

## INTRODUCTION

This document was prepared based on the request and approval of the Islamic Society of Central Jersey (ISCJ) Board of Trustees. A Steering Committee was established in August, 2014 to help the Board choose among numerous competing concepts and alternatives for the development of the ISCJ campus in order to serve the interests and priorities of the ISCJ community. The mandate of the Steering Committee was to develop and implement a comprehensive and objective process to identify and evaluate concepts from a range of prudent alternatives related to the overall ISCJ Master Plan refresh.

The Steering Committee worked collaboratively with the ISCJ Board and various stakeholders of the ISCJ Community (see attached list of their meetings) and compiled a long list of alternatives, including the mosque expansion, NUI school expansion, office building, parking garage, sports facility, cultural center, youth/senior recreation center, senior housing, assisted living facility, banquet hall and many others that meet the needs of the community while making ISCJ financially sustainable.

The Steering Committee also worked through the Board to apply the following criteria: (1) Consistency with ISCJ vision, mission, and goals; (2) Consistency with stakeholder interests and priorities; (3) Cost; (4) Major donor interest (5) Land acquisition needs; (6) Traffic/parking impacts; (7) Sustainability; (8) Revenue potential; (9) Township required approvals; (10) Schedule, Impacts, Advantages/Disadvantages; and others. This narrative is organized in a sequence to provide historical context, facts about the 2006 approved ISCJ Master Plan, and a brief description of the updated Master Plan as approved by the ISCJ Board.

## HISTORY

The ISCJ was founded in the 1970s by a few Muslim students from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. This small Muslim community was guided by a vision to preserve and perpetuate the Islamic heritage and uphold its ethical and intellectual standards. The pursuit of this vision and the gradual expansion of the Muslim community are among the main factors that transformed the Islamic community from the small nucleus of the early 1970's to a thriving community it is now.

Currently, the community is represented by an integrated institution that offers more than just a place of worship. The ISCJ is a diverse community comprising Muslims of many backgrounds, their children, including American Muslims, and immigrants from all over the globe. The ISCJ is full of activity on a daily basis; in addition, the institution provides a number of services as listed below:

- A full-time Islamic school that started in 1993 with an enrollment of 27 students from Pre-K to Grade 1. The school currently has an enrollment of 500 plus students from Pre-K to Grade 12. Noor-UI-Iman School is approved by the NJ Department of Education, is a member of the NJ Association of Independent Schools, and is accredited by NJAIS. The school participates in inter-scholastic activities with other private and public schools in the spirit of dialogue and getting to know one another better (Model UN, Model Congress, Mock Trials, basketball, soccer, and a variety of interfaith and community service activities only to name the few).
- A weekend school providing Islamic and Arabic education with a growing demand for enrollment. The Weekend School was formed in the late 1970s to fulfill one of the main objectives when ISCJ was established. Initially, the Weekend School had only one session during Sunday with less than 40 students. Currently, the Weekend School has over 600 students between both Saturday and Sunday Sessions.
- An esteemed Imam whose responsibilities include Daily Prayers, Friday Prayers, Eid Prayers, Funeral Prayers / Services, Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, Saturday / Sunday Children Islamic School, Khatmeh Quran, Quranic Studies on Saturday and Sunday, Matrimonial Introductions, Wedding Services, New Born Baby Services, Islamic Arbitration & Counseling, Teaching of Islamic culture and traditions, and Acting as counselor to Muslims.
- Qur'an Academy with an exceptional director leading this effort was established with classes 6 days a week and now has over 120 students.
- Seminars and workshops are conducted year-round covering diverse subjects hosted by prominent speakers.
- Library services with a comprehensive collection of Islamic literature. This includes free distribution of focused Islamic literature to the non-Muslim community.
- Zakat-ul-Mal is collected and fairly distributed to families in need.
- Islamic funeral and burial services are provided to an extended Islamic community. This includes making available Islamic burial plots in exclusively Muslim cemeteries.
- In addition to making the mosque's facilities available for the five regular prayers, ISCJ religious services include two Friday prayers with a varied group of esteemed khateeb each week, Ramadan taraweeh prayers that attract Muslims from the surrounding communities, and Eid celebrations attended by thousands of Muslims from the greater NJ, NY, and PA area.
- The community members volunteer their efforts and financial support for national and international emergencies such as the Asian Tsunami, Katrina disaster, the Haiti earthquake as well as South East Asia's earthquake. In addition community members donate their time and financial resources to the area soup kitchens.
- The ISCJ is a member of the South and North Brunswick Clergy Association. Interfaith meetings and exchanges are held to establish a strong dialogue and build bridges with the extended central Jersey faith-based and minority communities.
- Open workshops are held on pertinent topics such as Islam, human rights, social justice and other vital issues.

- Political outreach symposiums are held on political activism and mobilization.
- Other community activities include a variety of efforts performed by our young Muslims from sports to scouting, to community giving campaigns and Red Cross blood drives.
- In addition, there are numerous activities performed by the committees and volunteers throughout the community.

## APPROVED MASTER PLAN

Due to the continuous growth of ISCJ, there is a need for expansion of the existing infrastructure for all facets of services provided by ISCJ to its members and community at large. In 2006 a Master Plan was prepared by ISCJ and its consultants that was submitted and later approved by the South Brunswick Zoning Board.

Specific site improvements as approved in the 2006 Master Plan included:

- 612 parking spaces comprising of both surface and bi-level parking garage.
- Construction of approximately 40,000 square feet of new one story office building.
- Construction of approximately 87,000 square feet new two-story NUI school building.
- Construction of approximately 10,700 square feet addition to the existing mosque structure.
- Conversion of Lot 116 dwelling into a burial preparation house.
- Construction of storm water retention basins.
- Construction of new access driveways from adjacent roads and for improved internal circulation.
- New landscaping and lighting

## CURRENT SITE CONDITIONS

Since its inception, the ISCJ facility has changed to accommodate the growing needs of the community. Currently the existing ISCJ property consists of approximately 16.54-acres in the Township of South Brunswick. In 2006, ISCJ received approval from the Township for the Master Plan Expansion Project that included an expanded mosque, new permanent school building, new office building, new parking structure, and funeral services within a renovated building on the property. In 2009 funeral services became available for the first time in the fully licensed facility.

A phased construction approach was undertaken and in 2012, ISCJ completed Phase I of the NUI school construction. In 2014, Phase II was completed. Some school activities continue to

take place in Modular 3. The new school accommodates classrooms for NUI and the weekend school; however, the library, cafeteria, auditorium, and gymnasium are part of Phase III, which has not yet been constructed.

The mosque expansion has recently been started to increase capacity to accommodate the large congregations on Friday prayers, to create a dedicated women's prayer area, to increase the size and number of bathrooms, to increase the size and functionality of the multi-purpose room, handicap friendly corridors, drop-off and musallah space, additional meeting and office space and rooms for babysitting, youth and seniors among other major improvements. The office building which was envisioned as a source of revenue for ISCJ, and the parking structure have not yet been constructed.

## **ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS**

To date, only a portion of the 2006 approved Master Plan has been implemented at the ISCJ site. In order to account for the changing needs of the community, to fully implement the approved Master Plan, and to find the preferred development alternates that meet the vision of ISCJ in a cost effective and timely manner, the Steering Committee developed this narrative. An alternative analysis was performed to evaluate combinations of approved and some new development scenarios, their effect on the site and how to best meet the needs of the ISCJ members, patrons and community. A report containing more than 11 alternatives was completed in April 2015 and the findings were presented to the ISCJ Board and stakeholders.

## **PROPOSED UPDATED MASTER PLAN CONCEPTS**

As a result of the objective driven alternatives analysis two (2) main concepts have emerged as proposed updates to the previously approved Master Plan.

1. To accommodate the needs of the students, youth, adults and seniors, a proposed sports facility will take the place of the office building. The approximately 40 thousand square feet sports facility would provide an indoor temperature controlled facility for basketball, soccer and a variety of other sports. This facility will be developed by an investor from the ISCJ community and/or an outside investor.

The 2006 Master Plan envisioned a revenue-generating office building between the school parking lot and detention basin. However, there is an over-abundance of office space already available along Route 1 in South Brunswick and adjacent communities. The ISCJ Board with stakeholder's input decided that office building is no more feasible. Given the need for a sports facility, the ISCJ Board has now approved the idea of the general design and construction of the sports facility. Preliminary discussions are underway with internal and external investors.

Pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation to and from the facility will also be considered in the design process. The sports facility will de-intensify the original parking requirements and traffic circulation demand compared to the office building.

2. To accommodate the needs of our seniors and founding members of the ISCJ, a senior housing complex is proposed behind the NUI School building. The complex would provide approximately 44 housing units for seniors over age 55, in one or two bedroom units. The complex would provide a walking path to the masjid, common area for seniors to socialize and the units would be available for purchase at competitive market prices. Similar to the sports facility, this initiative will require no fundraising or donations.

A comprehensive pedestrian and traffic circulation plan with landscaping is in development to ensure safe movement of children and seniors around the campus. Parking for the senior housing units will be adjacent to the units. A group of individuals from the community will form a corporation and invest in the project.

In addition to the two new changes to the 2006 Master Plan described above, the NUI Board is proposing to revise the approved NUI Phase 3 plan. NUI would like to replace the proposed auditorium with 15 additional classrooms. The bi-level parking garage will remain in the Master Plan. The masjid expansion is already underway and has already received the Township's approval.

## NEXT STEPS

The ISCJ Board is keenly aware of the deep donor fatigue within the community and is thrilled to report that the two new ISCJ initiatives (Sports Facility and Senior Housing) we feel will not require fundraising. Thus, the ISCJ Board has approved to seek approval with the South Brunswick Township Zoning Board for the following changes to the Master Plan in a single application pending Town Hall discussions and General Body meeting.

- Approximately 44 senior housing units behind the school building
- Replacement of the office building with a multiuse Recreation Sports Center
- Revision of the 2006 approved NUI Phase 3 by replacing the approved auditorium with 15 additional classrooms.

**\*\*Town hall meetings will be scheduled in Feb and March 2017 to further communicate the designs, SB zoning board approval process and investor models. In the meantime, please send your questions to the ISCJ Steering committee via email at [steering@iscj.org](mailto:steering@iscj.org). They will be happy to address any questions and meet with you in person or in small groups along with ISCJ Board members.**