Proper Church and School Location

Churches and schools are essential features of the community, and yet they often receive less attention with regard to proper location and their effect on adjacent residential development—both beneficial and adverse—than most other features which make up the community. The tendency is always present for both school boards and church building committees to wait and see if a need develops and then attempt to find a site out of what is left of the undeveloped land. Usually the result is unsatisfactory both to the neighborhood and to the developer.

CHURCHES

Let us examine the characteristics of modern church activity as it affects the neighborhood. The amount and nature of their activities will vary widely with the denomination and extent of its program. Some churches will have activities of various kinds going on every night in the week. In nearly all cases, however, one or more services will be held on Sunday morning. Sunday evening services and meetings on Wednesday or Thursday are usually the other major meetings regularly scheduled. In addition to meetings of various groups held each week, some churches will have bazaars, dinners, plays, fashion shows, dances, and even bingo games scheduled throughout the year.

CHURCH ACTIVITY

These functions generate a considerable amount of traffic to and from the church. Even in the so-called small neighborhood church, a substantial proportion of the attendants use automobiles even though they may live less than one-half mile away. It can thus be seen that adjacent residential development can be seriously affected through improper location of a church site with relation to street access and circulation, and inadequate facilities for handling parked automobiles.

Figure 1

The above plan illustrates good church and school relation to adjacent development.
HOME BUILDERS MANUAL FOR LAND DEVELOPMENT

The mere extent to which bell ringing is carried on is a factor to consider, as it is not universally appreciated by nearby residents. These features can and often do become objectionable as the traffic and activity generated by certain types of commercial development.

It is not the intention, however, to suggest that churches be required to locate in commercial areas. The church is an important and necessary element in American community life, can help to stabilize neighborhood desirability and value, and often is a deciding factor in helping the prospective home buyer to choose his location. The objectionable features generated by church activity should be recognized, however, in developing any subdivision near an existing church or in providing a site in the development for a future one.

LOCATING NEAR EXISTING CHURCHES

Where new development is to be constructed near an existing church site, it may be found advisable to discuss the possibility of either selling or dedicating to the church some of the contiguous land in order to enlarge their site for off-street parking if this appears desirable. The developer may be well repaid for giving up several lots in this manner in order to remove parking from the street in front of nearby homes and to create an additional buffer of open space between them and the church.

Access to parking areas should be as direct as possible from a major or secondary street rather than a minor street. The provision of a boundary wall or screen planting might be a condition for dedicating the area. In many cases, however, the developer rather than the church will be in a position to suggest a new church location which is desirable both from the standpoint of the church and the residential development.

The developer may, if his project is large enough, find it to his advantage to offer the site at a nominal figure or as a gift, as the prospect of a church in his development can be an attractive sales feature.

The smart developer will know his market and the income range of his prospective purchasers. It is also quite often possible to check into their religious backgrounds. The assurance of a denominational church which would serve a large portion of his market can be a very valuable sales asset. In large projects the provision of more than one site to provide for more than one denomination should be given serious consideration.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

FACTORS TO CHECK

Principal factors to consider in setting aside a site are as follows:

1. Need. Don't indicate a site on your record plans without having definite prospects of its use. Various church organizations can be very helpful in this respect. Many cities maintain a "Comity Council" which is part of the local or State Federation of Churches and which assists various denominations in determining the need and general location for new church buildings. This group should be contacted by the developer and will welcome the opportunity to work with him.

2. Location. Don't locate a church site in the center of your project. Avoid locations which have only minor residential street access. Good locations are on or near major or secondary thoroughfares, adjacent to shopping centers, in the point of Y intersections, and as buffer sites between residence and business, where shopping center parking may be utilized in part on Sundays without detriment to the business activity.

3. Size. Size of the site will, of course, vary considerably with size of the church. However, if parking space is provided at a desirable rate of one car for every four to five seats, a neighborhood church seating five hundred to seven hundred-fifty persons, and including Sunday school rooms, and possibly a parish hall and parsonage, should have an area reserved of at least two to two and one half acres, one acre of which should be reserved for parking space.

4. Assurance of Use. While the developer should make every reasonable effort to assure the church coming into his project, he cannot be expected to hold a site indefinitely. For this reason, it is undesirable for him to commit himself completely by recording a plan showing a church site or posting the site as such until he has reasonably definite commitments.

It is also advisable to limit the length of time during which the developer will hold a site for church purposes. A definite time, which might vary from one to five years, might be established and this fact made known to prospective home buyers.

The tract should also be so situated that it can be developed for residential use if not acquired for church purposes within the allotted time.