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# Irvine Muslims look for a new home near the Great Park

Islamic Center of Irvine is hoping to expand into Lennar Corps. Lifelong Learning District.

By SEAN EMERY  
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

IRVINE – Muslim leaders have set their sights on a new home near the Great Park, with officials saying the Islamic Center of Irvine has outgrown its mosque.

Islamic Center President Issa Edah-Tally at a recent fundraiser outlined a plan to build a new facility in the Lifelong Learning District, which represents the first phase of the Lennar Corp. Great Park Neighborhoods development envisioned to surround the 1,347-acre central park.

"There is nothing fixed, nothing concrete, but a potential site is there, and we understand from Lennar that they would entertain organizations such as ourselves in the Lifelong Learning District," Edah-Tally said. "The Great Park is just one mile down the road from us, so it is a very convenient location."

The Islamic Center of Irvine opened in 2004, providing local Muslim's with the city's first real mosque and demonstrating the growth of the Islamic faith in Orange County. The center is behind a strip mall near Jeffrey Road and the I-5 Freeway, next to the South Coast Chinese Cultural Center and the New Horizon Islamic School.

Along with prayer services, the center also provides a home for a variety of recreational, counseling and educational services. But supporters say the center has operated at capacity since its inception, even as demand for its services continues to grow.

"After Sept. 11, there were fears of profiling, so people were staying away from Mosques, but that has died down," said Todd Gallinger, an Irvine Muslim who recently ran for City Council. "There is a gradual growth both in terms of numbers and in consumption of religious activities."

Edah-Tally said the 1,200 to 1,500 worshipers who come to the center for Friday prayers often overflow into the courtyard. Other major events, such as a service celebrating the end of Ramadan, have drawn more than 3,000 people, requiring special permits and temporary tents and parking.

"We are bursting at the seams," Edah-Tally said. "With all the new construction of homes in Irvine, many Muslims have moved into the area to be close to the mosque and the New Horizon elementary school. There is so much more we can do if we had the right type of facility."

The Islamic Center is also looking at alternate sites, Edah-Tally said, and it is still too early to tell if they would run two-locations or simply move to the new mosque.

Edah-Tally said the developer has indicated that it might contact those interested in being a part of the Lifelong Learning District by summer 2009.

Lennar officials didn't return calls for comment.

The Islamic Center has begun putting money aside for the expansion, as well as touting it during fundraising efforts, but a specific price tag and design is still unclear.

Meanwhile, Great Park leaders are also looking at including cultural and religious groups within the city-controlled portions of the renovated El Toro airbase, but say there are no plans to include houses of worship.

Instead, park leaders are exploring a multi-cultural center that would celebrate the "tapestry of cultures and traditions" within the city, said Councilman Larry Agran, the parks chairman.

"I'd like to see it be a reflection of all the cultural and ethnic diversity that is so evident in the Irvine community," Agran said.

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The Islamic Center of  
Irvine first opened in  
2004.

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PHOTO



**Irvine Muslims  
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Visitors look around the  
men's prayer room  
during the 2004 grand  
opening of the Islamic  
Center of Irvine.

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**Irvine Muslims  
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The prayer hall at the  
Islamic Center of  
Irvine.

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