



**Council Member Motion**  
**For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of September 8 2022**

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**To:** Committee of the Whole **Date:** August 2 2022  
**From:** Mayor Helps  
**Subject:** Being Muslim in Victoria and Saanich – 2023 Budget Recommendation

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**BACKGROUND**

In October 2021 the City of Victoria, the Victoria Foundation and the Canadian Urban Institute hosted a conference in Victoria, "CUIxVictoria, Conversations for Our Shared Future." This three-day event included a number of panel presentations and workshops focussed specifically on equity, diversity and inclusion, and how to build more inclusive communities.

A key evening plenary panel was "Belonging in Victoria: Muslim Voices for Change," which was a powerful sharing of Muslim women's experiences of Islamophobia, racism and resilience in Victoria and the region. As part of the panel, they provided recommendations to the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich and to both Sannich PD and Victoria PD. Both mayors as well as police personnel and police board members were in attendance at the panel.

Following the conference and the presentation of recommendations, Mayors Haynes and Helps have been working together with a group of Muslim women, Saanich and Victoria staff, and Victoria and Saanich police chiefs to action the recommendations that fall within operational jurisdiction and did not require additional resources from either the District or the City.

Over the past year, we have worked to build trust and take some small steps forward. These include Saanich and Victoria hosting a Muslim art exhibit (Saanich, July 27-September 5, Victoria, January 2023), installing signs about where to make wudu (washing before prayer) in public facilities, and we've also made connections for the women to the Greater Victoria Public Library Saanich and Victoria board members and library staff about the potential of starting a Muslim women's book club.

We have written to school district chairs and private schools in the City and the District and requested meetings to learn more about anti-Islamophobia work that's already happening in schools and to open doors for the women to get more involved in this work. These meetings will happen in September 2022. We've also been working with VicPD and Saanich PD to understand more about hate-crime reporting, data gathering, and what supports there are for Muslim people, and others in the community who experience hate-related incidents.

According to the [NCCM National Summit on Islamophobia Recommendations](#), more Muslims have been killed in targeted hate-attacks in Canada than any other G-7 country in the past five years because of Islamophobia.

Muslim Canadians have endured every-day aggressions while bearing witness to more violent acts of Islamophobia. Muslim Canadians report being regularly harassed and subject to microaggressions at work, school and in public spaces. Mosques and community centers have come under violent attack. Canada has become a country where wearing a hijab can put a target on your back, and where many mosques now require security.

Victoria and Saanich are not immune from these kinds of trends and concerted effort and resources are required to continue to implement the recommendations made in October 2021 and to make Victoria and Saanich welcoming communities that create a sense of belonging and safety for all.

## **Recommendations put forward from the Panel on Muslim Voices**

Addressing the recommendations put forward at the Voices for Change panel is whole of community approach involving Muslim community members and the mosque, City and District staff, VicPD and Saanich PD staff, and, as per the recommendation below, a one-time expenditure to be shared by the City and hopefully by the District of Saanich in 2023 to engage a consultant to manage the next phase of the work, which we have all be doing off the side of our desks for the past year.

### **0.1 Environmental Scan**

**Desired Outcome:** This environmental scan is needed to have a good sense of what is currently done in BC and across Canada in regard to Muslim community support and Islamophobia. We want to look at the four themes that are listed below and additionally, any additional sectors we haven't yet considered.

What are other communities doing on interfaith engagement and anti-Islamophobia work? Are there gaps that our work together can fill? Are there best practices from elsewhere?

## **Theme #1: Normalizing Islam: Positive Representation, and Visibility**

### **1.1 Annual public Eid festival and proclamation from Victoria and Saanich Councils**

**Desired Outcome:** Celebration of Eid in Victoria/Saanich through a public festival and proclamations.

### **1.2 Public art exhibitions across the city and district**

**Desired Outcome:** Greater awareness of Islamic cultural traditions, and increased opportunity for interaction, inclusion, and engagement between Muslims and other communities in Greater Victoria.

### 1.3 Quiet/meditative/prayer spaces in city halls, city libraries, and recreational spaces

**Desired Outcome:** Greater sense of belonging for Muslims in the city through the acknowledgment of cultural holidays and space for prayer. Greater awareness of Islamic cultural traditions, and increased opportunity for interaction, inclusion, and engagement between Muslims and other communities in Greater Victoria.

**Significance:** A shared interfaith space in which to pray, in places that Muslims already use, work in or pass through, meets practicing Muslim's everyday needs and allows for the normalisation of Islamic practices.

### 1.4 During Ramadan have an event at the Save on Foods Memorial Arena for the Muslim Community and the general public to hear recitations.

**Desired Outcome:** Greater sense of belonging for Muslims in the city through the acknowledgment of cultural holidays and space for prayer. Greater awareness of Islamic cultural traditions, and increased opportunity for interaction, inclusion, and engagement between Muslims and other communities in Greater Victoria.

## Theme #2: Education

### 2.1 Develop a resourced, Muslim-led, school-based advocate system to confront Islamophobia in schools.

### 2.2 Provide space for culturally safe dialogue and healing.

### 2.3 Coordinate a review of Islamic resources that can be shared across school boards as needed (during Ramadan, when there are global incidents of terrorism, etc.)

**Desired Outcome:** Making schools safer. Providing support to Muslim children and youth who have to carry the emotional labour of representing Islam and diversity in schools.

**Significance:** Based on lived experience and anecdotal data. Islamophobia and racism in schools is currently underreported and poorly addressed.

## Theme #3: Data

### 3.1 Collate available sources of data on hate crimes, racism, and Islamophobia in the City and District

**Desired Outcome:** To ensure public officials, Muslims, the general public, and other stakeholders across sectors have access to credible data that can inform the development of relevant programs and policies to address Islamophobia and racism.

**Significance:** Evidence informed programming and policies are needed. The extent of Islamophobia and racism is often underreported.

3.2 Based on the sources of data listed above, provide and publicly share accurate and up-to-date data on Islamophobia at City and District level. Utilise this data to inform policy development at the City and District level.

**Desired Outcome:** To ensure public officials, Muslims, the general public, and other stakeholders across sectors have access to credible data that can inform the development of relevant programs and policies to address Islamophobia and racism

**Significance:** Evidence informed programming and policies are needed. The extent of Islamophobia and racism is often underreported.

3.3 Provide ongoing opportunities for Muslims (and other equity deserving and faith-based groups) to tell their stories of racism, and discrimination

**Desired Outcome:** People in Victoria and Saanich have a deeper understanding about how to address racism and Islamophobia.

**Significance:** Evidence informed programming and policies are needed. The extent of Islamophobia and racism is often underreported.

#### **Theme #4: Safety and Policing**

4.1 Review levels of knowledge and skill in addressing hate crimes and Islamophobia within Sannich PD and VicPD across emergency and non-emergency lines, and community engagement.

**Desired Outcome:** There is clarity around the legal definition of a hate crime and people know who to go to in order to report a hate crime. When there is hate directed action that is not a hate crime people know where they can go for support.

**Significance:** To create a stronger sense of trust between Muslim communities and police.

4.2 Fact and resource sheets developed and shared and translated (Arabic, Somali, Urdu) on what to do if community members need help

**Desired Outcome:** Identifying instances that may lead to hate (not people, but body language, phrases etc.), managing moments during acts of Islamophobia (how to ignore, find help, defuse the situation etc.) and what to do after an act of Islamophobia (how to report it and how to find support after)

**Significance:** To create accessible and clear information for managing instances of Islamophobia.

#### **Proposed Noise Bylaw Housekeeping Change**

As part of our work together in the last year we also identified one other item that is a small but important change to make our communities more inclusive of all. These are housekeeping changes to the noise bylaw, so they require a decision of Council. Victoria's noise bylaw currently states that the following are exempt: "the use of bells or chimes by churches, and the use of

carillons where such carillons have been lawfully erected.” The group recommends changing the wording of the bylaw to be less prescriptive and more inclusive, to change the language from “church” to something more inclusive such as site of worship.” This work is not urgent or time sensitive and can be done as and when staff resources are available.

## **Conclusion**

To continue to support this work, a one-time expenditure of \$31,000, to hopefully be shared between Saanich and Victoria, is required to engage a consultant to have responsibility for the implementation of this important work in 2023.

The consultant will:

- Work with partners to support Masjid al-Iman Muslim community members and other local Muslims
- Track progress on recommendations
- Provide regular updates for key stakeholders, City staff in the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Office in Victoria and District staff in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion office once established
- Work on grant applications to secure future programming
- Support the implementation of prioritized recommendations with project management

Appendix A outlines a draft project timeline.

The Muslim women who have been volunteering their time for the past year in this work with Mayors Haynes and Helps will continue to serve in a volunteer capacity and will continue to support the work by advising and consulting regarding community collaborations (libraries, art, policies etc.) and also liaising with the Masjid.

## **Recommendation**

1. That Council consider a budget allocation of \$17,500 to support the work as outlined in this report in the 2023 budget and that this report be included as part of the 2023 budget package for Council’s consideration.
2. That Victoria Council write to Saanich Council requesting matching funding in 2023 for this initiative once their Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has been established.
3. That Council direct staff to amend the City’s noise bylaw to make the reference to “churches” more inclusive of all places of worship.

Respectfully submitted,



Mayor Helps



Councillor Dubow

## **List of Attachments**

- Appendix A: Being Muslim in Victoria and Saanich Project Work