

Bozeman Masjid Project Preliminary Study

Islamic Center of Bozeman (ICB)

Masjid Project Task Force

December 2009

In the Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Bozeman is located in the southwestern part of the State of Montana, USA. The Bozeman urban community which is located in the Gallatin Valley has a population of around 50,000. The City is the home of the Montana State University (MSU) main campus with around 15,000 students, faculty and staff representing the campus community. Besides the University, there are several local companies and other firms, which, in addition to tourism, constitute the major economic facts of the Bozeman area. As a university town, most of the Muslims in Bozeman are university students. The vast majority of students are singles pursuing studies at the undergraduate level. There is a fewer number of graduate students with only a few who live with their families. The professional Muslims in town consist of several families with numbers fluctuating from year to year. Only a few professionals work at companies and are not affiliated with the University.

The condition of Muslims in Bozeman and in Montana in general is unsatisfactory at best. There is no Masjid or any place of worship that belongs to the Muslims in Bozeman or in the State of Montana. *This is somewhat unusual as Montana is the only state in the U.S. without a Masjid or Islamic center.* There is no place for community, children, or family Islamic functions and activities. Students on campus are allowed to use a small room on top of an old house which is intended for international students at Montana State University. Currently, male Muslims on campus use this space to perform regular prayers. The place is neither appropriate nor adequate for Friday and Eid prayers. Those prayers are held in reserved places on campus or rented places off-campus. Sisters cannot participate in regular or Friday prayers mainly for lack of appropriate place of worship. In response to the above difficult situation, the Islamic Center of Bozeman (ICB) was established in the summer of 2005. ICB is the first and only registered non-profit Islamic organization in the State of Montana.

ICB has launched a project to build a Masjid and Islamic center in the City of Bozeman in 2006. To guide in project development and fundraising efforts, the ICB Board of Directors has formed the Masjid Project Task Force with the charge of conducting a preliminary study to outline the various concepts for the intended project and develop an initial estimate of the project cost in a more quantitative manner. Those estimates are expected to help the ICB plan the major milestones of this important community project. This study summarizes the ICB vision of the Masjid project, includes an initial analysis of community needs which was used as a basis for the Masjid requirements and cost estimates. The study suggests that purchasing an old property on a larger lot and using it as a Masjid seems the best option for the Bozeman Masjid project. The estimated cost of purchasing older property on larger lot would be in the range of \$400,000 to \$450,000. These cost estimates are based on current real estate market and will be used as a guide in defining fundraising goals and objectives. With the help from Allah (SWT), ICB has already raised over \$200,000 in last three and a half years. Therefore, we are almost half way in reaching our goal of establishing the first ever Masjid in the State of Montana. We still need your generous support to reach our goal.

ICB - Bozeman Masjid Project – Preliminary Study

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	2
THE CITY OF BOZEMAN	4
THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY.....	4
Profile	4
A National Perspective	4
Current Status.....	5
THE ISLAMIC CENTER OF BOZEMAN (ICB)	5
THE BOZEMAN MASJID PROJECT	5
Background.....	5
The ICB Vision	6
Location Requirements	6
Building Requirements	7
Cost Estimates	8
PROJECT FUNDRAISING	8
Fundraising Status	8
Challenges	8
CLOSING REMARKS.....	9

THE CITY OF BOZEMAN

The City of Bozeman is located in southwestern part of the State of Montana, USA. The Bozeman urban community which is located in the Gallatin Valley has a population of around 50,000. The City is the home of the Montana State University (MSU) main campus with around 15,000 students, faculty and staff representing the campus community. Besides the University, there are several local companies and other firms, which, in addition to tourism, constitute the major economic facts of the Bozeman area.

THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Profile

As a university town, most of the Muslims in Bozeman are university students. The vast majority of students are singles pursuing studies at the undergraduate level. There is a fewer number of graduate students with only a few who live with their families. The professional Muslims in town consist of several families with numbers fluctuating from year to year. This is mainly due to the fact that many of those professionals are engaged in post-doctoral research which tends to be short in duration (1-3 years). Only a few professionals work at companies and are not affiliated with the university.

The number of Muslims in Bozeman has been increasing in the last few years. Part of the reason behind this increase is the increase in international students from Muslim countries. Specifically, there has been an increase in recent years in the number of young undergraduate students as some of the Middle Eastern countries are increasingly sending their students on government scholarships to the university here. Other contributors to the increase in young student population is the university exchange program with schools in Muslim countries as well as other Muslim students who come to campus through the US Department of State PLUS program.

A National Perspective

It is well known that Muslims in the U.S. are overrepresented in institutions of higher education and several other professions that require high education and technical skills. However, the city of Bozeman and the State of Montana is not part of this National trend. Specifically, despite the increase in Muslim population in Bozeman during recent years, the number of Muslims who live and work on a permanent basis as well as older graduate students with families has not been increasing and remained very small in general. The lack of environment where Muslims can preserve the Islamic teachings, traditions, and identity is thought to be main reason why Muslims are not encouraged to move to Bozeman or to other

ICB - Bozeman Masjid Project – Preliminary Study

cities in the State of Montana. Therefore, the number of Muslims who work for Montana State University is considerably lower than what is typical in all other U.S. universities. Same observation applies to professionals who work for companies, hospitals, and other major employers in the area.

Current Status

The condition of Muslims in Bozeman and in Montana in general is unsatisfactory at best. There is no Masjid or any place of worship that belongs to the Muslims in Bozeman or in the State of Montana. *This is somewhat unusual as Montana is the only state in the U.S. without a Masjid or Islamic center.* There is no place for community, children, or family Islamic functions and activities.

Students on campus are allowed to use a small room on top of an old house which is intended for international students at Montana State University. Currently, male Muslims on campus use this space to perform regular prayers. The place is neither appropriate nor adequate for Friday and Eid prayers. Those prayers are held in reserved places on campus or rented places off-campus. Sisters cannot participate in regular or Friday prayers mainly for lack of appropriate place of worship.

THE ISLAMIC CENTER OF BOZEMAN (ICB)

In response to the difficult situation of Muslims in Bozeman, an Islamic organization was recently established in Bozeman with the main objective of elevating the status of Muslim community here, serving other Muslims in neighboring towns and cities, and play the role of Da'wa among non-Muslims. Established in summer 2005, the ICB is the first and only registered non-profit Islamic organization in the State of Montana. The primary mission of the ICB is to establish a Masjid and an Islamic center for our community that will satisfy our spiritual needs, protect our children and families, and play the role of Da'wa among the non-Muslims.

THE BOZEMAN MASJID PROJECT

Background

In January 2006, the ICB formed a Masjid Project Task Force to be in charge of planning and overseeing the Masjid project. A few months later, the ICB started a fundraising campaign with the purpose of establishing a Masjid and Islamic center in the city of Bozeman. Since its inception, the people who are involved in this project have had good appreciation of the unique situation of Muslims in Bozeman and the exceptional challenges that may face the execution of this project.

ICB - Bozeman Masjid Project – Preliminary Study

The ICB Vision

The ICB fully appreciate that Bozeman Muslims should benefit from the lessons of other Muslims in the U.S. and the West who successfully established strong communities within the majority non-Muslim population. Accordingly, in the course of planning the Masjid project, several options were considered for the future Bozeman Masjid.

After many deliberations it was decided that purchasing an existing property near the University and using it as the Masjid is the most practical option for the Bozeman community at this time. Many communities purchase or rent a small building to satisfy the current pressing needs while working towards a future bigger Masjid project. The advantage of this option is that it can help the community satisfy their immediate needs especially when the expected time span for future full-fledged Masjid project is relatively long. Issues that need to be addressed with this option are the facts that many of these buildings that have lower costs may not well fit the intended uses of a Masjid and that satisfying city requirements for use as a place of worship may also be a challenge. However, with adequate planning and some minimum remodeling, the older building can be converted for using as a Masjid. We believe that the aforementioned plan is practical, it requires less financial resources and could be achieved in a relatively short time span.

Location Requirements

The most important consideration in the location of the future Bozeman Masjid is that it should be centrally located and be within a reasonable reach of most Muslims in town. Given that most Muslims in Bozeman are affiliated with the University and live or work on campus, the location for the future Masjid should be close to campus. This may provide another challenge as the campus is located in an older part of the city that is almost totally developed. Older residential neighborhoods with relatively small single family houses surround campus from the north and east sides that may be a good candidate for the Masjid project described above (given that city requirements are satisfied, mainly adequate parking for building users). On the west side of campus, there are smaller older subdivisions with considerably bigger lots. This may become an ideal target for the ICB as the same property could be used for the current Masjid and in the future when the circumstances and needs require, an expansion to the older building could be implemented. The average size of lots is in the proximity of one acre which is an appropriate size for the intended Masjid project.. Given some current information on property values, those properties are only 15%-25% higher in cost than the smaller-lot houses.

ICB - Bozeman Masjid Project – Preliminary Study

Building Requirements

It is estimated that the total number of Muslims currently in Bozeman is in the proximity of 140 to 150. This number is more based on personal observations and the total number of the community could be larger (including both genders and all ages). The Friday prayers attended only by male Muslims on campus may see as many as 60-70 people when classes are in session. In Eid prayers, the number is usually higher as sisters and children normally attend Eid celebrations. Moreover, a few families from neighboring towns may show up for Eid prayers. Those numbers are expected to grow in the future (especially if there is a more appropriate place for Muslims in town) for the following reasons:

1. As the University becomes more known to students from certain Muslim countries, the number is expected to grow according to the trend of the past few years.
2. The level of involvement of Muslims in Islamic rituals and activities is expected to increase with the presence of a more appropriate place and more visible identity.
3. The Masjid is expected to attract more Muslims from outside the state particularly Muslim families who will be encouraged to move to Bozeman for work or study. The presence of Masjid typically means full range of activities for adults of both genders and children that are viewed as essential necessity by most Muslim families.

In estimating future needs of the Muslim community which determines building requirements, 10 and 15-year time spans and an annual growth rate in Muslim population of 6% are assumed for future forecasts. Using this information and current community estimates, it is reasonable to expect that:

In the year 2019:

1. The number of Muslims in town will be in the proximity of 270.
2. Assuming 20% increase in attendance rate of current Muslims if a Masjid were present now, the number of people attending Friday prayers would be as high as 80-90 Muslims including a small number of sisters who are not accommodated now in Friday prayers.
3. Future attendance of Friday prayers based on 10-year time span and 6% annual growth rate will be in the order of 140 to 160.
4. There will be around 160-170 Muslims attending Eid prayers and celebrations.

It should be noted the 6% growth rate assumed in the above forecasts is very modest compared with the rate of growth in many Muslim communities across the U.S.

ICB - Bozeman Masjid Project – Preliminary Study

Cost Estimates

There is a wide range of prices for properties in older subdivisions surrounding the Montana State University campus. According to local real estate market, old houses on smaller lots that are located to the east and north sides of campus are currently valued in the range of \$340,000-\$400,000. On the other hand, older houses on larger one-acre lots are currently valued in the range of \$400,000 to \$450,000. Consistent with the ICB vision, those houses on larger lots are considered a very good fit for the Bozeman Masjid project. It should be mentioned here that the real estate market in Bozeman is the highest in the state due to its touristic location. The real estate market and the construction market have been slowing down since 2006. This will hopefully help with the cost of achieving the Bozeman Masjid project should the property purchase takes place in the near future.

PROJECT FUNDRAISING

Fundraising Status

With the grace of Allah (SWT), the ICB has raised over \$200,000 in the last three and a half years. The ICB arranged fundraising campaigns in Bozeman during the month of Ramadan of 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009, raised funds outside those campaigns, and outreached several other communities in different states typically by arranging Friday prayer fundraisers. All people who are involved in this fundraising effort are professionals and students who volunteered to be part of the fundraising and outreach campaigns. The ICB also solicited donation through advertisements in a couple of Islamic newsletters and magazines. The ICB plans to use other fundraising opportunities on campus to locally raise funds for the project.

Challenges

Fundraising for the Bozeman Masjid Project has never been easy. The major challenges of particular significance are:

- The number of professionals who live and work on a permanent basis in town is considered very small. It is those professionals who typically represent the major source of community contribution towards community projects.
- The City of Bozeman is somewhat geographically isolated as with many other cities and towns in Northwestern USA. The closest major city is Salt Lake City, Utah which is around 450 miles from Bozeman (7-8 hours driving). All other major cities to the west, east, or south are more than 10 hours driving from Bozeman. This geographic fact largely restricts the ICB ability to outreach other Muslim communities seeking support to our Masjid project.
- The community resources to outreach other Muslim communities are relatively limited for this major undertaking.

CLOSING REMARKS

The Islamic Center of Bozeman (ICB) started the Bozeman Masjid Project in summer 2006. It will be the first Masjid in the State of Montana and is also intended to serve smaller Muslim communities in neighboring towns and cities. The ICB has formed a task force with the charge of preparing a preliminary study to guide in project development and fundraising efforts. The study suggests that purchasing an old property on a larger lot and using it as a Masjid with some minimum remodeling seems the best option for the Bozeman Masjid project. The estimated cost of purchasing older property on larger lot would be in the range of \$400,000 to \$450,000. This cost estimate is based on current real estate market and will be used as a guide in defining fundraising goals and objectives. With the help from Allah (SWT), ICB has already raised over \$200,000 in last three and a half years. Therefore, we are almost half way in reaching our goal of establishing the first ever Masjid in the State of Montana. We still need your generous support to reach our goal. It should be noted that the forecasts made in this report were based on an annual growth rate of Muslim population of 6% which is considered modest, as higher rates are observed in many other Muslim communities.