

Muslim Society buys Guelph Christian Community School | Your community newspaper in Guelph, Ontario

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By Doug Hallett Guelph Tribune

The Muslim Society of Guelph is buying the Guelph Community Christian School and plans to turn the Water Street building into an Islamic church, and perhaps later into Guelph's first Islamic school. Some Muslim families in Guelph now send their children to Islamic schools in Waterloo Region, and people will be surveyed to gauge interest in establishing one here, Muslim Society of Guelph president Muhammed Sayyed said Monday. "If there is a demand, if there is feasibility, we may consider it," he said in an interview. The Muslim Society of Guelph was the successful bidder for 286 Water St., which the Guelph Community Christian School put up for sale after buying the former College Avenue school from the Upper Grand District School Board last year for \$3.1 million. It is doing a \$2-million renovation to the building at 196 College Ave. W. and plans to move its 230 students there in September, says principal Bob Moore. The Christian school has signed an agreement of purchase and sale for its Water Street site with the Muslim Society, which currently meets at 44 Marlborough Rd., Moore said. He said the school's board intends to make the sale price public "in the not too distant future." The board decided to sell to the Muslim Society following a competitive bidding process, Moore told the Tribune in an email. "Similar to Guelph Community Christian School, the Muslim Society will be using the facility as a place for serving families, and for their faith-based educational and cultural needs," he said. "Guelph Community Christian School has held its classes on Water Street for over 50 years and has enjoyed good relations with the neighbourhood," Moore said. "It hopes that the neighbourhood will also welcome the new owners." Sayyed said the Water Street building is attractive to the Muslim Society for its central location in the city and for its design. "Literally we don't need to change anything," he said. It has 11 times as much space as the Marlborough Road building, which the Muslim Society bought in 1995 and which it now plans to sell, Sayyed said. The Muslim Society of Guelph has existed since 1973, but the Marlborough Road building was its first prayer hall, he said. The busiest time of the week for the new Islamic church on Water Street will be Friday prayers, which Sayyed described as "gathering prayers" that are equivalent to the Sunday services of Christian churches. The Marlborough Street site is too small for this, and the Muslim Society currently holds these services in a hall at the University of Guelph. He said 250 to 300 worshippers are expected to come to the new church on Water Street for Friday prayers, which will exceed the capacity of the building's current 50-plus-spot parking lot. However, "we will not be bothering anyone," Sayyed said, as people will be asked to access the new church via Municipal Street and Denver Road. "We are telling members not to drive down Water Street," in order to help preserve a good relationship with the neighbourhood, he said. They'll also be urged to car-pool to Friday prayers, he added. The Muslim Society intends to try to lease some land owned by Ontario Hydro on Denver Road to provide additional space for parking, Sayyed said. The Muslim Society has prayer services five times every day, he said. The first is held a half-hour before sunrise, and the last one is 1 ½ hours after sunset. In 17 years at the Marlborough Road site, "we never had any complaints" about the early and late services, which don't attract a lot of worshippers, he said. Sayyed said the purchase of the Water Street building will allow the Muslim Society to consolidate the religious studies that it now offers to a total of about 150 people at that and at two other locations, namely its Marlborough Road building and Centennial Collegiate. He said the busiest

time of year at the new church on Water Street will be Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which starts July 20 this year and lasts 30 days. The Muslim Society is very happy to be able to buy the Water Street property, he said. "We worked really hard to get that, and the school was very, very professional . . . we are very happy with the whole transaction."