

May 17, 2024

MGP File: 18-2649

At the request of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, the project planning team has prepared the following response to correct the circulation of misinformation and factual errors regarding their proposal to build a new National Centre (to replace the existing building at 7200 Leslie Street) and the construction of a National House of Worship for the peoples of Canada (at 7290 Leslie Street).

The following covers the following themes:

- The Bahá'í Faith, its teachings and how members participate in the community;
- Details of the proposal to construct a new National Centre and Canadian Temple;
- Nature of the Official Plan and Zoning applications submitted to the City of Markham;
- Possible impact on the environment and neighbourhood;
- Planning Act and legislation and policies regarding development in Ontario and the City of Markham; and
- Results of a multi-year, expert-led feasibility process involving best-in-class expert professionals in the fields of Architecture, Planning, Ecology and the Environment, Arborists, Landscape Architecture, and Engineering.

The Temple is intended to be gift to the peoples of Canada.

There appears to be a misunderstanding regarding the nature and practices of the Bahá'í community and their faith. The purpose of a Bahá'í House of Worship is to provide a place of prayer, meditation, and contemplation. The Temple will be open to everyone, not just members of the Bahá'í community. The Temple is for quiet worship and reflection at your own time and in your own way. It is a gift to the peoples of Canada of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

Bahá'í community life follows a decentralized pattern of gathering involving study circles, children's classes, youth programs, devotional gatherings, and home-based informal conversations that do not occur at the Temple or National Centre, but rather in local community centres and homes. There are no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, and no congregational patterns of community life that bring people together on a regular and specified day of the week. In a Bahá'í House of Worship, there are no ceremonies, talks or sermons, and no instrumental music. There can be, on occasion, organized programs of prayers and readings from the world's sacred scriptures.

There are 11 Bahá'í Holy Days as well as a rhythm of community consultation every 19 days, called the 19 Day Feast. The 19 Day Feasts are all celebrated in one's local community, often in one's own neighbourhood or home (not at the Temple or National Centre). The Temple will not be used for the 19 Day Feasts. The celebration of Holy Days also takes place in one's local community, although there may be organized devotional programs on such days of significance at the Temple. There will be no commercial offerings or gains within the Temple. No sales of food and beverage, tours, or souvenirs will be offered. The Temple or National Centre will not be rented out as a commercial banquet facility or wedding venue. There is no collection plate. The Temple is a gift to the peoples of Canada.

The Temple will be a beautiful structure nestled into the trees, at a scale more modest than the widely known Bahá'í Continental Temples.

All Bahá'í Houses of Worship share certain architectural elements, some of which are specified by Bahá'í scripture. They are required to have a round, nine-sided shape. The number nine is symbolically significant for Bahá'ís, representing completeness, perfection, and the Bahá'í teaching of the unity of religion.

While Bahá'í Houses of Worship share this essential architectural element, the design of each is intended to reflect the land from which they rise. The Canadian Temple will ultimately be designed through a call for proposal to Canadian architects and be reflective of our Canadian character and ethos. The temple height is proposed to be no more than 25 metres, which is lower than the height of the mature trees around the temple site. The Canadian Temple will be "tucked" into the woods and intended to only be visible from within the land owned by the Bahá'ís.

References or comparisons to other Bahá'í Temples from around the world, such as the Continental Temples in Chile and India, are not accurate precedents, representations or comparisons for the anticipated scale and usage to the proposed Canadian Temple.

There are a total of thirteen (13) existing Bahá'í Temples around the world. With the completion of the Bahá'í Temple of South America in Chile, there are now "mother temples" in each continent. The scale of continental temples is significantly greater than that of local and national temples, as they are meant to serve the people of an entire continent.

The Bahá'í Temple of Canada will be the third national-scaled Bahá'í Temple in the world, and as such there is not an exact precedent or model to apply to its anticipated usage. Nonetheless, using visitor rates from larger continental Temples in Germany and Australia, the Canadian Temple is estimated to see an average of 25-35 weekday visitors and an average of 100-145 weekend visitors. This is viewed as a conservative estimate based on up to 25,000 annual visitors (average 80 daily visitors), from the continental Temple in Germany. It should be noted that the Australian Temple saw approximately 10,000 annual visitors in 2022.

Given the Bahá'í community's decentralized pattern of gathering, daily attendance rates are not anticipated to happen at a set time or day of the week, rather visitors will come and go throughout the day at their leisure during opening hours (~8-9am) to close (~6pm). Thus, the Transportation Study concluded the need for approximately 10-35 parking spaces to meet the regular visitor demand to the Temple. On occasion, the peak parking demand could be up to 100 spaces on irregular busy days or public holidays.

The German Mills Meadow and Natural Habitat will not be impacted.

Contrary to claims, the proposal is not located within the German Mills Meadow and Natural Habitat and the consideration for emergency access along the trail to John Street has been removed at the request of the public. The Temple is proposed entirely on land owned by the Bahá'í community for over 50 years. Extensive study of these lands was undertaken to determine the most appropriate location for the Temple in consultation with TRCA and the City of Markham. The environmental impact of the proposal was studied and documented through a comprehensive, multi-season Environmental Impact Study (EIS) led by an experienced ecologist from GEI Consultants. This work has provided an extensive understanding of ecology of the site and surrounding natural heritage system, including the adjacent German Mills Valleylands. The EIS confirmed that the proposal will not result in impacts to significant wildlife or habitats within the lands owned by the Bahá'ís of Canada. Furthermore, the EIS confirmed there are no anticipated direct impacts to the wildlife and habitat located within the German Mills Meadow and Natural Habitat and surrounding German Mills Valleylands.

The Proposal will, in fact, result in Net Positive Ecological Gain to the German Mills Valleyland through 4.7 hectares of environmental restoration and enhancement.

The proposed Temple will impact approximately 0.5 hectares land in the southwest corner of the 7.2-hectare property owned by the Bahá'ís of Canada but includes over 4.5 hectares of environmental restoration and enhancement in the form of reforestation of the woodland with native and successional species, removal of impervious and invasive species from the valley, meadow creation adjacent to the German Mills Meadow and Natural Habitat. All restoration and enhancement efforts beyond the 3.04 ha minimum requirement (as calculated in accordance with standard methods approved by the TRCA and City of Markham), are considered a net gain to the ecological function of the site and the broader valleyland.

Construction of the Temple will require the removal of 361 trees (of which 231 are Invasive Trees, 105 Non-invasive trees and 25 Dead trees). Of the 361 trees to be removed only 110 are of a size and health that would require a removal permit in accordance with Markham Tree Preservation Bylaw.

Extensive tree inventories and assessments have been undertaken to understand the impact of the proposal on existing trees and the site's ecology. The location proposed for the Temple is characterized by qualified ecologist, botanists and arborists as a cultural woodland, dominated by invasive tree species that pose a significant risk to the core significant forest down the valleylands. Given the degraded and limited biodiversity in the composition of the tree and shrub cover, this wooded area provides limited ecological functionality or habitat for wildlife. Ecological surveys concluded this area only facilitates movement and general foraging for common species (i.e., White-tailed Deer, Eastern Cottontail, etc.). However, no protected species or species of interest were determined to be using this area. Effort was made through the resubmission to greatly reduce and minimize the number of trees that would need to be removed to accommodate the Temple. Similarly, at 7200 Leslie Street, the new National Centre will necessitate the removal of 125 trees (24 are Invasive Trees, 82 Non-invasive trees and 19 Dead trees). Of the 125 trees that are proposed to be removed, only 56 are of a size and health that would require a removal permit in accordance with the Markham Tree Preservation Bylaw.

Approximately 2,450 new trees will be planted along with 5,000 new shrubs and 1.6 hectares of seeding for meadow creation.

In accordance with the compensation requirements of the City of Markham Tree Preservation By-law, only 258 new trees would be required compensation for tree removals that require a permit. However, approximately 2,450 new trees will be planted along with 5,000 new shrubs and 1.6 hectares of seeding for meadow creation.

Safe access can be provided by raising Leslie Street out of the floodplain with minimal environmental impact.

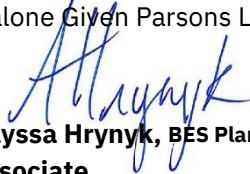
The raising of Leslie Street to provide safe access to the properties and homes at the end of Leslie Street was proposed in response to the concerns raised by the public about the impacts the use the existing trail to John Street as an emergency access route would have on the German Mills Meadow and Natural Habitat.

Reconstruction of Leslie Street also provides an opportunity to fill in the missing Lake-to-Lake Trail linkage along Leslie Street between Steeles Avenue and the new trailhead at the north end of Leslie Street.

In addition, the public raised concerns about existing safety issues and haphazard parking along Leslie Street, particularly because of the increased popularity of the Lake-to-Lake Trail. The proposal to raise Leslie Street was identified as the only other feasible alternative to provide safe access to the north end of Leslie Street. This solution was studied in great technical detail in consultation with the TRCA. Raising Leslie Street also provides an opportunity to address the existing safety issues along Leslie Street through the incorporation of a separate multi-use path and designated on-street parking.

For additional example list of claims by SPRA and GMSRA not supported by facts please see the attached **Appendix A**.

Yours very truly,
Malone Given Parsons Ltd.



**Allyssa Hrynyk, BES Planning, MUDES, MCIP, RPP, AICP
Associate**



APPENDIX A: Additional Examples of Public Claims not supported by facts:

	CLAIM	FACT
Zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Place of worship” is not a permitted use on the lands at the end of Leslie Street. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7200 and 7290 Leslie Street have been home to the Bahá’í National Centre for over 50 years. The properties were acquired in 1968 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada, as an endowment to be safeguarded for the eventual construction of a House of Worship open to all peoples. The log house at 7290 Leslie Street served as a Bahá’í National Centre until 1974 when the construction of the current Bahá’í National Centre was completed. • Both properties are currently zoned “Special Residential 3 Zone (SR3)” under Zoning By-law 1767. “Churches and Religious Institutions” are permitted uses in the SR3 zone (hence the legally existing current Bahá’í National Centre). • The requested Zoning Amendment is not seeking to permit a “Place of Worship”. The zoning amendment proposes to rezone a significant portion of 7290 Leslie Street from “Residential” to “Greenway” and update development standards.
Greenway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Temple is proposed in the protected “Greenway” of the Markham Official Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bahá’í National Centre is currently located at 7200 Leslie Street. This property is designated “Residential Low Rise” in the City of Markham Official Plan 2014 (“MOP”). “Places of Worship” is permitted in this land use designation. • The northern end adjacent to the German Mills Meadow and Natural Habitat of 7290 Leslie Street (aka Lot 3) and the area around the existing residential dwelling are designated “Residential Low Rise”, while the remainder of 7290 Leslie Street is designated “Greenway” in the MOP. The Greenway designation is intended to protect natural heritage and hydrologic features, such as valleylands, stream corridors, sensitive groundwater features, woodlands, wetlands, and agricultural lands as part of a Natural Heritage Network (NHN). The NHN also includes vegetation protection zones (VPZs or “Buffers”) and hazardous lands. • The Official Plan Amendment proposes to refine the edge of land designated “Greenway” in the southwest corner of 7290 Leslie Street adjacent to the National Centre and Bayview Golf and Country Club to properly reflect the extent of the key natural heritage features and hazards confirmed through an Environmental Impact Study as prepared by qualified ecologist and as permitted by the policies in Section 3.1.1 MOP.

	CLAIM	FACT
Proposed Uses and Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A commercial hotel, convention centre, banquet facility and restaurant are proposed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a great misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the proposal. A hotel, banquet hall, convention centre and restaurant are not proposed uses or functions of this project. The existing permitted uses at both 7200 and 7290 Leslie Street include “Churches and Religious Institutions” in accordance with Zoning By-law 1767. The proposed new National Centre includes “Lodging Rooms” as part of the institute’s function, as an accessory use for those participating in educational, consultative and retreat activities as part of the institute’s functions. These lodging rooms will function more like dormitories and will not be rented out to the public like a commercial hotel operation and implied by members of the public. The lodging rooms provide an opportunity to host members of the Bahá’í Community from all over Canada at the National Centre and make the programming, seminars, educational and community service events more accessible to all members of the Bahá’í Faith no matter their socio-economic background. Additional meeting space, expanding the existing space and uses currently within the National Centre are proposed for the new National Centre, not commercial convention or banquet facilities. Similarly expanded kitchen facilities are proposed to support the existing administrative and meeting functions of this existing institution, not a restaurant.
Temple Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Temple is an imposing structure that will dominate the neighbourhood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed maximum temple height has been revised from 30 metres to 25 metres to ensure that the Temple is lower than the height of the existing mature trees and will essentially not be visible from any vantage point. Additional landscaping and plantings will further screen the visibility of the Temple from public vantage points.
Impacts on Residential Neighbourhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 7 residential homes on Waterloo Court will be unduly impacted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of the Zoning Bylaw Amendment is proposed to modify current development standards to that the new National Centre at 7200 Leslie Street to replace the existing building can sit low on the landscape and follow the topography down the hill as well as preserve large, mature trees adjacent to the core woodland area. In contrast, a new building of similar size that were to utilize the existing zoning development standards would have to employ the full maximum height permission of 7.6 metres (25 feet) across the entire site to provide for the needed building space (whereas a building height of 5.4 metres is proposed). The National Centre has been designed to preserve the existing vegetation along Waterloo Court and additional trees and plantings are proposed to screen the view to and from Waterloo Court. The design of the National

CLAIM	FACT
	<p>Centre strategically orientates windows towards the internal lawn in a similar manner and spirit to the existing building. The building is proposed to step down with the topography and appear no more than two storeys in height. These design measures will ensure that the privacy of the front yards of the homes along Waterloo Court is not negatively impacted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Zoning Amendment proposes a minimum exterior sideyard setback along Waterloo Court of 4.5 metres. The typical zoning standard for exterior sideyards in the City of Markham is 2.4 metres. The proposed minimum sideyard along Waterloo Court has been confirmed by Arborists as sufficiently sized to protect existing shrubs and trees along this exterior sideyard. Furthermore, additional plantings will be provided to enhance the current landscape screening and minimize the visibility of the new National Centre from Waterloo Court.
<p>Parking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will not be sufficient parking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When studying the patterns of usage of other Bahá'í Temples from around the world (it should be noted that all examples studied were of the Continental scale, as the Canadian Temple will only be the third Temple in the world of a national scale), the greatest increase in Temple visitors tended to occur on Public Holidays (i.e. Statutory Holidays), rather than Bahá'í Holy Days, when the general public out came to enjoy the grounds and public trails surrounding those Temples. It was conservatively assumed that the Canadian Temple could have a similar visitor range of 10,000 to 25,000 annual visitors (or average of 27 to 35 weekday and 100-145 weekend visitors) to that of the Australian and German Continental Temples, respectively. The parking demand to support the Temple based on this level of visitors on a typical day-to-day is estimated between 10-35 vehicles. The increase in visitors on public holidays or Holy Days was considered in Transportation Study where it was determined that the peak parking demand at a single point could be up to 100 parking spaces on occasion. The proposed on-site parking supply, in addition to the over flow parking at the Bahá'í-owned lot at 7015 Leslie Street, was determined to be more than sufficient to meet the parking demands generated by visits to the site.
<p>Crowds and Traffic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The crowds and associated traffic will be unmanageable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Centre is anticipated to function on a regular basis as it does today, housing the administrative headquarters for the Bahá'ís of Canada and hosting occasional meetings. In addition, the new National Centre will host occasional and irregular events and programs throughout the year with variable occupancies; with the largest being the 3-

CLAIM	FACT
	<p>day National Convention of 200 delegates from across Canada. The national convention currently includes approximately 35% of local attendees travelling via car. The analysis assumes a conservative parking demand assumption of up to 40% of attendees travelling by car and requiring parking; however, it is most likely that the true number will fall below this. It is reasonable to estimate many attendees will be arriving at the convention via taxi/rideshare, carpooling, and bus or shuttle which will be offered. It was determined that the peak demand for parking at the largest event (which occurs once a year over 3 days) was estimated to be 105 vehicles (25 for employees plus 80 convention attendees).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BA Group analysis used a moderately conservative traffic scenario (i.e. 85th percentile peak hour trip generation) to represent when the National Centre is operating under “busier” conditions, such as the national convention. The traffic analysis confirmed that the anticipated new traffic volumes during these rare busier events can be appropriately accommodated at the signalized intersection at Steeles Avenue and Leslie Street. Furthermore, the proposed improvements to Leslie Street, including the separate pedestrian and cyclist path will improve the safety conditions of users along Leslie Street and help to mitigate the illegal U-turn movements at Steeles. • A Transportation Demand Management program will be put in place to help mitigate and minimize the amount of vehicular traffic to the National Centre and Temple, particularly during the larger events.
<p>Schedule and Construction Impacts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal will take over 10 years to construct. • Access will be restricted during construction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is anticipated that the proposal will take approximately 2.5 – 3 years to construct. Reconstruction of Leslie Street could be completed in phases over the course of 3 – 6 months. • Access to the Bahá’í National Centre, the homes along Waterloo Court, the Lake-to-Lake Trail, and German Mills Meadow and Park will be maintained during construction.