



Town of Newmarket

An open letter to Residents of Newmarket from Mayor Tony Van Bynen on Newmarket's first Mosque

As many of you know a group of Newmarket residents of the Muslim faith has put forward a proposal to convert a 1700-square-foot bungalow on Mulock Drive into a place of worship and to put in 48 parking spaces for its congregation.

This project has raised questions for some of our town's residents. In an effort to better answer the questions that have been raised and to openly communicate with all of our residents, I felt I should write this letter to clarify the Town's role in the site plan process and to address any possible confusion with regards to the mosque and its leadership.

Let me begin by assuring you that the public process for this site plan application which began on August 28, 2006 has followed the identical course as all other site plan applications. The land in question has long been zoned for use as a place of worship and therefore does not require rezoning. The site plan process examines the physical attributes of a proposal such as lighting, drainage, fencing, etc. It is important to recognize that site plan applications do not require public meetings. If this application came before us and it was to be used as a day care facility, a synagogue, or a church we would not have called a public meeting. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to do so for this application.

It is more than appropriate to respond to the public's questions and concerns outside of the site plan process. I have called for the creation of an Interfaith Committee and a Diversity Council. I can also respond to your questions and concerns by letting you know that the congregation is a group of local Newmarket residents who has fundraised for years to establish their own community mosque. The mosque's spokesperson is Mr. Ansar Ahmed, a resident of Newmarket for twelve years. He has informed us that Zafar Bangash is not the Imam (leader) of this mosque and has no official role in Newmarket's mosque.

One last point of clarification relates to a church having previously shown interest in the same property. In 2004 a church requested zoning confirmation in relation to this property. The Town responded to the applicant and confirmed that the site was zoned for a church, but that site plan approval and other regulatory processes would have to be followed. The church chose not to pursue the application and did not purchase the land.

I sincerely hope that this letter helps to clarify the Town's role in the site plan process. I continue to be willing to listen to the residents of the Town, so please do not hesitate to contact my office at 905-953-5300 ext. 2000 or e-mail me at mayor@newmarket.ca if there are questions I have left unanswered.

Sincerely,

Tony Van Bynen, Mayor