

- SUBJECT:** PREV-663
- APPLICANT/  
PROPERTY OWNER:** M.T.O. Shahmaghsoudi
- PURPOSE:** Work Session to review and receive comments on a preliminary review proposal for: (1) a conditional use permit to operate a church facility; and (2) design review approval to construct a church complex on three parcels totaling 6.12 acres.
- GENERAL PLAN:** Low Density Residential (<2 DU/acre) and Rural Density Residential (1 DU/5 acres)
- ZONING:** Agriculture and Unincorporated
- LOCATION:** APN 941-1580-046-00 (10890 Dublin Canyon Road), City of Pleasanton; APN 941-1580-003-03 (10712 Dublin Canyon Road) and APN 941-1580-002-05 (no street address on record), Unincorporated Alameda County
- ATTACHMENTS:**
1. Location Map
  2. Exhibit A: Preliminary Site Plan and Narrative, dated “Received, May 4, 2007”
  3. Exhibit B: Planning Commission Discussion Points
  4. Exhibit C: Petition of Support for M.T.O. Shahmaghsoudi facility, dated “Received, August 1, 2007”

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## BACKGROUND

Maktab Tarighat Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi (M.T.O. Shahmagsoudi®) is an established non-profit religious organization where sufism is taught. Sufism is a mystic tradition within Islam that encompasses a diverse range of beliefs and practices dedicated to divine

love and the cultivation of the heart. The M.T.O. mission is to create a serene atmosphere for learning, in which students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds can embrace the wholeness of health and life, as well as experience balance and harmony. Khaneghahs—literally meaning “house of present time”—are buildings designed specifically as a spiritual retreat and for the Sufi practice of character reformation.

The proposed project is for a M.T.O. church facility, which should not be confused with a mosque. The proposed church will function as a place of congregation and meditation, much like other neighborhood churches currently operating in the City of Pleasanton. Mosques have very distinctive differences from a M.T.O. church facility. Mosques have strict architectural requirements and contain very distinct visual elements not present in a smaller church facility. The most visible element of a mosque is the minaret. This is absent in all M.T.O. church facilities.

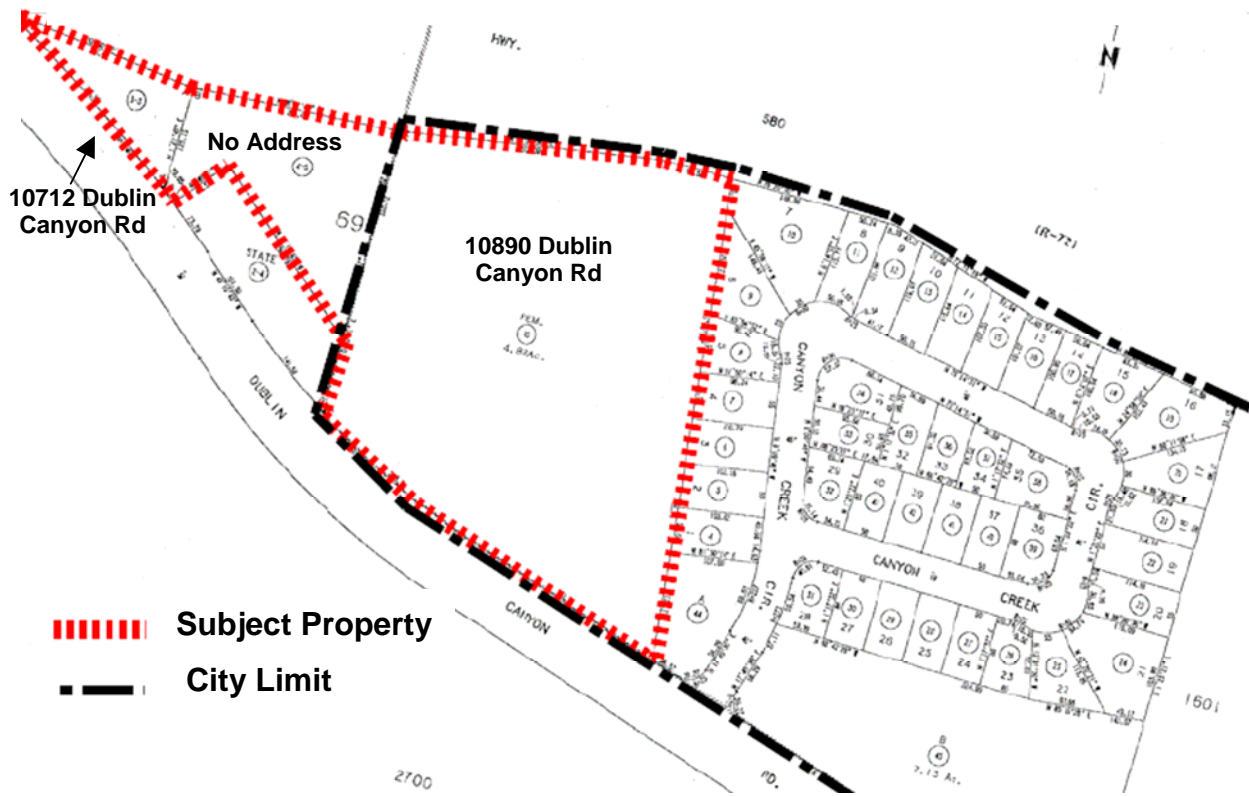
The M.T.O. organization operates and maintains over 65 congregational centers worldwide, with U.S. khaneghahs located in Virginia, Dallas, and Los Angeles. The organization has recently purchased the three contiguous properties along Dublin Canyon Road with the aspiration of constructing a new M.T.O. congregational center.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The subject site is the former Westbrook property. It is comprised of three lots totaling 6.12 acres. The main development parcel (APN 941-1580-046) is the 4.88-acre lot located at 10890 Dublin Canyon Road. The next lot to the west (APN 941-1580-002-05), is a 0.92-acre parcel without an address of record. The third lot (APN 941-1580-003-03) is a 0.32-acre parcel located at 10712 Dublin Canyon Road. The latter two parcels are located outside the City limits in unincorporated Alameda County and will require annexation to the City of Pleasanton. The parcel located within the City is zoned Agriculture; the two County parcels are not rezoned. The properties to the south of the subject site are also unincorporated County, and the Canyon Creek development to the east is zoned PUD-MDR.

The site is bound by Interstate Highway 580 to the north, the Canyon Creek residential development (PUD-90-13) to the east, a CalTrans parcel (APN 941-1580-002-04) to the south, and Dublin Canyon Road and Dublin Creek to the south and southwest. The site ranges in elevation from 490 feet at the southeast corner of the site, which is adjacent to Dublin Canyon Road, to an elevation of 530 feet at the northwest corner of the site, which is adjacent to I-580. The site generally drains in a southeasterly direction, towards Dublin Creek and Dublin Canyon Road.

An existing 2,303-square-foot, single-story, single-family home constructed in the late 1970s is located on the main parcel as are a number of associated out-structures, pens, well sites, and fencing. Numerous trees exist on the property and a tree report will be required upon submittal of the Design Review and Conditional Use Applications.



## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project is a neighborhood church facility consisting of:

1. An approximately 14,000-square-foot, two-story (with basement and dome) assembly hall;
2. An approximately 3,900-square-foot, single-story greenhouse;
3. An approximately 3,500-square-foot, single-story annex building;
4. An approximately 2,500-square-foot, single-story classroom building; and
5. An approximately 2,303-square-foot, existing single-family house to be retained as a residence for the groundskeeper.

Dublin Creek meanders through the subject properties. With the exception of creek crossings, no alteration or disturbance to the creek bed is proposed. Approximately two-thirds of the proposed development will be situated north of Dublin Creek with the balance of the development—ancillary uses and associated parking—situated south of the creek.

The project development fronts Dublin Canyon Road and will obtain access from two gate-controlled entrances. The westerly entrance will serve as the main gate and will provide ingress and egress for all scheduled church functions. The main gate will consist of a recessed gated entrance and an enclosed guard station. Traffic related to the daily activities of the existing single-family residence will use the secondary gate, which will be

located at the existing residential driveway. Both entrance locations are noted on the conceptual site plan.

Development of the site will be accomplished under three development phases. Phase 1 will consist of (1) the main church facility and related parking; (2) the greenhouse structure; (3) required modifications to the existing residence and related service parking; and (4) the main gate entrance, guard structure and entrance roadway. Phase 2 will consist of construction of the annex building and related service parking. Phase 3 will consist of construction of the classroom/retreat facility situated in the general location of the existing horse barn south of Dublin Creek.

The main assembly hall and related auxiliary buildings will house the various functions of the church including meditation and relaxation classes, youth classes, lectures, Sunday services and Sunday school. A brief description of each program is discussed below.

### **Youth Classes:**

The youth class offers poetry, art, lectures, group discussions, meditation and relaxation. The number of participants ranges from 5 to 10 people with one teacher. The class is offered once a week for two hours on weekdays from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm for students ranging in age from 13 to 18 and for college students on weekends from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. All classes are broken into one-hour sessions. Youth Farsi language classes are held on weekends throughout the day.

### **Adult Classes:**

Adult classes consist of lectures, meditation, and relaxation classes. The students are taught to experience self-improvement, self-wellness and concentration. The nature of these classes requires an environment which is serene, quiet, and peaceful. The students wear comfortable clothing suitable for meditation. Students enter the church facility in a meditative and calm manner. Each student, with minimal communication with others, finds a comfortable place to sit and meditate. Breathing and harmonizing exercises are used to relax the student's body and allow the student to "unwind" prior to the start of the lecture. The lecture is followed by singing of poetry written by Sufi masters in the form of a chorus. The session ends with additional meditation and concentration exercises. All students leave the class in the same quiet and peaceful manner in which they entered. Adult classes are offered twice a week from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. The classes are typically comprised of 15 to 20 students.

### **Sunday Service:**

Sunday service consists of prayer services, lectures, and scripture readings, along with choir singing to a melody of Sufi poetry. Refreshments are provided after all services. Typical startup congregations accommodate 40 to 60 persons with an anticipated congregation growing to up to 250 persons within a year.

Sunday school is held in conjunction with the church's Farsi language classes.

### **Holy Day Observances:**

All holy days are observed and conducted in the same manner as Sunday services. Holy days fall on November 17, February 4, and the first day of Spring.

## **DISCUSSION**

This workshop is a process for the Planning Commission to provide direction and comment to the applicant and staff related to the proposed use, site design, and architecture of the church facility. Based on the Commission's feedback and direction on the queries listed in this report, the applicant will finalize plans for consideration by the Planning Commission. Simultaneous with the planning entitlement process and approval by the Commission for the conditional use permit and design review, the applicant will commence proceedings to annex the County parcels into the City.

### **Urban Growth Boundary, Planning Area, Sphere of Influence**

The subject site is located within the City's Planning Area, Sphere of Influence, and the inside edge of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). The General Plan encourages lower densities along the inside edge of the UGB to provide a transition to the rural areas and a buffer for preventing potential conflicts with uses immediately beyond the boundary such as agriculture and wildlands.

### **General Plan Land Use and Zoning District Conformity**

The General Plan designation for the City parcel is Low Density Residential (less than 2 dwelling units per gross acre) and is Rural Density Residential (one dwelling unit per 5 gross acres) for the two County parcels. Religious facilities are an allowed use in any residential land use district provided that all requirements of the Zoning Ordinance are met. Zoning for the City parcel is Agriculture. While the two County parcels are not pre-zoned, upon approval of a conditional use permit by the City, the applicant will commence the process to annex the County parcels into the City. The intended pre-zoning for the County parcels will also be Agriculture. Churches and other religious institutions are a conditionally permitted use of the Agriculture District. The current proposal is, therefore, consistent with both the land use designation and zoning designation.

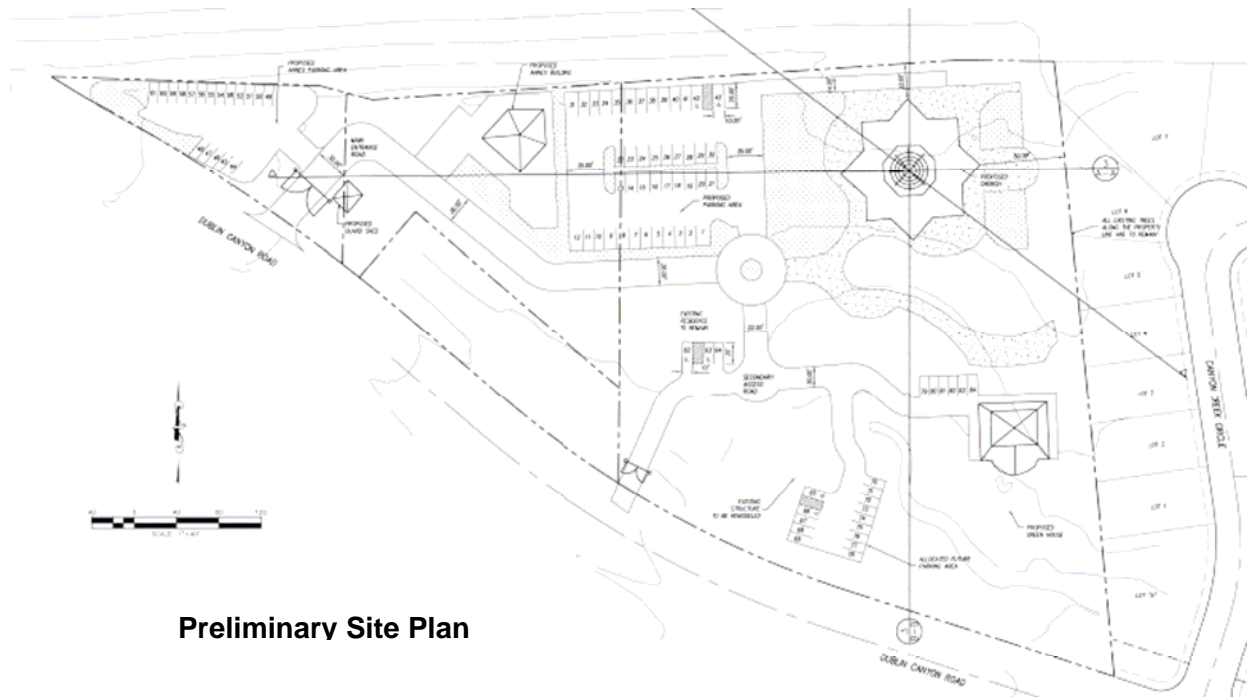
### **Conditional Use Permit**

Because of their unusual characteristics, conditionally permitted uses require special consideration to ensure they are properly located with respect to their effects on surrounding properties. In particular, the conditional use's impacts on noise, traffic, and parking are evaluated. For the proposed use, all activities, including services and classes, will be held indoors, thereby producing negligible sound impacts to the surrounding neighborhood. All parking, as required per Code, will be provided on site, and traffic generated by the use will be limited to off peak-hours and weekdends. A traffic scoping analysis is being conducted for the proposed use at the subject site. According to initial feedback from the

City's Traffic Engineering Department, the trip generation for this project is minimal and no traffic study will be required.

### **Site Plan and Design Review**

As proposed, the main assembly building (khaneghah) of the M.T.O. Shahmaghsoudi church facility is an approximately 14,000-square-foot, two-story building, located towards the northeastern corner of the subject site. Parking will be sited on the western portion of the property, away from the Canyon Creek residences. The main entrance to the facility would be located at the eastern side of the western most parcel (10712 Dublin Canyon Road) with the secondary entrance located at the existing driveway at the western edge of the eastern most parcel (10890 Dublin Canyon Road). To ensure safe egress into the facility, the applicant is providing a left turn pocket eastbound on Dublin Canyon Road and a right turn deceleration lane westbound along the project frontage. Please see the preliminary site plan below.



**Preliminary Site Plan**

The proposed architecture of the main building will be similar in nature to the M.T.O. khaneghahs in Dallas, Virginia, and Los Angeles, all of which have the central dome and building footprint in the shape of an eight-pointed star. The preliminary site sections show an approximately 33-foot tall building with an approximately 19-foot tall central dome. Upon application for design review, the applicant will provide full architectural details including a color and material board.





**Aerial View of Dallas Facility**



**Front Elevation of Los Angeles Facility**

A key characteristic of any M.T.O. Shahmaghsoudi campus is the serene, retreat-like atmosphere obtained through enclosed fencing, extensive floral landscaping, reflective ponds, and fountains. Staff will work with the applicant to encourage drought resistant, native, and Mediterranean plant species as part of the landscaping plan submitted with the design review application.

Entrance to the facility would be gained through ornate wrought iron gates, while the surrounding fencing would typically be wrought iron, stone wall, or a combination of the two. The Fire Marshall has required a minimum 40-foot setback of the main gate from Dublin Canyon Road to allow safe stacking of vehicles without impeding traffic flow.



**Landscaping at the MTO Virginia Facility**

*Points of Discussion:*

- *The maximum height of structures within the Agriculture Zoning District is 30 feet. The proposed height of the main assembly building is 33 feet to the rooftop, 52 feet to the top of the dome, and 42.5 feet as measured to the midpoint of the dome. The dome is an open, glass structure designed solely for aesthetic purposes. It will not contribute to the square-footage of the building. Does the Commission believe the City could support a variance for height of the primary structure, including the dome?*
- *The main assembly building is currently proposed to be located in the northeast portion of the site, with an approximate 80-foot setback from the Canyon Creek residential development. Fencing will be installed and trees will be planted along the perimeter of the site to provide privacy and screening to neighboring property owners. Parking would be provided west of the main assembly building, adjacent to Dublin Canyon Road and I-580. Does the Commission believe this layout minimizes noise, light, and visual impacts to surrounding properties?*
- *Fencing within the “front yard” in the Agriculture District may be up to six feet in height provided that the style is wrought iron, split rail, or other similar type of open fencing. Where such fencing crosses a driveway, however, it shall be set back a minimum of twenty feet from the face of the curb. Fencing along the side and rear property lines may be any style up to six feet in height. All fencing proposed by the applicant will be tastefully designed and executed. Does the Commission feel it appropriate to have the site fully enclosed with fencing with entry gates and a guard station? Will the impression be one of a serene enclosure or a gated compound?*
- *The main entrance to the facility will be located at the western end of the subject site in the center of the slight s-turn along Dublin Canyon Road. The location provides minimal sight distance both eastbound and westbound. As previously stated, the applicant is providing a left turn pocket eastbound on Dublin Canyon Road and a right turn deceleration lane westbound along the project frontage. Does the Commission feel the turn pocket and deceleration lane are sufficient safety measures, or are additional measures required?*

## **PUBLIC NOTICE AND COMMENT**

The applicant has actively engaged in outreach to the neighboring community. They have held four separate neighborhood workshops (March 1, March 18, April 18, and May 19) to introduce the project and the organization, have held one meeting with the Canyon Creek Home Owners Association on April 18, 2007, and have circulated a petition of support for the project (Exhibit C). During the neighborhood gatherings, members of the congregation presented a slide show of the proposed project. Afterwards, a question and answer session ensued. The neighbors expressed interest in the project and voiced concern regarding erosion caused by the development on Dublin Creek, an increase in traffic and safety along Dublin Canyon Road, and liability issues related to the private park.



Staff sent notices of the Planning Commission's workshop on this item to all property owners, tenants, and residents located within 1,000-feet of the subject property on July 27, 2007. As of the writing of this staff report, staff has received comment from five residents of the Canyon Creek development.

The residents echoed concerns that had been raised in the neighborhood meetings regarding the amount and speed of traffic on Dublin Canyon Road and the location of the facility entrance just past the blind curve. They noted that there have been many accidents on Dublin Canyon Road, and that traffic at peak hours and on Sundays is problematic. They expressed concern that the Church development would exacerbate the problem. One neighbor wondered if a traffic light could be installed along Dublin Creek Road.

One resident expressed concern regarding erosion of the creek banks along the residential development. She fears additional development on the neighboring property will contribute to erosion in their development. The resident also inquired whether there was any intention of using the Canyon Creek development for church overflow parking and whether the private park that the HOA maintains would be used by churchgoers.

Two residents expressed concern of noise generated from the church and church activities.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Since the Planning Commission will take no formal action on the project at the workshop, no environmental document accompanies this workshop report. Environmental documentation will be provided in conjunction with the Planning Commission's formal review of the conditional use and development plan application.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission take public testimony, review the proposed project, and provide direction to the applicant and staff.

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