping the future of their neighbourhoods. However, this process tends to be at the source of controversy instead of leading to resolve and constructing good neighbourhoods. The use of development notices and public meetings to solicit feedback from community members is not necessarily inclusionary. The input of the public in a private development is a crucial aspect of developing whole communities, however, there is a need to distinguish between relevant, constructive, unbiased feedback that is a fair reflection of the whole community affected by the development. Instead, the feedback received is typically by those

that are either affected enough to voice their dismay, or those that are regular participants in groups such as ratepayers associations or have the time to attend these meetings. There are also those who use the municipal development arena as a means to engage with national and international politics.

Although the experiences described above seem to be common occurrences in the development of mosques in the Greater Toronto Area, it is quite interesting to observe the grand success and celebration of a group of Islamic themed developments in an otherwise desolate industrial part of Toronto. A monolithic structure like the Aga Khan Museum, the Ismaili Centre and its adjoining garden came into existence with little to no resistance in one of Toronto's oldest industrial suburbs.

3.1 The Aga Khan Development Process

The Aga Khan Museum and the Ismaili Centre project began when the Toronto-based Ismaili community began planning the development of a new community centre with limited support from the overseeing international body -- the Aga Khan Development Network. The application was first submitted in the early 2000s. At this time, the adjacent lands were occupied by Bata International headquarters. A building that held recognition for its architecture. Coincidentally, the Bata lands become available the same time the Aga Khan family was exploring locations for a museum to house their personal collection of art. The expansion and development of the Ismaili Centre on Wynford Drive by the local Ismaili community brought attention to the possibility of acquiring these lands to develop a master plan to include the museum. This possibility placed Toronto on the short list of cities to house the Aga Khan's personal collection of art.

Once Toronto was chosen to be the location for the new museum, the Aga Khan Development Network took over the expansion of the Ismaili Centre to encompass it into one large master plan consisting of three components: the Ismaili Centre for cultural and religious activities, a museum to house collection of art, and a garden. An independent company by the name of Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited was created to act on behalf of the Aga Khan Development Network to oversee the planning and construction of the development. An application for site plan control/site plan approval was submitted to the City of Toronto by Moriyama and Teshima Architects and Planners on June 30, 2006. The application lists Imara (Wynford Drive) Limited as owners of the 7,036 Ha (17.36 acres) located at 55 and 75 Wynford Drive in Ward 38 Scarborough Centre. The site was zoned industrial/office business park.

The existing building on the site, the Bata International Headquarters, was designated as heritage as it was constructed in 1967 and represented an exemplary architecture of the Modern Movement. The heritage designation was revoked after the owners of Bata expressed support for the new development, and the City believed the new development would only enhance the architectural excellence that the Bata headquarters held. This would allow the Aga Khan development an exemption from the Ontario Heritage Act, and permit demolition of the heritage building in exchange for a commemoration of the Bata International building.

The proposed development, filed under a "complex" category, consisted of "a new place of worship, community centre, museum, underground central utility plant, underground parking, above grade parking and landscaping" (Smallwood 2006; Teramura 2006). The development was proposed in two separate phases. The Site Plan Control Application for the community centre/place of worship and a museum was submitted on June 30, 2006 (Teramura 2006). and approved on September 2, 2010 (Keefe 2010). Among several items, the applicant was given a 5-year period to complete all works from the date of final site plan approval. The site was inaugurated a year ahead of schedule on September 12, 2014.

As a standard part of the planning process, numerous studies were conducted. A detailed traffic impact study was submitted by BA Group on October 4, 2006. The study observed other similar Ismaili Centers in the Greater Toronto Area to understand operational characteristics of similar sites (Clarizio 2007). The consultant indicated that although there will be "regular weekly day-time activity at the Community Center and the Museum, it is clear that peak periods of site activity will be during the Friday evening worship period, between the hours of 7:00pm and 9:00pm" (Clarizio 2007). The traffic study also concluded that the site would generate traffic overlapping somewhat with the existing traffic conditions along Wynford Drive during the regular peak periods. The study also concluded that "many of the land-use developments are complimentary to the parking utilization. It was noted that office, community center and museum related activities would occur primarily in the day, peak religious activity occurs in the evening, therefore, there appears to be a potential for shared parking between the various uses onsite" (Clarizio 2007). The City requested further traffic study upon completion of Phase 1 development, and before the construction of Phase 2 Museum in order to assess the need for pedestrian or other signals at Wynford Drive, Garmond Court, and a proposed Middle Driveway intersection. Signals deemed necessary were to be expensed to the applicant (Clarizio 2007).

The City reiterated the need to maintain the minimum parking supply at all stages of development. This meant a minimum of 449 and a maximum of 451 parking spaces must be made available during Phase 1 of the development to satisfy zoning bylaw 7625 requirement. Approximately 300 of these parking spaces would service the museum and the remaining for the Ismaili Centre based on the recommendation of the traffic study (Clarizio 2007). The City emphasized that the owner must construct the proposed temporary surface parking complete with paving as per municipal requirements in order to maintain a constant parking supply. Any shortfall of the parking was not acceptable, even during the transition period when Phase 2 was to be constructed, and most above grade parking will be shifted to underground in order to accommodate the large park.

The site plan application seemed to be held due to a “number of outstanding issues related to the design of the site which must be resolved to allow the review of the site plan application to proceed” (Keefe 2007). These issues were attributed to the scale of the development. Among the key issues were a request to enhance landscape and pedestrian access along property frontage between Wynford Drive and the two buildings (the museum and the Ismaili Centre) to allow immediate public access to the gardens (Keefe 2007). To achieve this reduction of hard surfaces, municipal staff suggested that at-grade parking and driveways be removed or relocated, and the landscape setting be enhanced by extending the central garden between the Ismaili Centre and the Aga Khan Museum to the Wynford Drive sidewalk, not only allowing immediate public access to the park but also making the park an important third component of the project (Keefe 2007).

Under Section 41 of the Planning Act, the Notice of Approval Conditions identifies the conditions that need to be satisfied prior to the approval of plans and drawings. A Notice of Approval Conditions and Site Plan Agreement Conditions issued in November 2007 identified a number of fine detailed elements and listed conditions that need to be met in order to receive approval. The list included a number of highly priced demands from the City including: land conveyance, sidewalk relocation, and submission of applications prior to completing landscaping in adjoining lands. The City of Toronto demanded a land conveyance of 3.44 m road widening along site frontage on Wynford Drive in order to satisfy a 27 m right-of-way, free from all physical and title encumbrances. In such case, the owner must cover all costs associated with the conveyance, including registrations, preparation of reference plans, retaining qualified persons to conduct environmental site assessment, and the costs of the City retaining a third party peer reviewer including a 7% administrative cost (Clarizio 2007). The City also demanded \$70,000 for the relocation of 1.7m wide sidewalk across the entire Wynford Drive frontage of the site to the standard location of 1.0m from the widened property line. Further, the

City demanded that any landscape plan within the Wynford Drive, Eglinton Avenue East and the Don Valley Parkway ramp boulevards must be approved by transportation services prior to Site Plan Approval (Clarizio 2007). The Site Plan Agreement conditions also outlined a number of other items that need to be included. These were understandable items guiding the development such as the removal of all redundant traffic control signage, access, curb cuts, details on sizes and dimensions as per municipal requirements.

Other conditions included proposed fencing, landscaping and the pedestrian walkway within City Boulevard along the Don Valley Parkway ramp's site frontage prior to site plan approval for Phase 2. The project therefore paid \$7,500 for the removal of existing fence at property line along the Don Valley Parkway's ramp, \$50,000 for construction and relocation of new fence along the Don Valley Parkway's ramp site frontage, \$75,000 for installation of guide rails along the Parkway's ramp site frontage; and an additional \$6,625 representing the 5% fee for engineering review of the above construction works (Clarizio 2007). Additional items included landscape guarantees of \$495,783, the relocation of 1.7m wide sidewalk across entire Wynford Drive frontage to 1.0 m from property line at the cost of \$96,750 and associated 5% engineering review fee of \$5,080, \$1,000 for the installation of "hidden driveway" warning signs on Wynford Drive, and additional engineering fees (Clarizio 2007).

The tree protection and plan review identified 166 trees on the property subject to removal from site that require protection under the private tree by-law. A \$200 per tree removal fee applied, and a 14-day notice period was needed to collect community comments. Any objections were subject to further consideration. An additional 23 trees were identified for preservation; however, only 4 were ultimately deemed worth keeping. A permit fee of \$35,600 for the removal of 178 trees was required in addition to tree planting guarantees. An additional tree planting security deposit of \$4,081 applied for planting 7 trees on city street allowance, plus a guarantee that the applicant must maintain and renew the trees for a two-year period (Moffat 2007).

In March 2008, the City was notified of a future Eglinton-Crosstown Light Rail Transit expansion as part of the Toronto Transit City Light Rail plan that will directly affect the Aga Khan Museum and the Ismaili Centre developments. Eglinton Avenue, a major arterial road, defines the southern boundary of the site. This announcement served as notice to the developer of possible future noise, vibration, electromagnetic interference (EMI), and stray current that may be transmitted into the buildings. The developer became responsible for applying respective attenuation measures to mitigate these effects, for advising future occupants of this

possible interference, and for discharging the Toronto Transit Commission of any liability (George 2008). Further, the City requested the developer to enhance the connection between existing transit stops near the site and particularly along Eglinton Avenue. The City recommended that the developer consider a signature bus stop concept to brand the identity of the transit stops to the adjacent development and to improve the pedestrian transit interface (George 2008). Finally, the property was subject to an Education Development Charge, which was addressed by a gift of \$50,000 to a scholarship fund at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design.

3.2 What makes the Aga Khan Development more acceptable?

In comparing and contrasting the different planning processes by which different mosques have (or not) been approved in the Greater Toronto Area, I see three planning issues that have rendered the Aga Khan development more acceptable: its multi-use program; scale/budget considerations; and community support.

Multi-Use vs Single Use Facilities

The Aga Khan Museum and the Ismaili Centre are Islamic themed developments with uses that extend beyond just a place for worship. Their cultural, institutional/office, along with religious functions was considered favorable by planning authorities in the City of Toronto. This was revealed through informal conversations (2015) with a city planner who overlooked the development of the Aga Khan project in Ward 38, Scarborough, as well as other senior planners. This particular city planner showed great excitement over the proposal due its large scale, the quality of architecture and its location in an otherwise "insignificant" neighbourhood of Toronto. Such development was a big deal for the City due to its scale and international reputation, as well as its ability to serve both a local and broader public. My informal conversation with this city planner revealed the City's inclination towards multi-purpose monolithic developments as compared to large, single use places of worship –especially that religious facilities generally tend to take up a substantial square footage, yet be limited in their use. It seems like the City not only likes to see projects that maximize the use of space (and tax revenues) and really appreciated that the development had more to offer in addition to a religious component --especially that the development was an impressive cultural addition

to Toronto's landscape that would be opened to a larger public. This was a recurring theme in media and in informal conversations with senior planners.

When we compare the Aga Khan development to more traditional mosques, the latter tend to be made up of large congregational prayer halls with makeshift accessory facilities. Mosques often host schools, offices, banquet and funeral spaces; however, these services are accommodated through the use of room dividers or renovations. The space is either limited or insufficient to draw a larger portion of the population to the mosque regularly for cultural and social interactions.

Scale/Budget Considerations and Professionalism in Development

The mere scale, budget and professionalism that the Aga Khan Development Network deployed in the construction of the site is likely unprecedented – especially compared to traditional mosque developments in the Toronto area. With a budget of \$300 million and a track record of world class developments, there is no doubt the builder is reputable and experienced. The budget and experience together allowed the builder the flexibility to quickly afford and respond to challenges in the construction and planning of the development. By recruiting the best professionals, including internationally recognized architects, the Aga Khan Development Network not only generated a lot of positive buzz around the project but was also able to quickly respond to unexpected site and development challenges, requests for additional studies, changes to design, and any other extras that were not originally planned for.

As is typical with most planning applications, the City requires additional studies to satisfy criteria. The Aga Khan development was subject to numerous reports as well as municipal demands for extras. The developer had to provide several reports related to traffic, parking, tree protection, landscaping and signage conditions. In addition to the reports, the builder had to respond to demands such as a last-minute request for attenuation measures against noise, vibration, electromagnetic interference and stray current that may be transmitted by the future Eglinton-Crosstown LRT expansion, a request for a signature bus stop to brand the transit stops adjacent to the facility, and a request for an enhanced open-to-public green space. The developer responded to this request for an enhanced open-to-public green space by fully redeveloping their plans for a simpler garden feature to one designed by renowned landscape architect, increasing their budget to a \$100 million. To satisfy the educational development charge, the developer made a donation of \$50,000 towards a scholarship fund at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design. Clearly, this capacity to find solutions to

development problems is made easier with access to large budgets, and is clearly not afforded to all mosque organisations.

Moreover, the ability to hire experienced and professional contractors and consultants serves as an advantage in responding to development regulations and mitigating the delays in the development process. Despite the large budget, the builder took advantage of their large community network by recruiting volunteer or local professionals to offset some of the professional costs of the development.

Casual conversations with various planners involved in the development of mosques consistently revealed the importance of professional involvement in dealing with development applications. Planners pointed to inadequacies in development packages and unrealistic expectations as some elements that arose from novice developers that often lead the development of mosques in their respective municipalities.

Community Support for the Aga Khan Development

The success of the Aga Khan development can also be linked to the structure of the Ismaili community. The global Ismaili community follows a singular spiritual leader and Imam – His Highness the Aga Khan IV, 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims. The global community ultimately serves and pays dues towards the central entity, therefore building and sustaining a strong international network of Ismailis. This community structure serves two specific advantages: first, having a singular leader to guide and represent the overall community through spirituality, politics, finance and philosophy; and second it creates a community that is clear in understanding their roles in implementing the directives of the community.

The Aga Khan project in Toronto started when the local Ismaili community was looking to build a larger Jamatkhana or Ismaili centre for their local area congregants. This project was to be funded by the local Ismaili community; therefore, the scale and design was not as grandiose as it turned out to be. It was perhaps a coincidence that during this process, the Aga Khan Development Network was looking to establish a new Museum to house their personal art collections when the site adjacent to the proposed Ismaili Jamatkhana became available. It quickly became a contender for the developer to establish their Museum. When the decision was finalized, the proposed Jamatkhana was encompassed into the broader plans for the site, therefore allowing it access to the same level of architecture and design as the Museum.

The Ismaili community played an important role through the development process. The community demonstrated strong support for the development by writing letters and emails to local ward councillors and planning departments in support of the development. The letters were largely written by members of the Ismaili community who emphasized the religious and cultural importance of this project. The letters came from people from all walks of life, but also highly regarded professionals within their communities such as lawyers and doctors. Support also came from others in the extended network of the Ismaili community. This included the North York General Hospital to whom members of the Ismaili community have shared good relationships through donations to the Orthopedic and Plastics Centre, the second busiest ward in the hospital.

Neighbours also expressed their support for the project. Nearby Japanese Cultural Centre and the Bata family that owned the existing heritage Bata Headquarters on the lands where the Aga Khan Museum was to be constructed wrote in support of the developer and the development. They explained their good relationship with the Ismaili community and their convictions that the development would only be beneficial for the City. That Bata relinquished the heritage designation of their headquarters despite some modernist architectural significance, on the basis that the Aga Khan Museum would outdo the existing architectural feat for years to come, was most significant.

The community played an important role when nearby condominium residents expressed their opposition to the Islamic themed development in their neighbourhood. Although the City assured opponents that they would not be negatively impacted by the development, the Ismaili community responded to the opposition by holding an open house and inviting all residents in the condominium building to answer all questions and concerns they had about the future development. The open house was carried out by a group of Ismaili women and was kept very professional. The session concluded with condominium residents sharing immense excitement for the development and the withdrawal of all complaints.

The development also balanced their relationships with local communities who served as a valuable asset by providing discounted or pro-bono professional legal or accounting services. These ties helped to offset some of the costs with retaining expensive professionals by having some of the preliminary work completed by locals – and involving local sectors into the project.

3.3. Planning Lessons Learnt

My research has revealed three areas of the planning process that warrant further exploration in order to mitigate the challenges found in highly controversial projects such as mosques. Community, communication (or public participation in planning), and professionalism are three broad areas that are a fundamental part of the planning process, however, often overlooked or even neglected. Looking at the different case studies of mosque developments, certain developments found favorable outcomes by increasing attention to one or more of these processes. Any negligence or deficiency in one or more of the processes tend to create difficulty or an unfavorable outcome for the project.

Community

Community speaks to the group of members that seek to use or benefit from a proposed development. Community can either be end users from the immediate area or the broader region that will ultimately make up the greatest user base of the space. For mosques, this is the community of Muslims that will use the facility to fulfill their daily, weekly or annual religious obligations, and seek out additional religious and cultural services to participate in. It also represents the donation base to contribute towards operational costs of a mosque.

In many of the case studies above, the community is largely missing in the planning stages of mosque development and tends to come into the picture after the fact. The community is expected to demonstrate support for the development once it begins to experience undue delay in municipal offices, yet it is largely missing in the conceiving stages of mosque planning and development.

In most cases, a mosque development is conceived by a small group of founding members. The initiative emerges from the need to have dedicated prayer space for local congregants as the Muslim population expands in a given area. Funding is typically provided by loans and donations from worshipers at nearby mosques. The founding members work with builders, architects and engineers to put together a proposal and eventually take the application through the development process. It is often at this stage that difficulties begin to emerge as the planning process legally solicits input (support or opposition) from the local community. The element of community becomes highly crucial in this phase, as it can drastically impact the feedback the planning department and councillors receive, and can demonstrate greater support for the development to counteract negative perspectives.

The absence of a strong community in the process of a mosque development and its presence after the fact presents a missed opportunity for the developing party. The involvement of future users and the presence of a strong community at the onset of the proposal presents major benefits. First and foremost, it offers the opportunity to generate a tight knit community that finds representation in their local mosque and turns to it for social, political representations in addition to social, financial, administrative/legal, religious, and cultural assistance. Second, it affords the chance to end users to have a say in the types of services they would like to see offered by their local mosque -- services that are later realized and offered in makeshift forms using room dividers and renovations or services that can also help offset some of the financial costs of the mosque by generating revenue. There is also the opportunity to create a strong financing base from end users that feel vested in the building, therefore more willing to contribute financially to secure a religious space to service their community. The same supporters can demonstrate the importance of the mosque to them – as taxpaying residents and vested stakeholders to counteract the opposition to the development. Finally, the missed opportunity to employ professionals from within their local community can reduce overall costs of construction. There is without a doubt a large pool of qualified and talented individuals in all communities. By connecting these individuals to their mosque and employing professional volunteers, the mosque can help offset some of the professional expenses in the development process.

A mosque draws congregants in the thousands during weekly Friday and holiday prayers. During these occasions, the mosques generate the greatest portion of their revenue to help them carry their costs through the year. The congregants generally attend sermons and prayers. There is little to no socializing that occurs on premise outside praying. There are, however, other programs that are advertised through the year, such as scholar visits, Islamic schooling, and adult classes but for the most part such activities occur in makeshift settings (using room dividers) with the exception of Islamic Centres where there is formal space for classrooms and offices. By engaging the community in early stages, these services can be incorporated into the design of the buildings and further enhance community engagement.

Once a mosque development is complete and operational, the wider community feels generally disconnected from the mosque as anything more than a singular place for religious obligations. The lack of sense of community leads to reduced operational funding support that can be provided by its congregants as compared to when the mosque provides more services greater than a single use congregational prayer hall. The attending members may not feel the mosque is a place for social and cultural gatherings but only a place for religious worship. By limiting the function to just a prayer hall for majority of its users, the mosque misses

out on the opportunity to function as a cultural or community centre, hence multiplying the revenue to keep up with operational costs by increasing its role among its cohorts. Not only is single-use a financial disadvantage, but a missed opportunity for the community as the mosque is often the closest thing to a cultural centre or a community centre that most attendants may have or identify with. The function of the mosque as a community centre is increasingly seen as essential to provide and create support for the Muslim community and for them to come together as visible stakeholder in local community matters. It is important for mosques to be representational of their communities in order to overcome the challenges faced by Muslim communities.

In the examples provided above, a few mosques turned to the community in order to demonstrate support for their contested developments, however this came after the fact, or in the form a protest as opposed to formal support.

In many cases, the level of community involvement prior to the incidents of opposition is to be noted. The Ithna Asheri Community Centre developed a vision that was inspired by their congregants, while the Sakinah Community Centre had quickly become an important institute in their community by offering the variety of programming the community needed. In both examples the mosques had an existing and established user base that developed over several years. The Ithna Asheri Community Centre had existed since the early 1990s and the plans for additional development came out of a collective community vision. The Sakinah Centre offered a variety of programming which increased the level of community involvement with the mosque. This in turn created and established community of users who strongly identified with the development and demonstrated their support.

Yet despite the strong support base for the two developments, they were unable to solicit the scale of influence needed to sway their developments. The support came when the matter was no longer a planning issue but a political one. For the Ithna Asheri Community Centre, Vaughan councillors were simply not responding to the application while siding with the hostile opposition. For Sakinah Centre, the issue was grounded in by-laws, and the City was unwilling to award any flexibility to the issue.

When comparing these two specific cases to the Aga Khan development, we see that the Aga Khan project saw supportive letters from its community early on in the planning phase of the development. The project had relatively less hostile opposition, and the very little opposition was quickly diffused through a dialogue. The development also benefited from having a large budget to address planning, development and design shortfalls, and greatest of all a strong political and

financial backing awarded by the personal relationship of Prince Aga Khan and the Canadian Government.

A similar approach of building kinship within the broader community outside the cultural confines of the developing party would greatly benefit mosque developments in showing their role in their respective societies. It is therefore important for mosque developments to create opportunities for dialogue, and increase community representation by building a strong sense of community amongst its constituents so that their individual actions can be referred back to an affiliation with the broader community of Muslims.

Nonetheless, in both the Ithna Asheri Jafari and the Sakinah Centre cases there are obvious undertones of discrimination, Islamophobia and NIMBYism that prevented the developments to progress passed the opposition and municipal planning hold ups. The effectiveness of a strong communications strategy is limited in that it can assist in “warming up” the community and planning offices to the significance of the upcoming proposal for a community, and to out shadow the opposition before it is raised. However, it cannot do enough in sawing planning departments and politicians to act in a fair manner without prejudice.

Communication and Public Participation in Planning

The planning process in Ontario is a social-political process to govern land use. Public participation is an important step in this process as it requires the municipalities to consider stakeholder and community input before making changes to existing zoning or land use designations.

The process of obtaining public feedback involves communicating with stakeholders and community through the placement of a notice board on the proposed site, notices in newspapers, city website, and letters mailed to residents within a set radius. The process limits involvement to those who are actively seeking this information, able to read the signage, or bothered enough by the proposed development to voice their concerns, or capable to afford the time to participate. These limitations might in turn create an imbalanced representation of support or opposition to the existing proposal, hence leading to delays for the developer.

I would argue that even with the best intentions, this process designed for public engagement fails to adequately represent a fair community perspective on the proposed development. In doing so, this process leaves room for opposition to take advantage of technical shortfalls and carry out personal fears and distaste for the development or developer. This process fails to weight in the parties that hold either

a positive or at minimum a neutral opinion of the development while considering the opposition.

The traditional forms of public engagement often limit the involvement of a sizeable public to adequately represent the area. The small text on notice boards, or confusing planning websites generally require a deal of effort for someone to investigate the fate of a site marked for development. Those that may be indifferent, supportive of a particular expression of growth in their area, unaware of municipal politics, or simply lacking the time to research further, are generally excluded from the consultations.

The public engagement process draws in people that either feel strongly about the development, regular participators in municipal politics (such as ratepayers groups) or those that have the time, capacity and the willingness to show up to express their opinion on proposed developments. Meanwhile a good majority of the community rests either unaware of the development proposal or is not concerned enough to express their support or neutrality on the subject. The negative opposition on the other hand, is ultimately mobilized and loudly expressed, and even though often a smaller segment of the population manages to skew the perspective of the planning department.

The case studies above, as well as my current professional experience, helped me understand the importance of an advanced communications strategy particularly for sensitive developments. As a communications coordinator for a communications consulting firm, I worked on two sensitive developments in Toronto — Honest Ed's redevelopment and Downsview Park. Honest Ed's was an iconic building in Toronto that was rooted deeply in Toronto's history and culture. The site was up for redevelopment and the objective was to renew legacy of the building by adding much needed rental supply to the area. The developer understood if they were to proceed with a development application it will quickly become controversial as the site is not just iconic to the immediate area, but the city and region as a whole. The developer hired a communications consulting firm to warm the community to the idea of the redevelopment. The objective of the consultation firm was to gradually introduce the idea of a redevelopment to renew the legacy of Honest Ed's. This campaign was carried out through a series of open houses, art events working with local artists, and other social events where the local residents, culture, heritage and creatives were prioritized, and consulted with to redesign the look and feel of the area. The process was no doubt lengthy, however it yielded favorable results.

A similar activity was conducted for the Downsview Park lands. Downsview Park is a vast national urban park controlled by the federal government. A portion of the park was going to be released to the City of Toronto for development. Since the site was controlled by the federal government, they wanted to maximize the benefits for the local community by conducting preliminary planning studies to pre-zone the lands before releasing it to the City. The park sits in the northern part of Toronto with an affluent neighbourhood towards the east, a marginalized Jane and Finch neighborhood on the west, and an industrial corridor to the North. It houses an airport, a new subway station, film studios and numerous recreational facilities.

The government initiated a series of communications and public participation programs and invited local area residents to provide input on the future of the site. A series of workshops, community outreach programs and open houses were held to engage the public with the idea of redevelopment. They were asked to provide feedback which was reflected in plans for the area particularly through amenity spaces, and urban design. The community was made to feel connected to the redevelopment, and excited about this change.

An enhanced communications strategy would provide considerable benefits for most traditional mosque developments; however, planning departments should share the responsibility in adequately weighting all opinions expressed towards a development. This strategy would help mosques in strengthening their own community by increasing the involvement of the end users of the space. Additionally, a communication strategy could provide the opportunity to engage the broader public with the future development in order to “soften” its impact. It could also give mosque developers the opportunity to connect with their new neighbours and for residents and engage with specific personalities and perhaps help shift unfavorable opinions. Open houses similar to the ones conducted by the Aga Khan development can help to improve, refute and bridge differences that are created without having personal connections between parties.

Improving the public participation process and striving for accurate representation of both negative and positive support for future developments could enhance the quality of our built environments by alleviating tensions between stakeholders. In some cases, the developer understood this inherent imbalance and gathered community members to lead protests, or write in support to their local municipality in effort to sway decisions in their favour. Similar to how the opposition carries out its heavy expression of dislike for a certain development, opinions in support should be considered to hold equal weight. Mandating a communication strategy for large developments gives the opportunity to shift the narrative on the foresight to one that promotes excitement and inclusiveness for the community. This can have

a significant impact on the types of opinions that are formed in response to the development proposal. This is an area that requires further research to develop better practices of community engagement.

Professionalism

In some of the case studies outlined above, the developing party for the mosque development was often novice in the field of planning and development in their respective municipality. The lack of familiarity with the planning and development process can easily lead to misinterpretation of norms and procedures. Real application deficiencies and inevitable delays are misinterpreted to be personal attacks leading to sentiments of discrimination. Alternatively, however, the opposite could also be true. Minor planning issues can be used as grounds for disapproval or lengthy delays costing the developer thousands of dollars in carrying costs and revisions.

Professionalism in planning aims to address and incorporate professionals at various levels in the planning and development of mosques. This includes and is not limited to planners, consultants, financiers, engineers so on and so forth. While most of the latter professionals are undoubtedly involved in the process, I would like to emphasize the need to include professional planners and consultants such as those specializing in communication and public outreach. Doing so will not only encourage greater conversation between the community of end users, the builders, and regulatory agencies thereby enhancing the overall product, but also assist in separating the 'real' planning issues from 'perceived' planning issues.

The Aga Khan development was praised for its high degree of professionalism by city planners. Professionalism was a common theme in interviews with other planners on the subject of places of worship. The planners touched on the importance of having a team that is experienced and knowledgeable with the planning and development process to facilitate the development of a mosque. While it is also incumbent to the planners to learn about new communities and their needs, the absence of professional representatives for a community can create problems whether they be in the lack of familiarity with the technicalities of planning and development, or simply cultural barriers.

Low budgets may convince the mosque developers to overlook these valuable categories. However, the solution lies in my earlier remarks on community—the involvement of community in the preliminary phases of a mosque development will ultimately use the space upon completion. The community is expected to use the facility and provide financial support through contributions, and participation in

programing. There is no doubt a large pool of educated professionals in this community that can supplement the work conducted by paid professionals. By recruiting professionals and volunteers from within the community at either a discounted or pro-bono rate can assist in offsetting some of the costs associated with research, analysis, public outreach and planning.

The Aga Khan development fund exceled by having the budget for consultants at all levels. Despite their large budget, the developer recruited discount rate volunteers from within their community to offset the professional fees associated with bookkeeping and accounting (Mohamed 2018). The volunteers completed some of the preliminary work before having it reviewed by other paid professionals. The builder can benefit by incorporating all three strategies listed above, and present a resilient model for mosque development that is in line with the future growth objectives of their own community, the broader community of the region, as well as the city-region.

CONCLUSION

Urban planning is a social-political process through which the use of land is governed and regulated in urban (and rural) areas. It is a process that has long lasting impacts on the physical fabric as well as social life and lived experiences of a city-region for decades to come. Therefore, it is important to understand the impacts planning decisions have on people and projects, particularly in a large and diverse city.

This paper was inspired by the increasing trend towards auto-dependant suburbs and the resulting impact on social life, sense of community and the further impacts of immigration in these suburban neighbourhoods. The decline in sense of community seen in suburbs is further propagated through the lived experiences of racialized newcomers settling in suburban cities. The settlements quickly came with an increasing demand for cultural and religious spaces. These spaces quickly became sites where the impacts of suburban isolation often interact with private property entitlements, xenophobic sentiments and municipal planning regulations. It led me to question whether the process of planning has evolved to respond to the multiculturalism that many cities so largely pride themselves in.

Although there is a rise in a variety of culturally oriented buildings throughout the Greater Toronto Area, I was specifically interested to see how the changing

demographics have impacted the practice of planning. My central inquiry was how does planning address the culturally specific needs of new Canadians based on their beliefs and practices. How does planning processes respond to the culturally specific needs of developments such as places of worship to permit construction of minarets and domes.

I therefore chose to compare traditional mosque developments in the Greater Toronto Area to a unique Islamic themed Aga Khan Museum, Park and Ismaili Centre. The Greater Toronto Area is home to some of the largest Muslim populations in Canada therefore, housing a large number of mosques. The creation of these mosques, however, has been through several instances of friction. At the same time as a mosque in Markham was dragged through the then Ontario Municipal Board to seek approvals for a site that was pre-zoned for a place of worship, the Aga Khan Museum, Park and Ismaili Centre were being inaugurated by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper with nothing but praise for the spectacular architecture, the developer and what the project brought to the city. This position was particularly intriguing since Prime Minister Stephen Harper had previously been leading an Islamophobic campaign on the premise of a Niqaab ban.



Figure 15: The Aga Khan showing former Prime Minister Stephen Harper a model of the Ismaili Centre.
(Source: Steve Russell, Toronto Star, May 28 2010).

The Aga Khan development was certainly an impressive feat. The financial and physical scale of the development, as well as its global stature was certainly commendable. But such feat does raise the question as to why one type of Islamic development is more widely deemed acceptable than another?

To examine this relation, I completed an academic literature review and newsprint media reviews on mosque development which quickly reveals itself as a contentious issue. There were common themes in delays, opposition, and reasons for such opposition. Mosque development continues to be sites of tension in large culturally diverse metropolises like the Greater Toronto Area. Their development tends to stir up debate in the municipal arena which often drags in politicians and hurt sentiments. On the other hand, most mosques are generally tight on funding, and are born through the initiatives of local community members who hope to establish a space for their community to practice their faith and remain connected with their culture. The funders typically come with little to no experience with the already complicated planning process.

At a glance, complications in mosque development are often associated with real planning issues such as inadequate parking for the congregants or inaccurate calculations due to differences in praying needs for mosque occupants compared to churches. However, these real and legitimate planning issues are quickly hijacked by individuals that often seek to use the mechanism of planning to act out personal resentment towards specific groups. Planning issues are quickly used to act out forms of discrimination/Islamophobia or NIMBYism, resulting with unjustified delays for the developing party hence added expenses.

I would also like to argue that the contrary is also true, often legitimate planning concerns are identified, and the complicated process of planning presents itself as a challenge to novice developers and communities. The frustrations in the never-ending list of studies, and changing municipal by-laws can strain and stretch the novice mosque staff who engage little with the planning departments. Where in recent years the narrative of Islamophobia has created a hostile environment for Muslims leading to tragic acts of terrorism such as mass shootings in mosques, the Muslim community might be at times quick to interpret delays and planning nuances to be an act of discrimination towards their proposed development.

Alternatively, the public participation process of planning tends to solicit an unfair representation of opposition for a development. The process fails to capture the unspoken support or indifference to the upcoming development, however, instead focuses on addressing the concerns of the opposition. Doing so begins the cycle of redesigning plans to satisfy issues raised by a small minority, ultimately creating lengthy delays and increased cost for the developer. The solution lies in the ability to fairly evaluate applications against planning criteria and public feedback to take a fair stance on the process.

The case studies reviewed in this Major Paper helped to illustrate some of the challenges faced by mosque developers. Despite their best efforts to work with their communities, the results often remain unfavourable. The mechanism of planning has been seen to serve as a vehicle for people to carry out acts of discrimination towards others by exploiting legitimate planning issues and limiting the flexibility typically offered by planning departments. The expropriation of legitimate planning issues creates unnecessary delays and expenses for the builder. Those issues would have otherwise been addressed easily had they been left to the planning departments.

As Valverde (2012) and Isin and Siemiatycki (1999) encapsulate, the planning arena often becomes the site where the implication of national level policies on immigration and foreign relations are felt locally by citizens, and the only place where ordinary citizens can engage with them. The effects of the global narrative of Islam can certainly be felt through NIMBYism described in the cases above. However, planning departments fail to identify and respond to it in a fair and just way. The mechanism of planning remains unchanged to address this reality and separate the emotionally driven opposition to adequately evaluate a proposal on the premise of cultural norms. It does however react well to being seduced by scale, reputation, and large projects and the prospect of high tax revenues.

The mechanism of planning has not evolved to respond to pluralistic needs of a multicultural society. Instead, it deals with it on a project-by-project basis without establishing a baseline of norms for various cultures. The inability to do so results in a cycle of unnecessary confrontations and delays, creating extra difficulties for novice developers or ones with limited resources, structure and power. Qadeer (2000, 17) speaks to this issue when stating that "The planning process, particularly project reviews and approvals, largely proceeds in an adversarial way. It brings different interests into conflict, causing public controversies and costly delays and often leaving all involved dissatisfied and dazed. The process is particularly harsh on the politically weak or unorganized, and on minorities, as it tends to be driven by the politics of local power structures and vote banks."

While planning departments have yet to see reform in their approach to plurality, there are some things to observe when comparing traditional mosque development to another Islamic themed development -- the Aga Khan Museum, Park and Ismaili Centre. In doing the research, considering interviews and professional experiences, I have come to observe noticeable differences in the development process of the Aga Khan Museum, Ismaili Centre and traditional Mosque applications. These differences can be summarised in three general categories: multi-use versus single use facilities; scale of funding; and community

support in all aspect of development. Such difference highlights the need for better community participation, communication channels and recognition of professionalism.

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