

## FROM COMMUTE TO COMMUNITY: PLANNING A SELF-SUFFICIENT NEW TOWN OUTSIDE LAHORE

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### Abstract

*Lahore has become the new hub of employment, higher learning, health and specialized services in Punjab, Pakistan due to rapid urbanization and urban primacy. Such a density has created extreme daily commuting streams between the peripheral settlements and secondary cities in the metropolitan centre leading to road congestion, environmental destruction, social strain, and deteriorating urban living conditions. This paper is in reaction to this and explains plans and design of Sahulat Nagar, an envisaged self-sufficient new town at the outside of the Lahore Metropolitan Boundary close to Muridke. The primary goal of the project is to transform urban development into a system where people no longer commute to the city but rather community through the formation of an entire city in which the people can live, work, learn, and receive healthcare without having to travel to Lahore on a daily basis. The study is based on a planning approach that utilizes a studio-based approach with assistance of secondary data, national planning standards, and an overview of urban literature on Pakistan to create an integrated master plan that focuses on mixed land use, employment creation, walkable neighbourhoods, and a robust town centre. The results indicate that the new towns that are planned in an appropriate manner may be crucial in alleviating the commuting stress on Lahore and enhancing the lives of people and facilitating balanced development of the region. The paper ends with recommendations on the policies to implement to use self-sufficient new town strategies as a model of urban growth in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** *Self-sufficient Cities, New-towns, Commuting, Lahore, Urban Planning.*

### 1. Introduction

In Pakistan, urbanization has steadily increased within the last few decades whereby the larger cities have been assimilating a disproportional population and economic activity as well as state investment. Lahore, the capital of the Punjab province, and the largest metropolitan region of Pakistan is no exception. It is the major employment, educational, specialized medical, and cultural centre, which makes the city a destination of daily commuters in towns and peri-urban regions, including Sheikhpura, Muridke, Gujranwala, and Kasur (Hasan and Raza, 2020). Although this concentration has helped to make the economy dynamic, it has created extreme urban problems.

The increased reliance on long-distance daily commuting is one of the most urgent problems. Lahore has thousands of workers and students who daily come into the city in search of employment, education and medical facilities. Research has revealed that long commuting situations in Lahore are linked to traffic congestion, higher fuel use, air pollution, stress, and low productivity (Qureshi, 2019; Ahmad et al., 2021). The Lahore metropolis has become too mono-centric and as such, has created a space and time imbalance between housing and employment that compromised efficiency and quality of life in the city.

Traditional city sprawl in terms of residential development of the metropolitan periphery has not helped in solving this issue. The residential plots mostly found in the periphery of Lahore

do not have proper employment opportunities, institutions of higher learning, or tertiary healthcare. Consequently, they are inhabited by slum settlements that are left to depend on Lahore to continue with their day-to-day activities (Khan, 2018). This trend adds to the commuting, as well as exerting more pressure on the infrastructure and other services in Lahore.

The need to develop self-sufficient new towns is becoming a more important topic in the literature of urban planning as a solution to the overconcentration of the metropolis. Globally, new towns have been employed in the decentralization of population and economic activities, enhancement of balanced regional development, and enhancement of urban liveability. Such approach has much potential in the framework of the Global South or Pakistan, in particular, though it is underused (Nadeem & Hameed, 2017).

This paper fills this gap by providing the planning and design of Sahulat Nagar, a new town proposed to be located on the Metropolitan Boundary of Lahore. The project itself can be seen as a result of an academic planning project with a distinct purpose: to develop a city that will not need external commuting to Lahore by means of offering an extensive social, economic, and physical infrastructure on its territory. The conceptual statement, From Commute to Community, is a demonstration of the change in people living in urban settings due to their mobility to living in place-based urban settings.

The proposed study intends to:

1. Review the applicability of self-sufficient new towns to the commuting crisis of Lahore;
2. Record the planning plan and spatial planning of the Sahulat Nagar; as well as
3. Discuss the general consequences of such developments on urban policy and regional planning in Pakistan.

By basing the design suggestion on the Pakistan-related literature, as well as planning reality, the paper will add to the existing discussions regarding sustainable urban developments and metropolitan decentralization.

## 2. Theoretical Background: New Towns and Self-Sufficient Cities

The new towns idea is a twentieth century response to congestions in industries, living conditions, and unregulated growth of towns. The Garden City model developed by Ebenezer Howard was the foundation of intended settlements that had a balance between the housing, the employment, and the green area in an autonomous unit of the urban setting (Hall, 2002). The new town concept was developed over time and applied in different forms in Europe and Asia, usually as a state-directed policy of decongesting big cities.

One of the concepts of successful new towns is that of self-sufficiency which does not mean being isolated but having enough employment, services and facilities to meet most day-to-day needs within the locale. Researchers believe that self-sufficient cities decrease the demand to travel, increase social cohesion, and contribute to environmental sustainability through reducing the excessive movement (Newman and Kenworthy, 2015). The key elements of this approach are mixed land use, high-density town centres and cohesive transportation systems.

In the developing world, however, a lot of new towns have been unable to become self-sufficient because of poor governance, speculative development, and excessive emphasis on real estate properties. It has been noted that in the absence of strategic planning of economic activities and social infrastructure, new towns will be relegated to being commuter suburbs instead of being stand-alone urban centres (Angel, 2012).

In Pakistan, the concept of planned new towns has been used haphazardly. Although other projects like Islamabad can be seen as a holistic approach to planning, most of the recent plans in and around large cities do not have functional diversity that can sustain them

(Hameed and Nadeem, 2008). Such theoretical background contains the significance of incorporating employment, education, health, and civic functions as part of the essence of new town planning- a strategy applied in Sahulat Nagar design. Literature Review: Urbanization, Commuting and New Town Development in Pakistan.

### 3. Literature Review

The urbanization rate is being realized at one of the highest rates in South Asia in Pakistan. It has been found that in several studies that the urban population has been so concentrated to only a few metropolitan centres, especially Karachi and Lahore, thereby creating an incredibly uneven urban system (Hasan and Mohib, 2003; Nadeem and Hameed, 2017). Lahore is the capital of Punjab and controls the province economically, administratively and socially. This metropolitan primacy effect has only increased rural-urban migration and inter-city mobility entrenching the fact of Lahore being an opportunity magnet (Qadeer, 2014). According to scholars, this level of concentration exerts a lot of pressure on the metropolitan infrastructure, housing, transport system, and environmental resources (Khan, 2018). There has been rapid population growth and lack of planning capacity that has resulted in informal development, traffic jams, air pollution, and deteriorating quality of life in Lahore (Anjum, 2007; Ahmad et al., 2021). These pitfalls are not just the outcome of population growth but entrenched on spatial planning initiatives that promote growth at the expense of sustainable regional growth.

#### 3.1. Commuting patterns and Stress on mobility in Lahore

Commuting has become one of the characteristics of life in Lahore. Studies have also shown that a large percentage of the workforce in Lahore does not live within the metropolitan region and have to use extensive transportation to work, study and receive medical care (Qureshi, 2019). This trend has been heightened by the proliferation of periphery housing schemes without any employment opportunities.

The literature on the transportation and mobility of Lahore has emphasized that longer commuting time means less productivity, more spending on household transportation, and poor health conditions because of stress and exposure to air pollution (Batool and Goldmann, 2013; Ali et al., 2020). Moreover, the use of personal cars and informal means of transport has contributed to the increased congestion and emissions and has made commuting to work economically and environmentally unsustainable (Imran and Pearce, 2015).

The literature stresses that commuting issues can never be solved through the only intervention of transportation, e.g. the expansion of roads or the creation of flyovers unless the land use pattern is also tackled (Newman and Kenworthy, 2015). This observation highlights the significance of spatial planning which lowers the necessity of long-distance travel as opposed to just the accommodation.

#### 3.2. Peripheral Housing Schemes and the inability of Self-Containment

Within the last twenty years, the city of Lahore has experienced the growth of large-scale private and state housing projects at its outskirts. On the one hand, these developments have boosted the supply of houses, but on the other hand, scholars believe that these developments have only been partially effective in terms of being a self-contained urban unit (Hameed & Nadeem, 2008). The schemes mostly lay emphasis on residential plots and commercial real estate but little on employment generating activity, institutions of higher learning or tertiary medical care.

Consequently, such regions become dorm towns and this does not lessen the dependence on Lahore but strengthen it (Khan & Anjum, 2013). Segregation of social-spatial areas and mobility demand have been caused by the absence of mixed land use and poor integration of social infrastructure. As it is always emphasized in literature, peripheral developments are not

an effective way of sustainable urbanization unless there is a robust town centre and economic foundation (Qadeer, 2014).

### 3.3. New Towns, Secondary Cities and Balanced Regional Development.

In the literature of international planning, new towns and secondary cities are noted to be very important tools in ensuring that a balanced development of the region is realized. In Pakistan, scholars state that by empowering secondary cities, it is possible to take the weight off major metropolitan areas, as well as to encourage a more balanced economic development (Nadeem & Hameed, 2017; Malik, 2020).

Empirical evidence shows that well-planned new towns have the potential to bring investment, create jobs and not only provide better living conditions than overcrowded metropolitan cores but also can be more attractive than the latter (Angel, 2012). Such experience with new towns has been mixed within the borders of Pakistan though. Although Islamabad is an embodiment of a holistic planning initiative, there are numerous emerging trends, which are not supported by institutions, and short-term goals (Hameed and Nadeem, 2008).

Recent research demands movement to housing-led development to full-fledged cities where land use, transportation, economic activities, and social services integrate (Imran et al., 2018). This literature offers a solid argument to the validity of researching into the self-sufficient new towns as a robust planning approach towards the hinterland of Lahore.

### 3.4. Planning Policy, Governance and Institutional Challenges

The challenge of urban planning in Pakistan is limited to a disjointed governance system, old master plans, and poor implementation systems (Anjum and Hameed, 2007). The lack of efficient metropolitan and regional planning systems has given way to unplanned development of urban fringe regions. Researchers also highlight the fact that institutional reforms are essential to ensure the successful execution of well-planned reforms at the institutional level (Qadeer, 2014).

Still, there are also opportunities to enhance things, which are also pointed out in the literature. Integrated regional planning, urban growth boundaries, and new town development have gained recognition in policy documents and academic studies as effective mechanisms used to control the growth of urban sprawl (Nadeem & Hameed, 2017). The insights are taken directly in the planning of Sahulat Nagar which proposes an independent urban model coupled with flawless spatial structure and functional integration.

## 4. Research Methodology and Planning.

The paper has taken a studio-based planning approach, a typical way of doing planning studies in the field of urban design and planning in Pakistan. It combines abstract planning and critical analysis of the site factors, land use and connectivity in the region (Anjum and Hameed, 2007).

Key aspects include:

- **Pakistan Planning Standards:** The standards used included the road width, plot sizes, the facilities within the neighbourhood and land use allocations based on the Lahore Development Authority and other local planning authorities (Qadeer, 2014).
- **Data Sources:** Design decisions were informed with Secondary sources, such as population data, studies of regional transport, and past research on the urban growth of Lahore and the commuting pattern (Imran and Pearce, 2015).
- **Assumptions:** The project assumptions were expected population growth, trend in vehicle ownership and demand of housing, commercial and public facility. These were assumptions that directed spatial organization, hierarchy, and development of the neighbourhoods.

The methodology maintains a balance between theory and practice of design giving a framework on how to develop a self-sufficient urban environment and concerns Pakistan-specific planning issues.

### 5. Site Selection and Regional Context

Sahulat Nagar is a well-placed area, being close to Muridke, which is in the metropolitan limits of Lahore, whereas it is spatially independent.

Key site selection factors:

- **M-11 and N-5 Connections:** The location is located next to the Sialkot-Lahore Motorway (M-11) and the Grand Trunk Road (N-5) that enable fast access to Lahore and other regional terminals.
- **Railway Access:** There is a railroad that provides potential integration of transportation in the future and facilitates connectivity without disturbing residential zones owing to a 620-foot buffer area.
- **Location in relation to Lahore:** It is located around 3040 minutes to the central Lahore making it less dependent but still not out of reach.
- **Regional Suitability:** The size of the site (approximately 4,190 acres) can be used to accommodate a balanced combination of residential, commercial, institutional, and recreational land uses. The fact that it is not a part of the urban sprawl gives the town an opportunity to be an independent entity that promotes self-sufficiency (Nadeem & Hameed, 2017).

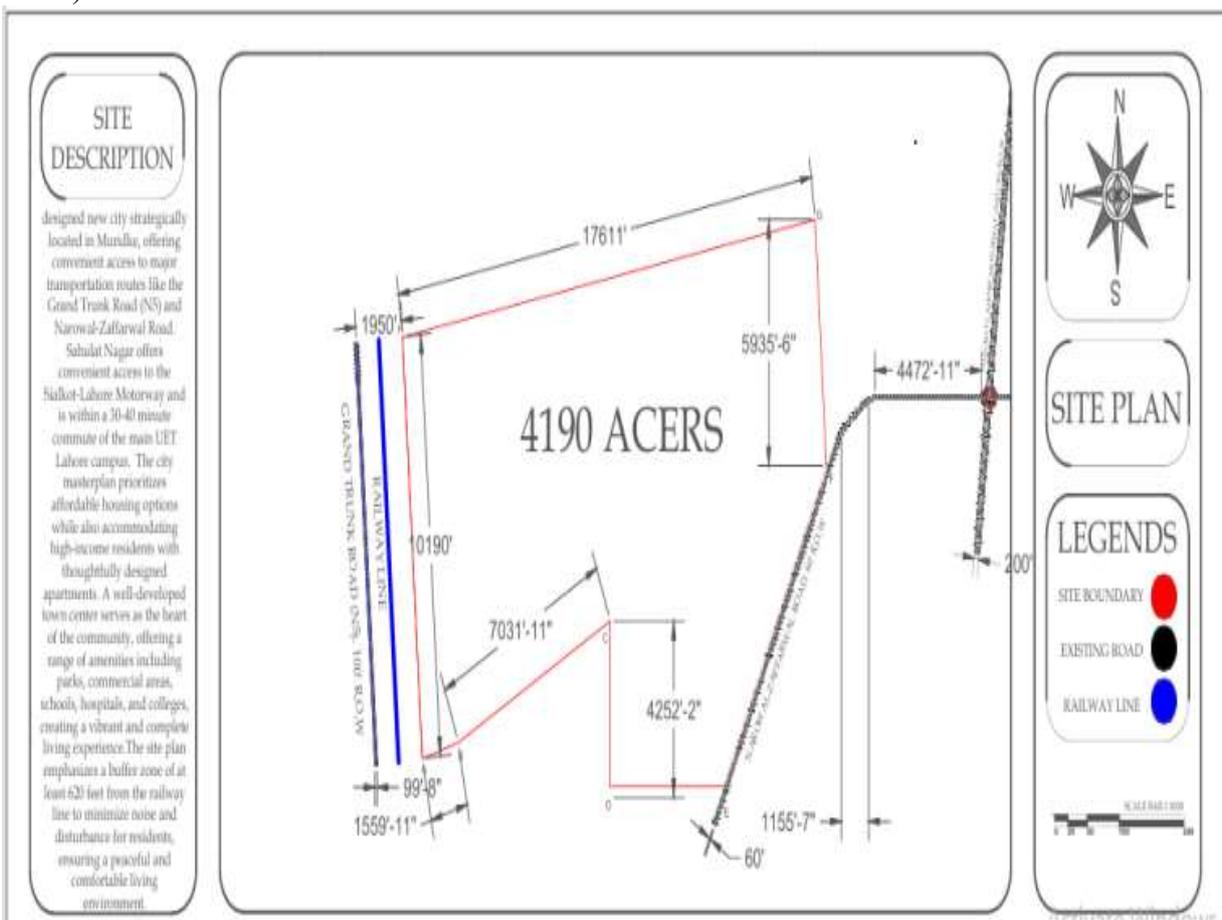


Figure 1 Site Plan of Sahulat Nagar

The Muridke site will enable independent urban growth by incorporating these requirements, lessening the strain of commuting in Lahore, and aligning with the urban decentralization plans in Pakistan (Malik, 2020).

### 6. Land Use Structure and Master Planning.

Sahulat Nagar master plan was formulated with the aim of having a self-sufficient inclusive and functional urban setting. It includes a hierarchical land use plan that corresponds to the principles of modern town planning and solves Pakistan-specific issues of commuting, affordability, and access to social services (Hameed & Nadeem, 2008; Qadeer, 2014).

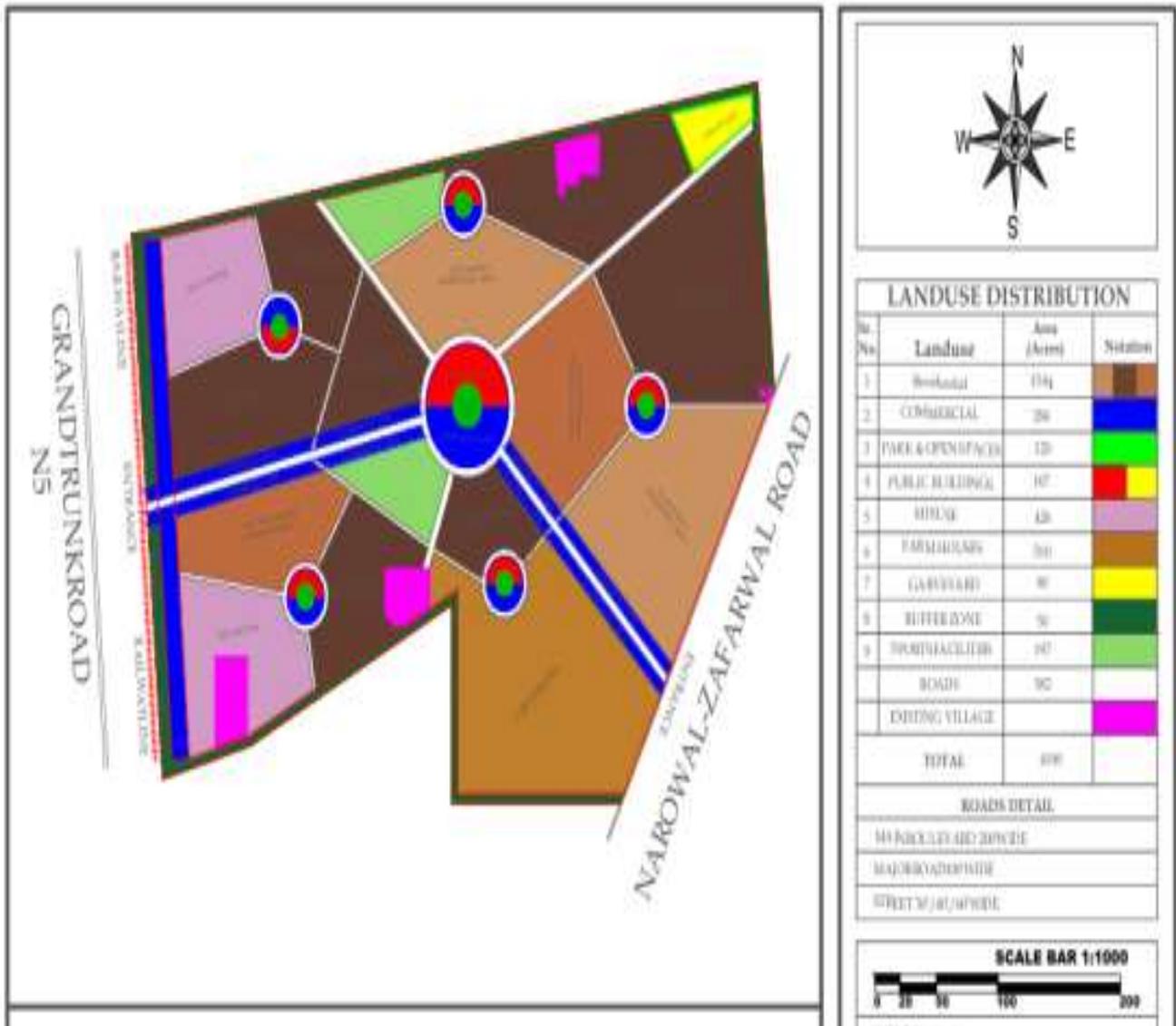


Figure 2 Zoning Plan of Sahulat Nagar

#### 6.1. Residential Planning

Sahulat Nagar residential development comprises high, medium, and low-density residential development offering a wide range of housing facilities to different income groups. The high-density residential areas are mostly within the proximity of town centre where people can walk to obtain their commercial, educational as well as health facilities. Housing is organized into residential neighborhoods consisting of local parks, mosques, and schools, which means that it is accessible and liveable (Khan, 2018).

Housing typologies include:

- One, two and three-bedroom apartments (7502,250 sq.ft) serving high- and middle-income populations.
- Medium and low-income families (5 Marla to 1 Kanal) detached houses.

• Peripheral farmhouses to live in recreationally or semi-urban lifestyle.  
This heterogeneity in the housing is aligned with the global approach to new towns and the socio-economic stratification of Pakistan (Ali et al., 2020).

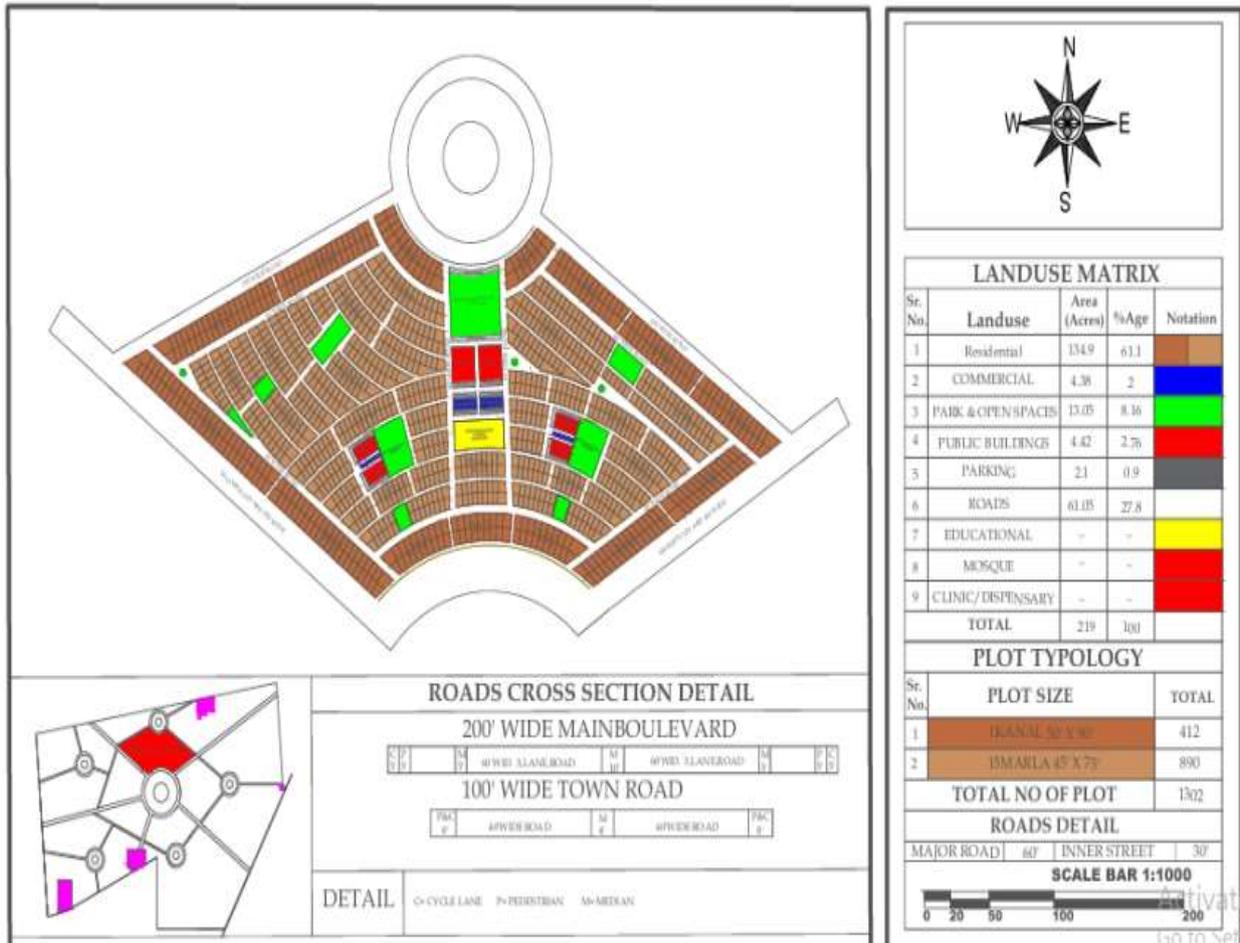


Figure 3 Layout Plan of Neighborhoods

### 6.2. Mixed-Use and Commercial Development.

A colourful central business district of Sahulat Nagar is the heart of the town. It includes:

- Commercial space amounting to 170 acres.
- Public structures town hall, police station, post office, and so on.
- A stadium, restaurants and banks which are social amenities.

Along major corridors, mixed-use development is incorporated to offer jobs to people within a walking distance of residential areas. The design also minimizes commuting to Lahore to work, which is the main objective of the study, which is self-sufficiency (Nadeem and Hameed, 2017).

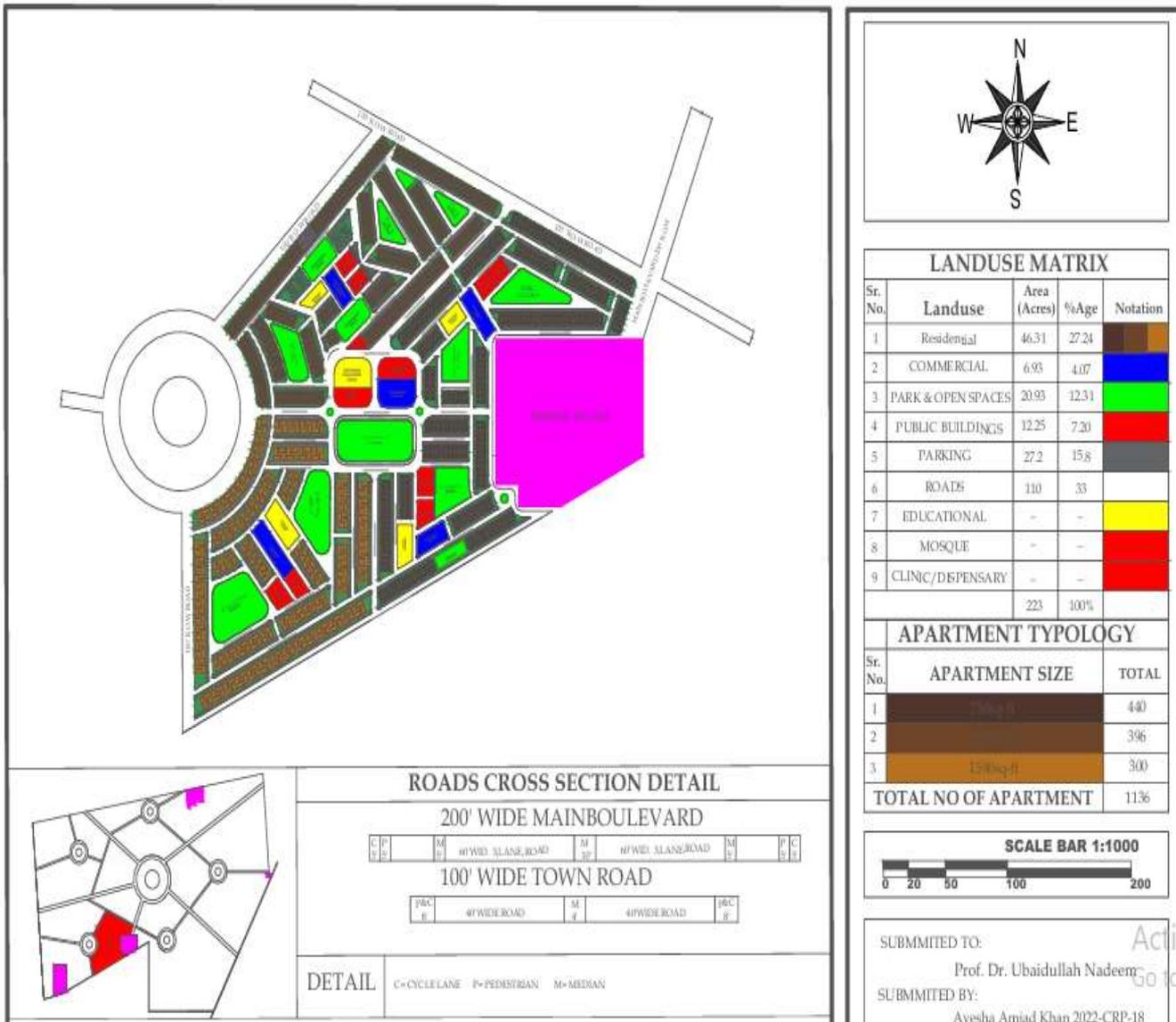


Figure 4 Layout Plan of Neighborhoods

### 6.3. Neighbourhood Hierarchy and Social Infrastructure.

Neighbourhoods are hierarchically structured with every sub-unit consisting of:

- Neighbourhood parks (4 acres)
- Local mosques (1 acre)
- Clinics and dispensaries (1 -4 acres)
- Primary and middle schools (132.2 acres)

The result of this hierarchical planning is that every resident has access to the necessary services within a 5-10 minutes walk, which fosters social integration and inclusiveness (Hasan and Raza, 2020). The purpose of the Open Spaces and Environmental Planning is to provide an overview of the open spaces and environmental plans of the city of Union.

The site is almost 15-20 percent covered with open spaces and playgrounds, parks, and green belts. The residential areas are safeguarded by a 620-foot-wide buffer on the railway line to stay off the noise and pollution. Green infrastructure is also inserted on the primary boulevards and footways, which supports the environmental sustainability and better living standards (Imran et al., 2018).

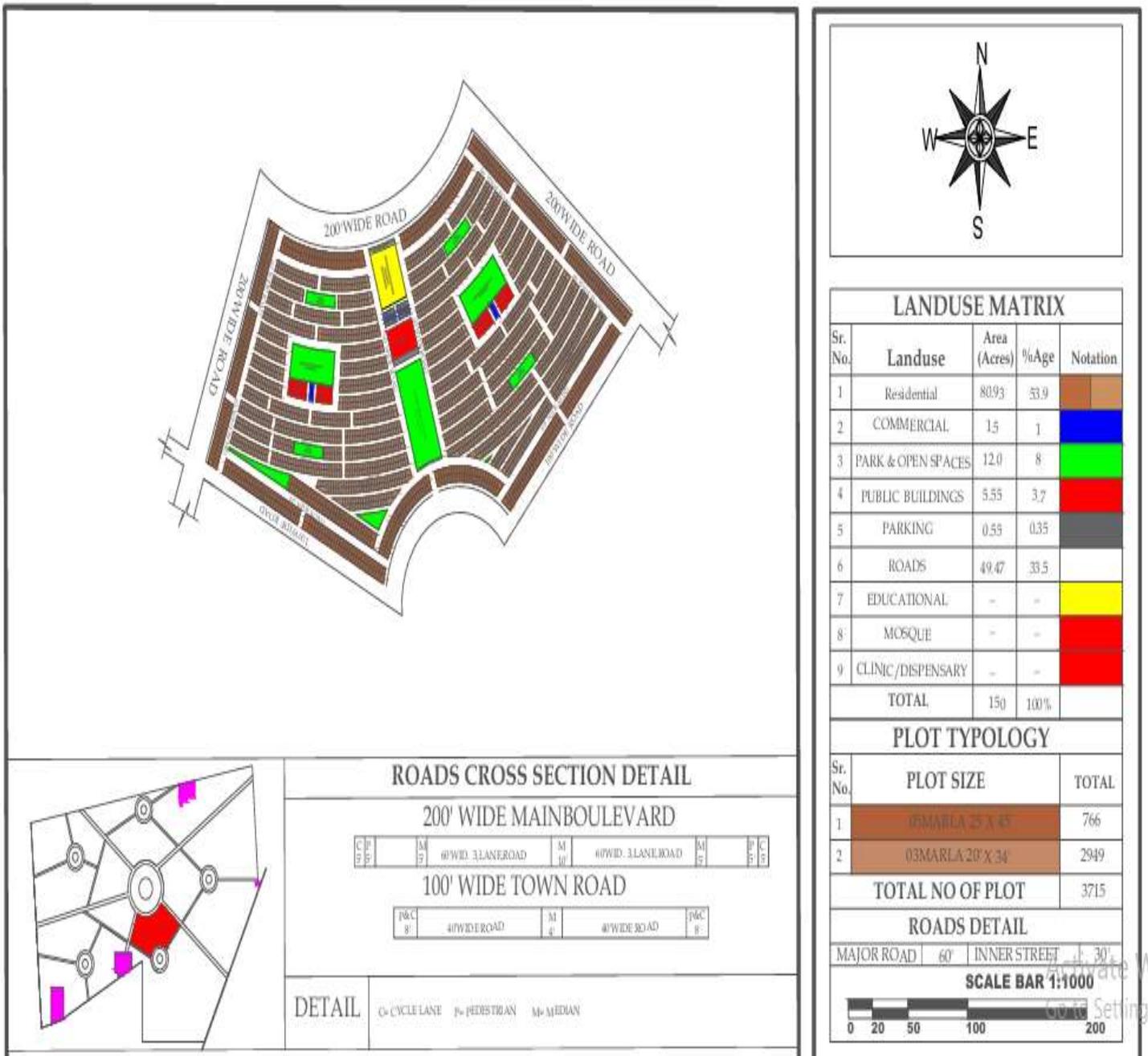


Figure 5 Layout Plan of Neighborhoods

### 7. Transportation and Mobility Planning.

Sahulat Nagar transportation planning aims at eliminating the Lahore reliance and promoting local movement. There is a hierarchical system of roads:

- **Major Blvd.:** 200ft avenues, with medians, pavement walkways and cycle paths.
- **Large Roads:** 100 f wide, linking the neighbourhoods to the town centre.
- **External Streets:** 30-60 wide, serving as an access to residential groups.
- **Walks and bike trails:** 10ft in width, and provisions of non-motorized connectivity.

#### 7.1. Reduced Commuting Strategy

The plan encourages a high level of residential, commercial and social development within the town, which means that one does not have to commute to Lahore on a daily basis. The mixed-use corridors and neighbourhood centres can enable the locals to fulfill work,

education, and healthcare requirements at the local level, forming a completely autonomous urban ecosystem (Qureshi, 2019).

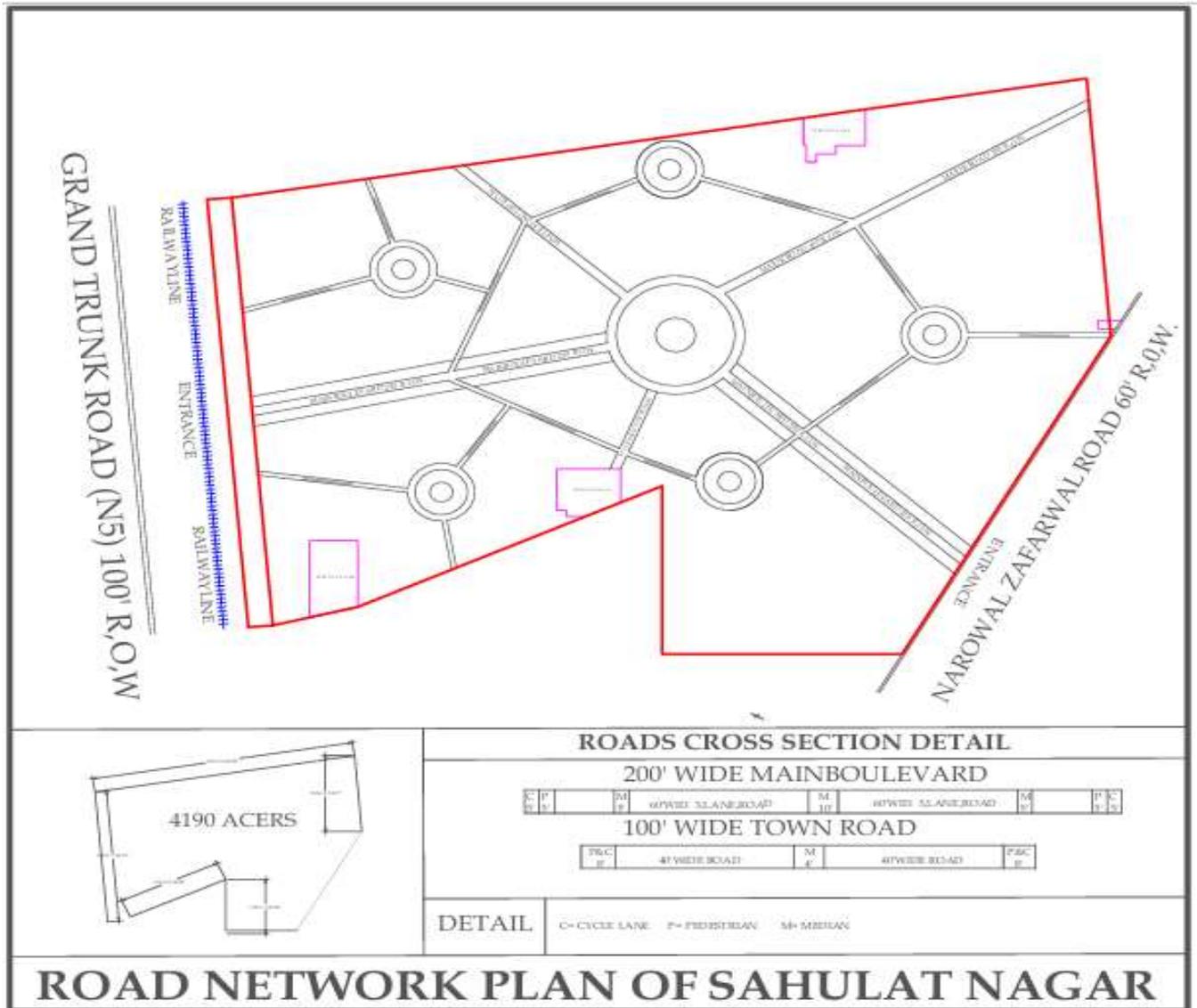


Figure 6 Road Network Plan of Sahulat Nagar

### 7.2. Public Transport Integration

Though the increased utilization of personal vehicles is still a mainstream fact, future accommodations of bus travel along major avenues and accessibility to M-11 and N-5 are also put into consideration to facilitate sustainable mobility. These solutions can be based on the experience of international and local studies that highlight transit-based development of the new towns (Batool and Goldmann, 2013).

### 7.3. Walkability and Pedestrian Access

The residential design focuses on walking the streets and pedestrian streets. Schools, clinics, parks, and mosques are planned to be within 5-10 minutes walkable distance, which minimizes dependency on vehicles and creates the opportunity to interact with the community (Ali et al., 2020).

#### 7.4. Cross-sections and Parking Road

Sideways of large roads have bike lanes, walking paths, and medians, and the parking lanes are incorporated to avoid highway congestion. Both the town centre and the commercial and public facilities have centralized parking areas that enhance organized growth of the urban centre (Imran and Pearce, 2015).

#### 8. Town Centre and Social Infrastructure

The town centre is the civic and economic hub of Sahulat Nagar and is planned to make all the necessary services available in the area; it will ensure that the residents of the state do not have to go quite far to obtain them, which will help them feel a sense of community. The town centre plan will include:

- Lastly, commercial spaces (170 acres) that comprise shops, markets, and mixed-use buildings.
- Communal structures such as a town hall (5 acres), police station (1 acre), general post office (1 acre) and community centre (3 acres)
- Health amenities such as a hospital (8 acres) and dispensaries at the levels of the neighbourhoods.
- Educational facilities that comprise of primary and middle schools and high schools that amount to 10 acres.
- Social and recreational facilities such as: stadiums (10 acres), parks (up to 7 acres), playgrounds, and sports facilities complexes (2.4 acres).
- Banks, commercial and financial offices, restaurants that are located strategically in places where they are easily accessible (Ali et al., 2020; Imran et al., 2018).

This design guarantees the availability of all the residents to the employment, services and recreation facilities in the town and this represents the self-sufficiency and less commuting ideals.

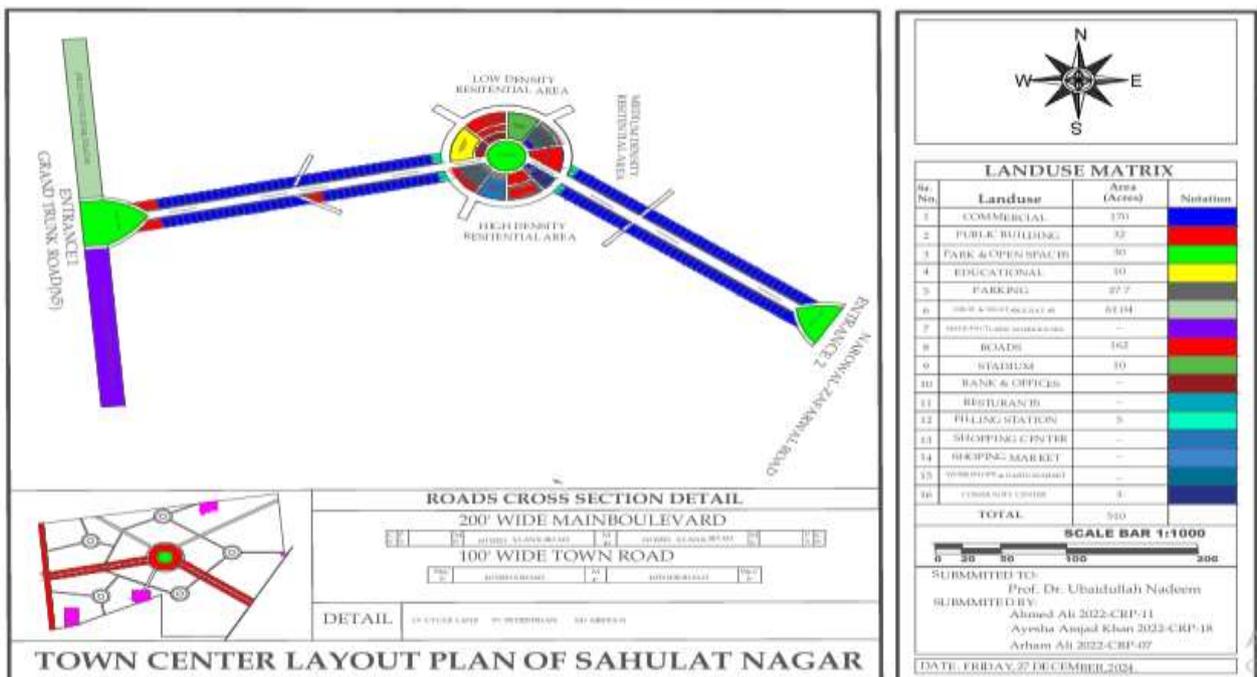


Figure 7 Town Center Layout Plan of Sahulat Nagar

### 8.1. Community-Oriented Design

Sub-neighbourhood scales integrate social infrastructure such as mosques, parks and neighbourhood-based clinics forming small walkable communities in the town. This hierarchy assists in supporting social cohesion and the creation of community identity (Hasan and Raza, 2020).

### 8.2. Accessibility and Transport Integration

The town centre is connected through residential and commercial land use zones by well-planned road hierarchy through 200' main boulevard, 100' major roads, 60' streets, and 30' internal roads. Walking roads and bikeways allow the residents to move freely without use of personal transport.

### 8.3. Environment and Open Space Planning.

Parks, green areas and lined with trees are integrated into the town centre. These characteristics offer recreational facilities, better the microclimate and increase habitation. Aesthetic and environmental values are also created through water fountains and small-scale green buffers (Khan, 2018).

## 9. Discussion and Policy Implications.

### 9.1. Commuting and Urban Pressure Reduction.

Sahulat Nagar shows that self-sufficient towns that are planned can alleviate the pressure on the major cities such as Lahore due to commuting. Through the creation of residential, commercial and social infrastructure within a walking distance, the residents do not depend on Lahore to work, educate, and receive healthcare. This is in line with international research on the new town planning, as well as practicalizes the commuting problems that are unique to Pakistan.

### 9.2. Inclusion and Diversity Housing

The combination of high, middle, and low-density residential houses, apartment, and plot housing type serve several income brackets. This will minimize social isolation and will offer affordable housing, which is in line with the urban development objectives of Pakistan.



Figure 8 Layout Plan of Apartments

### 9.3. Lessons to Regional Planning.

- **Site selection is important:** The location of Muridke illustrates to the new towns the need to be connected and autonomous.
- **Integration of transport is essential:** Hierarchy of roads, walk-through routes and possible transit links decrease the use of personal vehicles.
- **Hierarchical social structure:** The sub-neighbourhood clinics, schools and mosques enhance accessibility and social interaction.

These lessons support the suggestions to decentralization and regional development as the means of taking the load off the large metropolitan centres, as found in the literature on urban planning in Pakistan (Qadeer, 2014; Nadeem and Hameed, 2017).

### 9.4. Concerns on the environment

Noise and air pollution are minimized by the integration of green buffers along with open spaces and environmental zoning along the railway line, which increases liveability. It proves that it is possible to merge environmentally conscious planning with self-sufficiency goals (Imran et al., 2018; Khan, 2018).

### 9.5. Limitations and Future research.

Although this paper has given a specific concept plan, it lacks specific economic feasibility, phasing plans, and long-term governance patterns. Future studies can answer the following questions:

- Wireless economic evaluation of housing rates and business feasibility.
- Implementation phasing and financing models.
- Pakistan self-sufficient towns governance and policies.

## 10. Conclusion and Recommendations

Sahulat Nagar indicates that a new town may be developed in Lahore that is self-sufficient, community based and which concerns the problems of urban congestion and over-commuting. The town also makes the metropolitan core unnecessary as a work place, educational institution, healthcare centre, and leisure venue by providing residential, commercial, and social infrastructure in a highly connected urban structure. The strategic point in the proximity of Muridke, direct access to the M-11 motor road, N-5 as well as the railway guarantee not only connectivity but also independence, which contributes to the equal development of the region. Considerate planning of the neighbourhoods such as mixed-income housing, parks, schools, clinics, and local mosques, encourages social cohesion and inclusivity, and the town centre is a bustling place of business, government, and community services. Green buffers along the railway and lots of open spaces are also environmental considerations that make the liveability and sustainability even higher. All in all, Sahulat Nagar can be used as an example of how future peri-urban projects in Pakistan can be done as replicable models, with special emphasis being put on site selection, planning, and community-based design, which will help redesign the urban experience into one that is not commuting-oriented, but community-oriented.

### 10.1. Policy Recommendations:

- Promote secondary towns in Pakistani major cities.
- Combine the standards of planning with the environmental and social goals.
- Free up mixed-use, walkable communities and ease the commute to make places more liveable.
- Provide Government subsidies on infrastructures, financing and governance structures of new towns.

Through such plans, Pakistan will be able to deal with the overcrowding of urban areas, housing deficit, and transportation issues, as well as allow an even more balanced regional growth.

### 11. Acknowledgement

We are pleased to show our deepest appreciation to Dr. Obaidullah Nadeem as the Professor, the Department of City and Regional Planning, UET Lahore, who offered us highly valuable guidance in the Planning of New Town subject and always provided us with critical observations and constructive feedback on the writing of this study. The conceptual framework and the master planning approach of Sahulat Nagar were developed with his expertise and mentoring.

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