

HISTORY OF THE UMMAH SOCIETY IN HALIFAX

During the 1990's the Muslim community in Halifax grew rapidly, exceeding 10,000 Muslims. During that time, the Dartmouth Mosque used for classes by the Maritime Muslim Academy became insufficient to accommodate school students.

The Maritime Muslim Academy (MMA) with the help of the Islamic Association started searching for suitable space in Halifax that could accommodate the Islamic School as well as the weekly Friday congregation. There were several unsuccessful attempts to purchase property in Halifax, until 1996 when the City of Halifax advertised the Chebucto Schools for sale; an ad subsequently dropped by the city due to the limited number of bids. However, the Islamic Association was able to reach a "lease-to-buy" deal that allowed MMA to use School Building "C" without specific details or time frame.

In 1996, the Muslim Academy moved to the upper level of the school building "C", while the basement was used as a prayer hall (Mosque). In 1998 the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) offered the sale of all 3 school properties. Only the Maritime Muslim Academy and the Maritime Conservatory of Music were allowed to submit proposals to buy all 3 school buildings. However, MMA and the Music Conservatory reached mutual agreement and decided to split the deal; submitting one joint proposal instead of competing to buy all three buildings. After lengthy negotiations, it was agreed that MMA would buy buildings B & C at a cost

of \$157,500 and the Music Conservatory would buy the heritage school building A.

While MMA was fundraising to purchase the property, the purchase price was donated by members of the Saudi Royal Family as an ongoing charity in the name of a late prince who died on the Swissair Flight 111 that crashed on September 2nd, 1998, into the Atlantic Ocean near the Canadian coastline not far from Halifax. The deal of purchasing two School buildings was finalized and closed in December 1999.

In January 2000, MMA board of directors appointed a “Building Committee” composed of representative members of the diverse Muslim community in the region with a mandate to help MMA decide on the best uses that would serve the Muslim community in the region. Four months of meetings, deliberation and consultation with experts assessing building structural conditions concluded in April 2000. The committee recommended a long-term plan that included demolishing building B due to the poor structural conditions and rebuilding a new structure that could accommodate a large Mosque as well as other facilities to serve MMA needs and to be a community center for all Halifax Regional Municipality Muslims.

In 2001, the work was complicated by an inspector claiming that all 3 school buildings on the site are designated as “Municipal Heritage”, preventing MMA from making such changes. It took MMA four years of continuous hard work to prove to the HRM officials that buildings B & C were not included in the ‘heritage designation’ of building A, eventually succeeding in May 2005. Subsequently, MMA started the search process

for a suitable Mosque design. Eventually, the fourth design brought forward by the Imam and a community member portraying a modern Mosque with additional facilities such as a multi-purpose hall, and community center was favorably and unanimously approved by the Muslim community.

A major feature of the new design is that the building has an inviting appearance, and blends very well with other existing structures. This is to bring harmony and preserve the outside appearance of the heritage building. New Building and Technical committees worked together with substantial autonomy overseeing different construction phases. The prayer hall was completed and opened for use by the community on August 1st, 2011 .

Today, the Ummah Society strives to achieve a vision once thought impossible. Having been developed into an inclusive institution that includes a school, a daycare, a community center and more; Ummah Society acts as a spiritual, educational, social and a supporting institution for the Muslim minority community in Halifax through a plethora of different services. What was once a place to pray is now much more; a place for kids and adults alike to learn, to help the needy, to get together for different social occasions, and most importantly a place where the wisdom of living Islam materializes.

Ummah Society also acts as a beacon for the region through which everyone can get to know what Islam is all about. Islamic awareness lectures, free books and resources for those interested in learning about Islam, as well as different interfaith events where people from various

backgrounds could engage and learn about Islam firsthand through different activities, multicultural festivals, and much more...working towards a future of mutual understanding, respect and communal harmony.