
Site Selection Criteria Checklist

Evaluating Potential Locations for Your Church Building Project

Prepared by Hawkey Church Management Inc.

Updated 2026 Edition

Hawkey Church Management Inc. (HCMI) provides expert construction management services for churches and religious organizations across Ontario. With decades of experience guiding congregations through the building process, we combine construction expertise with a deep understanding of ministry needs.

Site Selection Criteria Checklist

Choosing the right site for your church building project is one of the most consequential decisions your congregation will make. The location you select will affect your ministry's effectiveness, your construction budget, your ongoing operating costs, and your ability to serve the community for decades to come. This checklist provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating potential sites across Ontario.

Use this guide to compare multiple sites objectively. We recommend assembling a site selection committee that includes your pastor, building committee members, and if possible, a real estate professional and a civil engineer familiar with Ontario regulations.

HCMI TIP: HCMI offers site evaluation services as part of our pre-construction consulting. Before you sign a purchase agreement, let our team conduct a preliminary assessment of development feasibility, potential costs, and municipal requirements.

Section 1: Location and Accessibility

The site's location relative to your congregation and community is perhaps the most important factor. A beautiful property that is difficult to reach will limit your ministry's growth.

- Site is within a reasonable driving distance (15–20 minutes) for the majority of current members
- Located in or near a growing residential area with future ministry potential
- Access to public transit routes (bus stops, LRT, or GO Transit within walking distance)
- Adequate road frontage and visibility from major roads or highways
- Traffic patterns support easy access during peak church times (Sunday mornings, Wednesday evenings)
- Multiple entry and exit points to prevent traffic congestion on surrounding streets
- Safe pedestrian access including sidewalks and crosswalks
- Sufficient sight lines for road signage and wayfinding
- Proximity to complementary amenities (restaurants for after-service gatherings, schools for partnerships)

HCMI TIP: Visit the site at the times your church typically holds services. Sunday morning traffic patterns are very different from weekday traffic. Also visit during winter conditions to assess road maintenance and drainage.

Section 2: Zoning and Municipal Requirements

Ontario's planning and zoning framework can significantly impact your project timeline and budget. Understanding the municipal requirements early avoids costly surprises.

- Current zoning designation permits places of worship (or rezoning is feasible)
- Site conforms to the municipality's Official Plan land use designations
- Site plan approval requirements have been reviewed with the municipal planning department

- No heritage designations or heritage conservation district restrictions apply
- Minimum parking requirements under the zoning by-law can be met on site
- Building height and setback requirements are compatible with your building design
- Lot coverage and floor area ratio limits allow adequate building footprint
- No pending municipal road widening or expropriation plans affect the property
- The municipality has confirmed timeline estimates for plan approvals (often 6–18 months)
- Committee of Adjustment minor variances (if needed) are likely to be granted

HCMI TIP: HCMI has established relationships with planning departments across Ontario. We can help navigate the approvals process and often identify potential issues before you commit to a site.

Section 3: Physical Site Conditions

The physical characteristics of the land will directly affect your construction costs and building design options.

- Lot size is adequate for the building footprint, parking, setbacks, and future expansion
- Topography is relatively flat or grading costs have been estimated and budgeted
- Preliminary geotechnical (soil) investigation shows suitable bearing capacity
- No evidence of contamination requiring a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment (ESA)
- Phase I Environmental Site Assessment has been completed with satisfactory results
- Property is not located within a floodplain or regulatory flood area (confirm with Conservation Authority)
- No significant natural heritage features (wetlands, woodlots, species at risk habitat)
- No easements, rights-of-way, or encroachments that limit development potential
- Existing structures (if any) have been assessed for demolition costs or adaptive reuse
- Survey and legal description confirm property boundaries match expectations

HCMI TIP: Never purchase land for a church project without a Phase I ESA and a geotechnical report. Contaminated soil remediation can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and poor soil conditions can require expensive foundation systems. These reports typically cost \$5,000–\$15,000 combined but can save you many times that amount.

Section 4: Infrastructure and Utilities

Utility availability and capacity can make or break your construction budget. Services that are not available at the property line can cost tens of thousands of dollars to extend.

- Municipal water service available at the property line with adequate capacity
- Municipal sanitary sewer available at the property line (or septic system is feasible and permitted)
- Stormwater management requirements reviewed with municipality and Conservation Authority
- Electrical service available with sufficient capacity for HVAC, lighting, and A/V systems
- Natural gas available at the property line (if gas heating or kitchen equipment is planned)

- Telecommunications infrastructure (high-speed internet, fiber optic) available or extendable
- Fire hydrant locations meet Ontario Fire Code requirements for the planned building size
- Road access meets municipal engineering standards (curb cuts, turning radii)

Section 5: Financial Considerations

The purchase price of the land is only one component of the total site cost. Understanding all financial implications helps avoid budget overruns.

- Land acquisition cost is within budget and has been appraised independently
- Municipal development charges have been calculated (often \$30–\$80 per square metre in Ontario)
- Parkland dedication or cash-in-lieu requirements have been determined
- HST implications have been reviewed (churches may be eligible for partial rebates)
- Cost of required off-site improvements (road upgrades, utility extensions) has been estimated
- Property tax implications have been reviewed (places of worship are generally exempt in Ontario)
- Legal fees for land transfer, title insurance, and due diligence have been budgeted
- Carrying costs during the approvals and construction period have been estimated

HCMI TIP: Development charges in Ontario vary dramatically between municipalities. A site just across a municipal boundary could save your project tens of thousands of dollars. HCMI can help you compare total development costs across potential locations.

Site Evaluation Scoring Matrix

Use this matrix to compare up to three sites objectively. Rate each criterion from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Weight each category according to your congregation’s priorities.

Criteria	Weight	Site A	Site B	Site C
Location / proximity to congregation				
Road visibility and access				
Public transit accessibility				
Zoning compatibility				
Lot size and expansion potential				
Soil and environmental conditions				
Utility availability				
Stormwater management feasibility				
Land acquisition cost				

Criteria	Weight	Site A	Site B	Site C
Total development charges				
Approvals timeline estimate				
Overall community growth potential				
WEIGHTED TOTAL				

To calculate weighted totals, multiply each site’s rating (1–5) by the weight you assign to that criterion, then sum the weighted scores. The site with the highest total is your strongest candidate from an objective standpoint.

HCMI TIP: Site selection is one area where professional guidance pays enormous dividends. HCMI has evaluated dozens of church sites across Ontario and can help your committee identify issues that may not be obvious during an initial visit. Contact us at 519-509-6363 for a site evaluation consultation.