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To: Norwalk Planning and Zoning

From: Jim Travers, Director Transportation, Mobility & Parking  
Garrett Bolella, P.E., PTOE, Assistant Director, Transportation

Date: August 27, 2021

Subject: Preliminary Review: 283 Richard's Avenue, Proposed Sikh Religious Center -  
Gurudwara

#### Memorandum

The Transportation, Mobility and Parking (TMP) Department has completed a preliminary review of the following documents related to the proposed religious center Gurudwara (house of worship):

- Special Permit Application prepared by Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey LLP, dated August 9, 2021;
- Engineered Site Plans prepared by Cabezas DeAngelis, dated July 21, 2021; and,
- Traffic Access and Impact Study (TAIS) prepared by SLR Consulting dated August 2, 2021.

It is our understanding that the current Sikh Gurudwara is a regional religious center which serves members from Fairfield and Westchester Counties. As a result, the primary mode of access is personal automobile. The 18,000 square-foot religious center Gurudwara will include 53 parking spaces on-site. It should be noted that the Applicant currently operates an existing Gurudwara in Norwalk, located at 622 West Avenue.

It is our understanding that this existing Gurudwara is less than one-third the size of the proposed house of worship, as it has a living area of 5,102 square-feet and an unfinished basement. While the existing facility appears to be significantly smaller it has proportionally more parking (per square foot) than the proposed facility. Furthermore, the TAIS recognizes that today, attendees also park along the street and/or in other public lots nearby, inferring that the existing on-site parking provided by the smaller 5,102 square-foot facility is inadequate for current services. The TAIS does not quantify the number of existing attendees parking off-site during pre-pandemic conditions. It should be noted that the existing religious center has significant available on-street parking in its immediate vicinity (including West Avenue and Elm Street) whereas the proposed Site will not have available on-street parking in its immediate vicinity. Richard's Avenue and its adjacent streets do not

accommodate on-street parking and any parking along these roadways would adversely impact traffic operations. Lastly, it is unclear as to whether the existing religious center utilizes any off-site, off-street overflow parking areas.

Based on the aforementioned documents provided, TMP has general concerns about the appropriateness of the traffic generation estimates, adequacy of proposed parking and general configuration of the proposed driveways for the 18,000 square-foot religious center.

The following comments are based on a high level review of the project and related to issues which should be addressed/resolved prior to a more substantiate review. This review is based upon the items that have been presented to TMP to date. TMP reserves the right for additional comments based on revisions/updates to the Site Plans to address the following concerns.

### **Traffic Impact and Access Study (SLR Consulting)**

1. The Traffic Study states that the “Gurudwara offers one service on Sundays with different activities occurring before and after. Thus, ITE trip generation was not used for this analysis.” While the department agrees that empirical data (especially for this type of use and when an existing facility is currently operating within the City) may be more appropriate, the Applicant needs to provide a detailed schedule of activities/services happening prior to and after the main services on Sundays in order for the Department to better understand these other activities impacts on traffic and parking.
2. The TAIS forecasts future trip generation based on current membership despite the existing house of worship re-locating to a facility over three times the size. There is a concern that if membership is anticipated to grow, that attendance of services will increase respectively. Please address and revise trip generation estimates accordingly.
3. The anticipated attendance of future religious services is based on pre-pandemic attendance for Friday and Sunday services; however, it is unclear as to whether the overall capacity of these services will grow as the proposed facility is over three times the size; and the capacity of the actual chambers for services is anticipated to increase. The TAIS should address the potential trip generation of Friday and Saturday services based on the new maximum capacity of the chambers for services.
4. The site traffic generation appears to be primarily based on the primary congregant gathering/Kirtan services. However, the TAIS notes that on a Sunday there are many other activities taking place that may affect traffic generation and ultimately on-site parking demand including: Sunday school classes and breakfast which take place immediately prior to Kirtan services; and, Langar community lunch which takes place immediately after Kirtan. The Applicant and the Applicant’s traffic consultant should provide clarification on how these services (and any other ancillary uses) affect traffic generation during Kirtan’s arrival and departure periods and also the overall parking demand for the Site.

5. Given the anticipated site generated traffic distribution, the available Site frontage on Richards Avenue and the relative proximity of curb cuts, TMP recommends that the northerly access drive is be converted to ingress only the and the southerly access drive be egress only. Transportation, Mobility and Parking is amenable the provision of an egress drive with a separate left and right lanes to Richards Avenue. The provision of one egress drive, as opposed to two egress drives as currently depicted on the Site plans, will greatly reduce the number of conflict points on Richards Avenue and improve traffic safety and operations.

### **Parking**

6. The Applicant shall update both the Application for Special Permit and TAIS to include a narrative on the religious center's operational program/scheduling in order for TMP to accurately access the facilities parking needs.
  - a. The narrative should include a detailed schedule of activities/services by day, who will be on-site for each activity/service, when they will arrive/depart and how they will arrive to the Site. For example, we understand the potential parking demand for attendees of the Kirtan service on Sundays; however, need a further understanding of any religious leaders, service support staff, etc. that will also be on-site to assess the true parking needs of the facility during its busiest time periods. Furthermore, there may be staff/attendees participating in one or several of the following activities (referenced in the TAIS) that may generate parking demand during the Sunday service:
    - Children's Sunday school classes;
    - Breakfast,
    - Community Lunch,
    - Etc.
  - b. The Gurudwara estimates that attendees carpool at rates of 3 to 5 people per car. A parking survey should be completed to verify this claim. Given that there is an existing facility located in Norwalk, a Parking Generation and Accumulation Study should be completed for the West Avenue religious center which also considers any off-site parking in order for the Department to better understand the proposed facility's needs. The Department recognizes that continuing COVID-19 pandemic may further complicate this issue.
  - c. The narrative should address whether the Applicant anticipates holding any special services with attendance which exceed regular Sunday "Kirtan" services and also clarify how they will accommodate overflow parking (if necessary).

7. The Vehicular Site-Generated Traffic Summary (as it relates to parking) is concerning for several reasons:
  - a. Despite utilizing a vehicle occupancy rate of 2.5 people per vehicle, there is no supporting empirical documentation to verify this claim.
  - b. The number of vehicular trips generated for the Sunday services (60 entering/10 exiting) suggests an accumulation of 50 vehicles on-site and a parking demand for 50 spaces in a proposed 53 space parking lot. The parking accumulation doesn't appear to be inclusive of any religious leaders and service support staff, site staff etc. that may arrive prior to services and depart after services and who will also require parking spaces.
  - c. Furthermore, there is a possibility that current membership may grow, and as a result, attendance to each service may increase given that the proposed religious center is over three times the size of the existing facility on West Avenue.
  - d. Also, it is unclear of the ultimate capacity of each service given that the size of the facility is increasing so greatly.
8. Based on our preliminary analysis the Site appears to be under parked and the Applicant should explore every possible solution to increase the parking capacity of the Site. One possible alternative may be reducing the existing building footprint, another option may be shifting the building southeast within the building setback boundary to create an additional parking aisle along the northerly building facade while retaining parking along the southerly facade of the building albeit in a different configuration (parallel). This would also allow a reduction in the width of parking stalls along the northerly property line from 9.5 feet to 9 feet, potentially resulting in additional parking stalls.

**Site Plan (Cabezas-DeAngelis)**

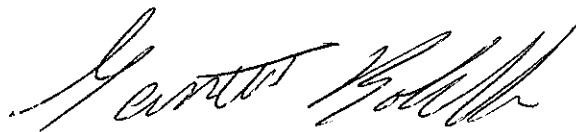
9. The Applicant should review the width of the sidewalk/walkway around the building to ensure its ADA accessibility. Its width particularly adjacent the northeast corner of the building appears to be less than four (4) feet which will impact ADA accessibility.
10. There appears to be an opportunity behind the building to reduce the two-way circulation aisle from 26 feet to 24 feet to accommodate increased green space and screening along the rear of the property.
11. TMP recommends that the sidewalks be improved to the Department of Public Work's City Standards along the entire property frontage.

12. The proposed concrete block retaining wall is located directly adjacent the northerly and westerly property boundaries leaving no space for landscaping between the proposed development and adjacent properties.
13. The dumpster enclosure at the southwest corner of the property is located immediately adjacent the southerly property boundary.
14. The propane tank and generator appear to be located immediately adjacent the northerly and southerly property boundaries, respectively.

**Conclusions**

Please note this is a preliminary review based on the documents submitted. Additional comments may be forthcoming based on the Applicant's response to address the aforementioned issues.

Sincerely,



Garrett Bolella, P.E., PTOE  
Assistant Director

- Cc: Jessica Vonashek, Chief of Economic and Community Development  
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