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### **3600 Van Horne in Montreal: Mosque or community centre?**

Original address: <http://www.thesuburbannews.ca/content/en/5383>

Author: Dan Delmar

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#### **Original title: Mosque or community centre?**

A small Muslim community centre in Côte des Neiges was thrust into the spotlight at last week's borough council meeting and the centre's president says he doesn't know what all the fuss is about.

The "Centre Socio-Culturel" is located inside a Van Horne Ave. storefront below a condo building that houses dozens of unhappy new homeowners. Last year, the condo owners at 3600 Van Horne at Côte des Neiges Rd. told The Suburban that they were stuck with new, city-subsidized condos in an old building in need of repair, soaring monthly fees they couldn't afford and unsympathetic politicians who have "washed their hands" of the whole situation.

Today, some complain that tenants at the commercial ground-level (which is not owned by the condo cooperative) are violating zoning rules.

"It's not a community centre," a resident told the borough council, "it is a place of worship."

After some initial confusion over what type of facility could be allowed in that locale, it appears as though a Mosque would be completely legal.

The man asked not to be identified but said that he is often woken up early in the morning and late at night by members of the community centre. He said many residents can hear what they believe to be prayer chants coming from underneath them.

“Some say they can hear the sermons from A to Z. They don’t care because they say they have the right. They think they can do whatever they want. It’s not normal to have a place of worship in a residential building!”

Borough spokesperson Michel Therrien said “they’re legit” and zoning regulations in the area allow for a community centre or a place of worship; they have advised the man to continue taking his disturbance complaints to Montreal police.

Abdel Ezzouhairi, the community centre’s president, seemed surprised when The Suburban alerted him to the complaint.

“No one has come to talk to us. I don’t understand this reaction. We have a permit to do these activities,” Ezzouhairi said, adding that members typically frequent the centre between 11 a.m. and 10 p.m. — a time frame the complainant challenges. “It may seem unusual to people but we’re in Ramadan.”

The holy month came to an end last week and Ezzouhairi admitted that there were more people than usual frequenting the centre. Once inside, Ezzouhairi asks that one remove his shoes; the centre consists of one large room, with a soft, blue carpet that has a few straight, white lines pointing (presumably) toward Mecca. He asked that no photos be taken inside the centre.

“It’s not a mosque,” Ezzouhairi said. “It’s just a locale to serve the community.”

There are roughly 200 members of the centre which the Muslim Council of Montreal (MCM), in a 2009 press release, described as a “Mosque/Islamic community centre” called Masjid Tebah.

On Sept. 21, 2009, vandals used rocks to break the centre’s windows during the festival of Eid-al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan. The incident was described by MCM president Salam Elmenyawī as a “hate crime.”

# Mosque or community centre?

*More tension among residents at 3600 Van Horne*

By Dan Delmar  
The Suburban

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