



## Harrison New York Temple

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Harrison New York Temple

The Harrison New York Temple is the 129th announced temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The announcement to build a temple in Harrison, New York, came on September 30, 1995. The site purchased on March 8, 1996, is located on the corner of Kenilworth Road and Westchester Avenue on 24 wooded acres.

The Harrison Temple would be the third temple in the state of New York, the other two being in Palmyra and Manhattan.

The original plans for the temple included a 89,700 square foot building, seating for 200, 198 parking places, 44.7 foot high building, a steeple 115 feet high, and additional structures.

Joseph Cannella chaired the Harrison Planning Board when the Church submitted its plans for the temple. He took credit for the Church scaling down its project from 89,700 square feet to 56,000 square feet; removing a third floor; eliminating one steeple and four spires—swapping the 159-foot main spire for a 115-foot single spire; reducing the number of parking spaces; diminishing the proposed flood lighting; and agreeing to no visitors center, family history center, or pageant on the temple grounds.[1]

Revised plans called for a 44-foot-high temple, requiring the Church to make application for a variance to the 30-foot height limit imposed on the residences of that neighborhood. The request came before the Harrison Zoning Board of Appeals on September 28, 2000. In a 5-2 vote, the Board denied the Church its variance, though the chairman suggested an alternative solution may be viable.

On September 22, 2000, just a week before the Harrison decision, President Bill Clinton signed into law the "Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act," which forbids local governments from using regulations on land use to place unnecessary burdens on the exercise of religion without a vested government interest.

On March 10, 2001, New York State Supreme Court Justice Peter Leavitt overturned the decision of the Harrison Board of Appeals, ordering a variance to be issued to allow construction of the temple. However, the Board countered by filing its own appeal.[2]

Despite the pending lawsuit, the Church attended a public meeting with the Harrison Town Board on June 11, 2001, requesting a special exception permit, which specifies how the temple will be used. Overwhelming opposition was expressed by neighbors including concerns over traffic, size of the building, height of the steeple, and nighttime flood lighting of the exterior.

After eight months of wrangling between the Church and residents in the form of public hearings, four traffic studies, and environmental reports, and having exhausted its administrative options after its numerous concessions, the Church was left with no option but to file suit on December 17, 2001, accusing the town of infringing on freedom of religion and assembly.

When it became clear that the town would likely lose in court and spend millions of dollars if legal action were pursued, the Harrison Town Board unanimously voted on April 30, 2002, to approve a proposed settlement with the Church. The agreement resulted in numerous additional concessions by the Church including reducing the building from 56,000 square feet to 28,400 square feet, dropping the number of seats from 200 to 100, lowering the height of the building from 44.7 feet to 34 feet and steeple from 115 feet to 105 feet, trimming the number of parking spaces from 198 to 135, paying for any damage to Kenilworth Road caused by construction, and refraining from building anything else on the property for 15 years after the temple opens.

Membership growth in the five boroughs of New York City had increased significantly and contributed to the Church's decision to build the Manhattan New York Temple inside an existing Church-owned building, which was announced in August 2002. Harrison lies approximately 22 miles northeast of Manhattan.

James Staudt, a White Plains, New York, lawyer representing the Church, told The Journal News that the Harrison New York Temple would be built. He explained that the Church was working to connect the property to a sewer line on the other side of Hutchinson River Parkway—a complex, time-consuming project that had to be completed before the town would issue a building permit. Once completed, the church would move on to the next phase of construction, he said.[3]

After the Manhattan temple opened, however, activity at the Harrison site died down. By 2006, the Harrison New York Temple had been quietly removed from the Church's official list of announced temples. The decision to build a temple on this site would constitute a new announcement.

#### Sources

Gary Stern, "Mormons show temple in NYC," *The Journal News*, 4 May 2004

Temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Harrison New York Temple

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