

# **Bozeman Masjid Project Preliminary Study**

**Islamic Center of Bozeman (ICB)**

**Masjid Project Task Force**

November 2011

## **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 and a small number of students live with their families. The professional Muslims in town consist of several families with numbers fluctuating from year to year. Almost all those families are affiliated with the university in town.

The conditions of Muslims in Bozeman and in Montana in general is unacceptable 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 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 identified two options for establishing the future masjid in Bozeman: to purchase a land with appropriate location near campus on which to build the masjid or to purchase an existing property and remodel it to meet the needs of the masjid project. Regardless of the situation, the masjid needs to meet the strict city regulation concerning public places and community centers. The estimated cost of the project was found to be in the range of \$500,000 to \$550,000. These cost estimates are based on current real estate market and the construction cost needed for building the future masjid or for retrofitting an existing property. The study recommends

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that this estimate be used as a guide in setting fundraising goals and objectives. With the help from Allah (SWT), ICB has already raised over \$275,000 towards the project. Therefore, we are more than 50% towards reaching our goal of establishing the first ever Masjid in the State of Montana. We need your generous support to make a change in the life of our Muslim community.

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## 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 limited 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).

The number of Muslims in Bozeman has been increasing in the last few years. This is partly due to the increase in the number of 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 MSU campus in Bozeman. 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 other US government programs.

### 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 the main reason why Muslims are not encouraged to move to Bozeman or to other cities in the State of Montana. Therefore, the number of Muslims who work for

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Montana State University is considerably lower than what is typical in all other U.S. universities. Same observation applies to professionals who work for other major employers in the area.

### **Current Status**

The condition of Muslims in Bozeman and in Montana in general is unacceptable 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.

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## **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, information on the real estate market, city regulations and requirements, and the characteristics of the area surrounding the university had to be examined in depth in order to develop and update the Bozeman masjid plan.

Upon examining all feasible options at this time, it was concluded that only two options are most practical and realistic in satisfying the needs of the masjid project. The first is to purchase a vacant lot, prepare designs and secure City approvals, and build the masjid given community needs. It is important to mention that the vacant lots in the areas surrounding the university are very limited in number as most these areas were developed long time ago. The second option is to purchase an existing property, secure City approvals, and remodel the property to meet the City requirements and the masjid needs. The drawback in the latter option is that most of the properties surrounding campus are old houses that may not lend themselves well to remodeling and thus not appropriate for the masjid project. The other drawback with the latter option is the difficulty in retrofitting old properties to meet City requirements for public buildings and community centers.

## **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. On the west side of campus, there are smaller older subdivisions with considerably bigger lots. However, these tend to be farther from campus than other properties in the North and East sides.

## **Building Requirements**

It is estimated that the total number of Muslims currently in Bozeman is in the proximity of 150 to 180. 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 are usually attended by 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

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show up for Eid prayers. Those numbers could grow in the future (especially if there will be a masjid 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 year time spans and an annual growth rate in Muslim population of 4% are assumed for future forecasts. Using this information and current community estimates, it is reasonable to expect that:

### In the year 2021:

1. The number of Muslims in town will be in the proximity of 260.
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 130 to 140.
4. There will be around 150-160 Muslims attending Eid prayers and celebrations.

It should be noted that the 4% growth rate assumed in the above forecasts is very modest compared with the rate of growth in many Muslim communities across the U.S.

### **Cost Estimates**

There is a wide range of prices for properties in the older subdivisions surrounding the Montana State University campus. According to local real estate market, old houses on bigger lots that can be converted to a community center are currently valued in the range of \$340,000-\$400,000. Retrofitting and remodeling work to convert to Masjid while meeting City requirements could cost another \$100,000 to \$150,000. On the other hand, vacant lands that could meet City requirements could cost ICB \$120,000-\$150,000 in the current real estate market. This estimate is based on two potential sites that were considered recently by the ICB for the masjid project. Building the masjid at acceptable specifications while meeting the City requirements could cost anywhere between \$350,000 to \$400,000.

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Therefore, the total cost for the masjid project will be in the range of \$500,000 to \$550,000 given appropriate planning is provided throughout the design and construction phases of this project.

## PROJECT FUNDRAISING

### Fundraising Status

With the grace of Allah (SWT), the ICB has raised over \$275,000 in the last five years. The ICB arranged fundraising campaigns in Bozeman during the month of Ramadan since 2006, 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.

### 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 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 to 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 identified two options for building the masjid in the city of Bozeman. The

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first is to build the masjid on a vacant land in one of the areas surrounding the MSU campus. The other option is to purchase an existing property and remodel it for use as a masjid. The two options have to meet the City requirements and regulations regarding building community centers. Those requirements are relatively stringent and require more effort and higher costs compared with residential buildings. It is important to note that meeting City requirements could be more difficult in case of retrofitting an existing property. The estimated cost of the project will be in the range of \$500,000 to \$550,000. This cost estimate is based on current real estate market and will be used as a guide in setting fundraising goals and objectives. With the help from Allah (SWT), ICB has already raised over \$275,000 in the past five years. Therefore, we are already 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.