

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations will not please everyone, solve all the problems, or be easy to implement but at least attempt to alleviate tensions in Kuraby by easing parking, traffic, and congestion problems in the local community. In considering these recommendations, it is argued that while the specific problems in Kuraby can be resolved, more generally and into the future, community reaction is shaped by political attitudes at a national level, over which planners have no control.

In many instances applications by Muslims for places of worship are in a no-win situation. If the application is in a developed suburb, then problems of parking are raised. On the other hand, when applications are made in remote areas, there are objections on the grounds that since no Muslims live in the area, the application should be rejected. While much of the discourse is couched in terms of technical jargon about urban planning, religious and symbolic considerations are major catalysts of conflicts over mosques.

In considering the suggestions for Kuraby it should be borne in mind that the mosque already exists and that the problems cannot be resolved by ignoring them or through the Council applying the technical rule book.

5.1.1 SHORT-TERM: MASJID AL-FAROOQ, KURABY

- Resuscitate plans to construct an overpass in Kuraby, which will considerably ease parking, traffic, and congestion concerns.
- Seek to minimise / solve parking problems through creative thinking, such as building suitable additional parking in the car park area of the Wally Tate Park or extending the parking facility at the railway station. In both cases, land will not be lost since a viable proposition would be to build an upper level (double-storey) parking facility. The parking facilities are adjoining and such a proposition is feasible. The Council could take the initiative by approaching mosque authorities to contribute financially towards the building of additional parking spaces. Alternatively, mosque authorities be proactive and approach the Council with such a proposal. The Federal government could also be approached for funding from one of its programmes aimed at community improvement (see list of funding programmes below).
- Once additional parking has been provided, a resident parking permit scheme can be introduced in nearby streets to prevent mosque attendees from inconveniencing residents.
- Council should engage with Mosque authorities to get them to train attendees on utilising parking in appropriate ways such as, for example, not parking on yellow lines, not blocking driveways, and not parking on the pavement.
- Mosque authorities should do more to engage with the local community about the mosque and its role in the community. They could be proactive and relate information about days of religious significance and times of prayer when higher volumes of traffic are expected.
- In the mid-to-long term, the local Muslim community in Kuraby should engage with Council with a view to locating a suitable site to build a second mosque because the Muslim population is continuing to increase and the present mosque will not be able to accommodate all the worshippers unless it is made considerably larger, which is not possible under the present circumstances. A second mosque in another part of Kuraby, by drawing part of the congregation, will ease congestion problems for all concerned, Muslim and non-Muslim. If this site is not within reasonable proximity of residents, however, it will fail to achieve its intended aim. Council, for its part, should engage in such discussion with an open mind and an understanding that it holds the key to resolving a serious problem.

5.1.2 LONG-TERM: GENERAL (AUSTRALIA WIDE)

- Planners should receive training pertaining to the cultural and religious needs of minority groups. A mosque, for example, does not play the same role in the lives of Muslims as a church does in the lives of Christians. This aspect of the training and the implications of multiculturalism should be integrated into existing planning courses offered at universities. As far as existing planners are concerned, workshops should be convened for this purpose. Funding, as always, is a thorny issue. While applications for mosque development may be localised issues, the repercussions are usually national and funding for this project should therefore be provided by the Federal government.
- Development requests should be seen as validation of minority cultural rights and not simply as a matter of urban policy. The right to establish places of worship is integral to the right of freedom of religion and belief. The Human Rights Committee, through its 1993 General Comment No. 22, stated that ‘the concept of worship extends to ritual and ceremonial acts giving direct expression to belief, as well as various practices integral to such acts, including the building of places of worship’ (in Villaroman 2011). However, this is a delicate task for the needs of minorities and recognition of diversity must be done in a way that does not lead to the essentialising of religious groupings. For example, there is concern about Muslims congregating in certain areas. This thesis has argued that this is to a great extent driven by the need to reside in proximity to a mosque. Thus building smaller but more mosques that are spread out, may reduce the presence of large numbers of Muslims around a few mosques and may appear less ‘threatening’. This will not be easy, I concede, because of competing interests, but in situations such as the existing Kuraby mosque, the Council can definitely be flexible in the application of its policy to resolve a dire problem.
- This raises the thorny issue of funding, for many Muslims are recent migrants or refugees, and lack resources to build and sustain such facilities. In the interests of long term cohesion it may be a worthwhile project for the Federal government to consider some form of subsidisation. In 2008, for example, the Adelaide City Council provided a substantial sum of \$65,000 to the Gilbert Street mosque to repair its minaret (ABC news, 17 June 2008). While historically, there has been a strict separation between church (religion) and state in Australia, such a scheme can work if it is equitable. In the longer term it may also create a greater sense of citizenship. Some existing funding programmes are wide in their scope and funding could be sourced from them. Examples include ‘Better Regions’, ‘Community Benefit SA’, ‘Community Grants’, ‘Community Heritage Grants’, ‘Community Investment Program’ (aimed at social inclusion), ‘Community Supports Grants’, etc. Information about these grants is available on the Australian Government website under the section ‘Grants: Community and Society’.

- In addition to requiring public comment through the media and public notices, ‘town hall’ discussions involving planners, local political authorities, mosque management, and members of the local community, to discuss proposed development applications may help to avert potential conflicts. The local political authority (City Council) and planning fraternity should organise such meetings. It must include the Member (or members) of Parliament who represents the area. It is preferable for incumbent and opposition members to work together and not exploit local issues for political gain, which results in long term damage. Such meetings could be facilitated by experienced conflict resolution facilitators so that issues can be discussed constructively, even though these would often be explosive issues. Seeing the conflict as one between ‘racists’ and ‘fundamentalists’ is counterproductive.
- The *City Plan* should make provision specifically for places of worship. The contention is that all planning applications are treated *per diem*. Even though places of worship may attract significant number of people into an area, inadvertently increasing the volume of traffic at certain times, it is different to an application to build a stadium or park or clubs. The traffic generated is different, the volume of traffic is different, and even noise level emitted by these venues differ significantly. Such places form an integral part of community and can be crucial at a time when political leaders seem to be placing emphasis on family, social cohesions, etc. Marginalising places of worship by placing them on the outskirts of suburbs will not be sending out the correct message - they should be visible and accessible. The key questions is, How? There are no easy solutions given the number of religions and denominations of religions and the need not to be seen to be giving preference to certain groups over others. One possibility applicable mainly to Greenfield sites is to set aside land in residential areas (just as land is set aside for parks and recreational facilities) for places of worship and assess them on the basis of performance criteria. Another approach may be to require developers to set aside land for community uses in addition to parks, and the permitted uses could include places of worship. The developer argument against this will probably be that this will make housing less affordable by requiring developers to have to buy more land, thus pushing up prices. Having various places of worship in proximity may also result in positive cross-religious contact. More thought needs to go into working out the exact mechanics of this. Changing design and architecture, which changes the landscape, generally, makes people uncomfortable because it is a sign of cultural change. If this idea materialises, assessments must ensure that the size, type, and architecture of any development is consistent with the built form of the surrounding area and that sufficient car parking, landscaping, setbacks, etc. is accommodated to mitigate opposition from (non-Muslim) landowners who already see mosques as alien and out of character.