

Mosque to be a state-of-the-art landmark in Oakville

New mosque could be largest in Ontario, while facility will house amenities to be open to the community

Bob Mitchell, Special to the Beaver

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Officials with World Islamic Mission (WIM) Canada say their planned Islamic Centre will be big — and will dramatically change the landscape of one of the eastern gateways to Oakville.



They believe what they're about to build on Ninth Line south of Dundas Street West will also be an "architect landmark" and a "state-of-the art" project for the town.

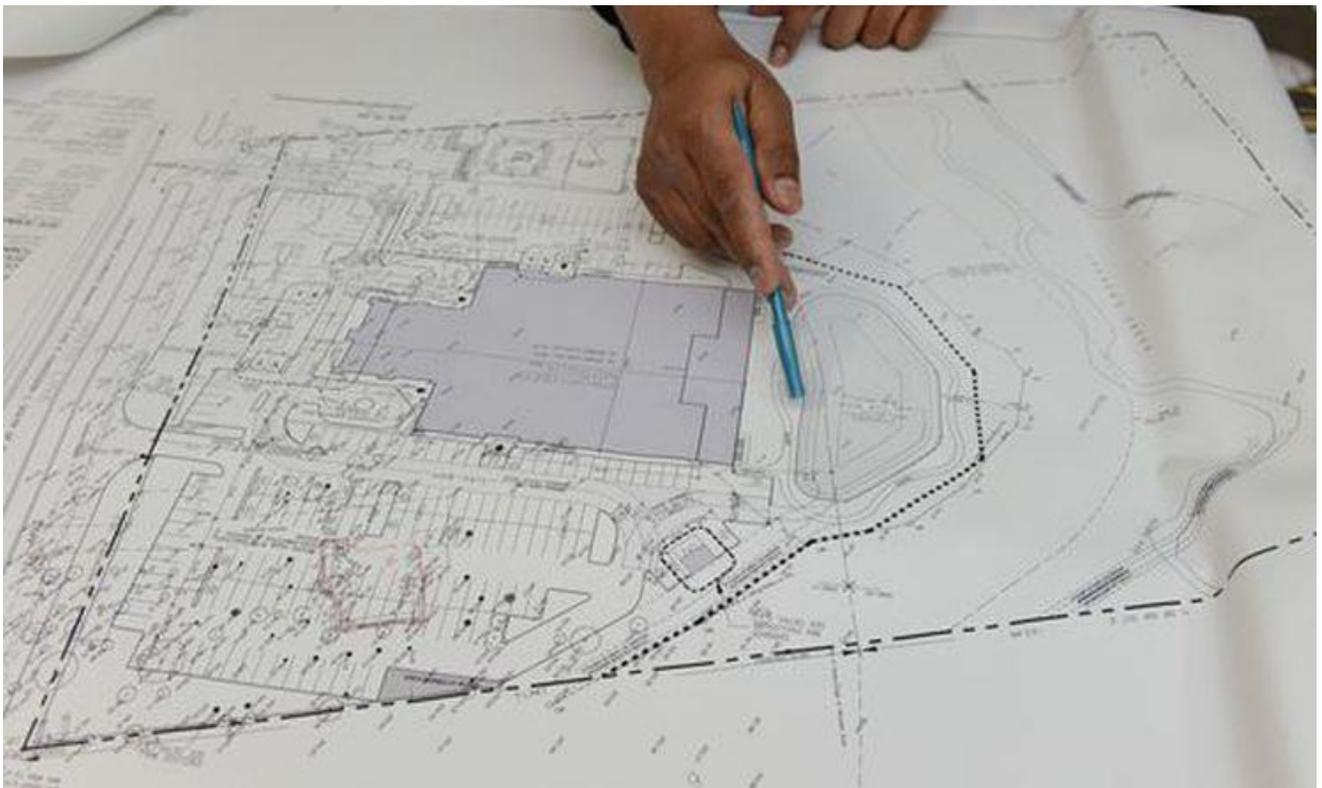
"We are building a landmark project, a majestic project that all of us in Oakville will be proud of," said Mohamed Farouk, who heads the construction team for the new Masjid Noor-UL-Haram.

“Not only Muslims, but all people, will look at this architecturally-beautiful building and say, ‘Wow.’ It will add to and enhance the landscape of Oakville.”

Confident the Town of Oakville will issue their long-awaited building permits within the next several months, officials are hopeful construction will begin in 2014, once the initial funding of \$2 million is raised from their worshippers for the project that could top \$15 million by the time all phases are complete.

Eventually, the three-storey centre, which includes a 21-metre high mosque dome, four minaret towers rising 30 metres (100 feet), two full-size gymnasiums, dressing rooms and meeting rooms, will rise on the 11 acres of land bought for \$780,000 in 1998 on the west side of Ninth Line, just north of the current 5 Drive-In. It will replace the 3,200-sq.-ft. bungalow currently used by worshippers.

There will be parking for 358 cars, 255 on the surface and 103 covered spots.



Once all phases are completed, the centre will have 5,700 square metres of floor space, making it Ontario's largest Islamic centre, one that will have more floor space than the White House, which has 5,100 square metres of floor space.

"We are not only building a mosque. We are building a community centre," Farouk said. "There will be a pathway for joggers right around the project that will be available to everybody in the community.

"We are adding to the mosaic of Canada."

Some residents living in Joshua Creek have expressed surprise that such a massive structure will be built in their community. Other than a home for sale immediately adjacent to the property there are no homes anywhere near the planned centre. The closest community is located in the distance, across from the Sixteen Mile Creek ravine where the centre will be visible from their backyards. Kausim understands how some residents may be concerned.

"People are always going to be scared. They have invested thousands of dollars in their homes and don't want to see anything ruined," WIM Canada president Noorhassen Kausim said. "They don't know us. They don't know who is going to use this building. But we want to reassure our neighbours that they are always welcome to come here and talk to us and see what we're doing. We want to live in harmony with them."

Abdul Ahad Ruhomaun, secretary general of WIM Canada, said the community has been invited to attend Canada Day celebrations at the mosque for the past two years.

"We've always been open with the community," said Ruhomaun, a Joshua Creek resident. "We even dropped off invitation cards door-to-door in Joshua Creek.

"Our intent has never been to hide such a majestic project from anybody. We intend to build a landmark project."

A site plan hearing was held in 2010 and the public was invited to attend and raise their concerns, but few residents attended, Town officials said.

Town Councillor Tom Adams, who represents the area, said he has received very few calls about the project and "certainly nowhere near" the number he has received about other community projects in the past.

The land was zoned decades ago to allow places of worship to be built — with provisions that all site plan conditions be met.

One of the requirements from the Town was that 20 per cent of the project had to be green. One concern voiced at the site plan committee, according to WIM Canada President Noorhassen Kausim, was how much of the vegetation would be destroyed.



“We’re going to have more trees than ever when it’s finished,” Kausim said. “Some 32 per cent of the project will be green. We have preserved every single tree and added some.”

Officials have yet to select the builder of the project, which was approved pending 13 site plan conditions in November 2012. Basically all of the conditions have been met and they’re currently waiting to hear back from Town officials on whether more changes are needed. They are also awaiting answers from the Town on a few design and architect queries. Building permits will be issued once everything is approved.

"We have done all and beyond what the Town has required us to do," said Farouk, who is currently in discussions with various builders, none of which have been hired yet to construct the centre.

"We bought the land in 1998 and have done everything the Town has required. The Town has scrutinized it. They didn't do this overnight. They had to make sure we complied with all the bylaws and requirements.

"This congregation has been worshiping on their site for years now and working hard to create their new place of worship. Oakville welcomes all faiths and their places of worship and appreciates how much they do to help make Oakville, Canada's most livable town. Council and I congratulate them on their progress," said Oakville Mayor Rob Burton.

"We have been approved by the Town and the Region (of Halton)... As soon as we select the appropriate builder, we will get it priced accordingly," said Farouk.

As a registered non-profit organization, funds must be raised publicly for the project. They are still raising the \$2 million needed to begin construction, but officials are confident once building permits are issued, the congregation will begin making their donations.

Kausim said substantial financial commitments have been made, but many of the donors are waiting for building permits to be issued before funds are released.

"We are not worried about the financing," Kausim said about the centre, which will be about a \$12 million to \$15 million for the project when all phases are completed.

"We can't say exactly when construction will begin, other than we are hopeful it will begin sometime in 2014. We want to build credibility. So, we don't want to just throw dates out there," Kausim said.

“We told the public it would take three years for us to work on the site plan and it took us two years and 10 months. So, our target is to start construction sometime next year. That’s when we hope to break ground.”

Officials say it likely will take about three years for the full project to be completed once they have the funds. Well before then, Ninth Line will be expanded into a four-lane road.

“We’ve got to the stage where we are today because of a lot of hard work between us and the Town and the Region, the Conservation Authority, the fire department, everybody,” Ruhomaun said. “All our engineers and architects will attest to the fact that it’s not easy to get things done through the Town of Oakville. They’re so many processes you have to go through to get to where we now are.”

Less than a quarter of the centre will be a mosque. The majority of the building will be dedicated for all of the other amenities.

“These facilities will be open to everybody not just Muslims,” Kausim said. “Our intention is to open it up to everybody in Oakville. We would like to host a tournament for youths and hope to work with the Town to make this happen.”

Initially, WIM Canada officials hoped to build a seniors’ home, a shopping centre, a medical facility and schools, but none of these are included in the existing project and won’t be, officials said.

“We are maxed out. There is nothing that will be added,” Kausim said. “We had big visions, but it was never for this property.”

About 250 worshippers currently attend prayers at the existing building, 2478 Ninth Line, where they pray five times a day. The new mosque will be able to serve 1,000 worshippers, but officials say those numbers won’t regularly attend each prayer session and likely won’t even be reached until at least 10 years.



“Our busiest time is on Friday, typically between 12:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m.,” Ruhomaun said. “And also during the months of fasting past 9 a.m.”

The largest gatherings will be during celebrations and public events, officials said.

Farouk said WIM Canada could have built a smaller project.

“But our intent has always been to build a project, a maximum size project that we could build on this land,” Farouk said. “If somebody had built this 20 years ago, the costs would have been 50 per cent less. But we’re building this for generations to come. We have undertaken the responsibility to build this as big as we can now so that future generations don’t have to build it at a much higher cost.

“This is an Islamic Centre, but it’s not restricted to just the Muslim community. It’s for the community at-large.”

The location was chosen because of a rapidly increasing Muslim population in Oakville/Mississauga. Proximity to Hwy. 403 means it’s accessible to Muslims living in the western part of Greater Toronto as well as Brampton and Burlington.

“At the end of the day, we are building a majestic project. Just visualize what you will see when you get off Hwy. 403 and drive towards Oakville,” Ruhomaun said. “It will be an inviting structure to the town of Oakville. Everybody will benefit from this.”