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Kamloops
ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION

February 23, 2021
Kamloops City Council

Subject: Mosque Relocation

Background:

Early Muslims settled in Kamloops in 1937. Many were farmers by profession who owned apple orchards on the Northshore. Muslims held gatherings, Friday prayers and annual Eid events in their basements or rented halls. In 2003, the Kamloops Islamic Association (KIA) received a registered charity status from the Canada Revenue Agency and was also incorporated with BC Registrar under the BC Society Act. Following their charity registration, the Association searched for a place, within the city limits, to establish a mosque but nothing feasible was found.

The Association had 34 families at the time and needed 'A Place' to establish a mosque. In 2007, the property in Knutsford was purchased which lies outside of the Kamloops municipal boundary and is not serviced with municipal water and sewage. At the time, the property in Knutsford was zoned for commercial use which was successfully rezoned to institutional use in 2009 with a condition of major renovations to meet BC Building Codes.

In 2009, there was a major influx of Muslim students at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) which triggered relocation discussion within our community, because the students felt the current mosque was not easily accessible. The Association remained focused on renovations of the Knutsford property while acknowledging that the relocation discussion would surface again in the future due to expansion and accessibility limitations at the current location.

Once again, in 2017, we had discussions with TRU Reach which didn't advance since we learned that the TRU campus is on crown land whereas a mosque needs to be on a freehold title land.

Most recently, in 2020, we conducted a survey within our community and a large majority of members support relocation of the current mosque to within the city limits. Based on our records for our members, we had 34 families prior to 2007 while 99 new families moved to Kamloops since the establishment of our mosque in Knutsford. As of today, 46 out of those 99 families have moved away from Kamloops. Amongst those that moved away, there were 13 doctors and 10 professors at TRU.

Despite an increase of over 300% in our members, we have struggled to improve programming at the current location where congregants' attendance is limited to Friday service and annual Ramadan events. The most common feedback from our members is that the mosque is out of town and not easily accessible. Additionally, the facility remains on constant boil-water notification from Interior Health while sewage is also limited in capacity and does not allow for any expansion at the current location.

Notable Services:

While the relocation remains a topic of discussion in our community, we continue to offer services as best as we can from our current location. The Association has held four large educational events since 2016 in an effort to bridge gaps with the community at large. An "Open Mosque Day" was held in Feb 2019 when the broader community was invited to visit the mosque. Hundreds attended the event and appreciated the opportunity to visit the mosque and understand its significance in the community.

The Association is an active member of Interfaith Kamloops where we make collaborative efforts to hold events and interfaith dialogue. We have worked with Kamloops Immigrant Services & RAFT (Refugees & Friends Together), an entity of United Church, to support the sponsorship & settlement of 12 Syrian Refugee families in Kamloops.

During the 2017 wildfire events, The Association provided hot meals to over 1,000 evacuees from Williams Lake and Cache Creek in addition to the essential supplies valued over \$10,000 to Kamloops, Clearwater, and Ashcroft Indian Bands. Our annual monetary distribution is over \$20,000 to local families and TRU students who struggle to make ends meet.

Our chaplaincy services are offered at Royal Inland Hospital, Kamloops Correctional Centre and TRU along with support to several TRU student union clubs.

The Association is the sole Muslim burial services provider in Kamloops. We have worked with the city's Hillside Cemetery where we have invested ~\$70,000 on the reservation of Muslim burial section.

Reason for Relocation:

We acknowledge that the current location has given us the strength to work and establish as many functions as possible. However, we continue to struggle to improve upon our onsite programs due to capacity and accessibility challenges. Although some limited expansion at the current location is an option, it does not address the issue of accessibility and lack of municipal services such as water and sewage.

All our large events are either offsite or the ones which are offered onsite are limited to Friday service and annual Ramadan events. Given the generosity of our members whether in responding to emergency relief efforts or working collaboratively with other non-profit or interfaith groups, we sense great potential for outreach programs with the community at large. Our current services and collaboration could effectively expand our network to local support groups such as Ask Wellness or the Mustard Seed.

TRU students continue to face the challenge of accessing the current location and struggle to offer obligatory religious services on campus.

Benefits of Relocation:

- Convenience for our members and TRU students
- Expansion of services to community at large
- Enhanced support for emergency events and relief efforts
- Better collaboration with other non-profit & Interfaith groups
- Attraction and retention of professionals
- New business establishments
- Attraction for Muslim students both domestic and international
- Representation in an inclusive community

Current Status:

We wish to relocate within the city limits and close proximity to TRU such as the McGill Corridor. This is a very important matter for our community. However, we are struggling to find a potential location within the city. We are also aware of the mosque project in the city of Prince George where the local Muslim association purchased a city-owned land and constructed a multi-million dollar mosque structure which is now fully operational.

TRU will continue to grow, therefore, we are mindful of accessibility for students and based on our community residences which are disbursed throughout the city, we find lower Sahali to be the most convenient and suitable location for our future establishment.

Contacts:

Muqsit Faruqi, Secretary: muqsit@ayeshamosque.com

Faisal Siddiqui, President: faisal@ayeshamosque.com

Umme Mansoory, Director: umme@ayeshamosque.com