

SEPTEMBER 24, 2010

## Controversies Over Mosques and Islamic Centers Across the U.S.

This [interactive map](#) shows the locations of 35 proposed mosques and Islamic centers that have encountered community resistance in the last two years. Below are brief overviews of each project based on news reports, organized alphabetically by state and then by city. In many cases, the opposition has centered on neighbors' concerns about traffic, noise, parking and property values – the same objections that often greet churches and other houses of worship as well as commercial construction projects. In some communities, however, opponents of mosques also have cited fears about Islam, sharia law and terrorism.

While the map shows only projects that have met resistance, many mosques and Islamic centers have been built in recent years with little or no opposition. See, for example, articles in the [Louisville Courier-Journal](#) and [the Associated Press](#) about newly opened mosques in Kentucky and Pennsylvania.

Currently, there are 1,897 mosques in the U.S., according to Ihsan Bagby, associate professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Kentucky. [The Mosque Study Project 2000](#), sponsored by four Muslim organizations, counted 1,209 mosques across the country in 2000, which suggests that about a third of the mosques in the U.S. have opened in the last decade.

On Sept. 22, the Department of Justice released a [report](#) on cases of discrimination against mosques, synagogues, churches and other religious sites since 2000, when the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, which protects places of worship and other religious uses of property from discrimination and unreasonably burdensome regulation, was signed into law. The Department of Justice is currently monitoring 11 cases of potential land-use discrimination against Muslims, according to [Reuters](#).

**Location:** Lomita, Calif.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of South Bay

**Background:** The proposal called for replacing eight one-story structures with a two-story building that would include classrooms, administrative offices and a prayer space. Some residents objected that the project would increase traffic and that such a large building would not suit the residential neighborhood. Proponents said the expansion would not increase traffic because it was intended to provide better facilities for current worshippers, not to attract new ones.

**Current status:** In March 2010, the Lomita City Council unanimously rejected the proposal, saying the project was too big for the area.

**Source:** [The Daily Breeze](#), [KPCB: Southern California Public Radio](#), [Los Angeles Times](#)

**Location:** Morada, Calif.

**Proposed by:** Masjid Umar Farooq

**Background:** In April 2009, San Joaquin County supervisors approved construction of a 13,820-square-foot mosque. The Morada Area Association, a residents' group, filed a lawsuit on environmental grounds; an email from the group also cited the mosque's "social and cultural implications." Other residents supported the project, saying it could reduce illegal dumping and vandalism in the neighborhood.

**Current status:** In August 2010, the county Board of Supervisors agreed with the county's Grand Jury that officials had sufficiently studied the mosque's environmental impact and had given adequate notice of a public hearing, thus clearing the way for construction.

**Source:** [Lodi News-Sentinel](#), [The Record](#)

**Location:** Santa Clara, Calif.

**Proposed by:** Muslim Community Association

**Background:** A Santa Clara architectural review board had previously approved the Muslim Community Association's plan to add a 64-foot minaret to its mosque. The issue was appealed to the planning commission by a local businessman who contended that the structure would lower property values. He emphasized that his opposition was to the architectural quality of the minaret, not to the mosque itself. A few opponents of the project also voiced concerns about "Islamic domination" of America, according to a news report.

**Current status:** The addition of the minaret was approved in August 2010.

**Source:** [San Jose Mercury News](#)

**Location:** Temecula, Calif.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of Temecula Valley

**Background:** A growing Muslim community in Southern California proposes to build a new mosque with a prayer hall for 150 to 300 people near two existing churches. Opponents have voiced a mixture of objections, ranging from concerns about traffic to fears that Muslims want to impose sharia law. At a small rally in July, some protesters brought dogs in a deliberate effort to offend Muslim sensibilities. But other residents and interfaith groups have expressed support for the proposed mosque.

**Current status:** The city's Planning Commission is scheduled to review the proposal in November 2010.

**Source:** [Time](#)

**Location:** Wallingford, Conn.

**Proposed by:** Tariq Farid

**Background:** Farid petitioned for a zoning variance to build a mosque on residential property. Many residents voiced concerns about traffic and parking, contending that the site should remain residential. One neighbor also expressed worries about Muslims' treatment of women, and proponents of the project suggested that the opposition was biased.

**Current status:** The town's Planning and Zoning Commission unanimously rejected the variance in October 2008, citing concerns about traffic and parking.

**Source:** *The Record-Journal* [May](#), [July](#) and [Oct.](#) 2008

**Location:** White City, Fla.

**Proposed by:** Muslim Friends of Florida International

**Background:** A Muslim group proposed to build an 18,800-square-foot mosque on a 2.9-acre lot, part of which was zoned for religious use. Neighbors expressed concerns about the size of the facility and potential drainage problems. The Muslim group scaled back the design to 14,400-square-feet in an effort to assuage neighbors' concerns.

**Current status:** St. Lucie County Commissioners unanimously approved construction of the mosque in February 2009.

**Source:** *TCPalm* [Feb. 16, 2009](#) and [Feb. 18, 2009](#)

**Location:** Alpharetta, Ga.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of North Fulton

**Background:** The 600-member congregation applied to replace its 2,500-square-foot mosque with a two-story, 15,458-square-foot structure and to construct a much smaller, temporary worship hall that would be converted to a community room and gym once the new mosque was built. Residents cited increased traffic and noise as reasons for opposing the expansion. Alpharetta's City Council denied the proposed expansion in May 2010, citing previous agreements in that the congregation would not seek to expand its mosque.

**Current status:** The Islamic Center sued the city in June, alleging religious discrimination.

**Source:** [WSB Radio News](#), [Appen Newspapers](#), [Alpharetta Neighbor](#)

**Location:** Forsyth County, Ga.

**Proposed by:** Hamzah Islamic Center

**Background:** The proposed mosque would be 25,000 square feet. Opponents objected to the size of the building and the traffic it would bring, contending that it would not be beneficial to the neighborhood.

**Current status:** The Forsyth County Commission approved the plan in October 2009, noting that zoning laws allow a religious facility on the 12-acre site. Residents opposed to the project said they would appeal in court.

**Source:** [Forsyth County News](#)

**Location:** Lilburn, Ga.

**Proposed by:** Dar-E-Abbas congregation

**Background:** The congregation sought to expand two buildings into a 20,000-square-foot mosque and gym, along with a cemetery. Residents said the expansion would cause traffic, noise and parking problems. After the city council rejected the project in November 2009, the congregation filed a federal lawsuit alleging religious discrimination, and tensions mounted in the neighborhood, according to news reports. The court stayed the litigation at the request of both sides in January 2010 as settlement talks continued.

**Current status:** City leaders are updating Lilburn's zoning laws while the city continues legal discussions with the congregation.

**Source:** *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [Nov. 2009](#), [June](#) and [July 2010](#)

**Location:** Des Plaines, Ill.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Community Center of Des Plaines

**Background:** A Muslim congregation that has grown over 25 years from a few families to hundreds of worshippers applied to add 23 parking spaces on its property. Neighbors opposed the proposal, saying the additional parking would ruin the aesthetics of the neighborhood.

**Current status:** The City Council gave the mosque permission to add the parking spaces in July 2010.

**Source:** [The Daily Herald](#)

**Location:** Naperville, Ill.

**Proposed by:** Irshad Learning Center

**Background:** A group of mostly Iranian-born Muslims proposed to build a school and mosque on a 2.9-acre residential lot. The DuPage County Board and zoning officials denied the application in January 2010 after neighbors voiced concerns about parking and late-night worship services, as well as allegations that the Irshad Learning Center had received funds from a Persian charity reportedly being investigated for funding Iran's nuclear program. Supporters of the project filed a federal lawsuit in April 2010, alleging religious discrimination.

**Current status:** The lawsuit is pending, with a hearing scheduled for November 2010.

**Source:** *Naperville Sun* Nov. 2009, Jan. and Aug. 2010 (no longer available online), [Chicago Breaking News Center](#)

**Location:** Chicago, Ill.

**Proposed by:** Faizan e Madina

**Background:** A Chicago-area congregation sought to turn a vacant restaurant into a prayer center in the West Rogers Park neighborhood. Residents voiced concerns about traffic and the aesthetics of the facility. The local chamber of commerce opposed the center, saying it preferred for the site's new occupant to produce tax revenue, which a nonprofit religious group would not do.

**Current status:** In August 2010, the zoning board denied a special use permit. Proponents decided to wait until after the holy month of Ramadan to decide how to proceed.

Sources: [CBS2](#), [Loyola Phoenix](#)

**Location:** Willowbrook, Ill.

**Proposed by:** Muslim Educational Cultural Center of America (MECCA)

**Background:** This group applied for permission to build a three-story building for a mosque, a gym and a school. At an August 2010 hearing, residents voiced concerns about drainage and traffic. Among mosque supporters at a September hearing, one proponent said the board should encourage “mainstream Muslim organizations” like MECCA. Meanwhile, the DuPage County zoning board is considering a ban on new places of worship in unincorporated residential parts of the county. Ban proponents say the timing is coincidental with three mosque proposals in the county; mosque supporters believe anti-Muslim bias is at work.

**Current status:** The board will hold another hearing in October.

**Source:** *Chicago Tribune* [Aug. 13, 2010](#) [Aug. 26, 2010](#) and [Sept. 2010](#)

**Location:** Florence, Ky.

**Proposed by:** Mercy Foundation Inc.

**Background:** The Islamic Center of Northern Kentucky proposed to move from a rented storefront in a strip mall to a new, 8,000-square-foot mosque on 5.5 acres already zoned for religious use. According to media reports, opponents set up a “stop the mosque” website and circulated fliers urging neighbors to help “stop the takeover of our country” by Muslims.

**Current status:** The Boone County Planning Commission approved plans for the proposed mosque in June 2010.

**Source:** [The Kentucky Enquirer](#), [WCPO 9 News](#), [The Christian Science Monitor](#), [Courier-Journal](#)

**Location:** Mayfield, Ky.

**Proposed by:** Somali immigrants

**Background:** A group of mostly Somali-born Muslims, many of whom moved to Western Kentucky to work at a poultry plant, applied to build a mosque in Mayfield’s business district. Residents and business owners expressed concern that mosque attendees would take up the limited parking in the downtown area. Some opponents said that the location was their primary concern and that they did not object to a mosque in principle.

**Current status:** Mayfield's Board of Zoning Adjustment denied the permit in August 2010, citing lack of parking. In September, the Kentucky ACLU announced it would support the group's effort to open a mosque, but it has not taken legal action.

**Source:** [Courier-Journal](#), [WKMS radio](#), [WBKO radio](#)

**Location:** Portland, Maine

**Proposed by:** Afghan refugees

**Background:** Worship at the Portland Masjid and Islamic Center, located in a former TV repair shop, was suspended for five months in 2009 because of a zoning conflict. In response, the Maine Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit on behalf of the congregation. After asking the group to remove an illegally paved parking lot, the Portland Planning Board rezoned the area, allowing the mosque to operate.

**Current status:** The Planning Board granted a conditional use permit in July 2010, letting the group of about 15 families reopen the mosque.

**Source:** [WMTV](#), [The Portland Press Herald](#)

**Location:** Walkersville, Md.

**Proposed by:** Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

**Background:** The group contracted to buy a 224-acre farm and proposed to build a worship center for about 200 people, two gyms and space for tents to host as many as 10,000 people for an annual three-day convention. Facing opposition from residents who expressed fear of Islam, the Ahmadiyya community took out newspaper ads, knocked on doors and offered residents use of the gyms in attempts to win community support.

**Current status:** The zoning board rejected the proposal in August 2008, citing traffic and water supply concerns. Although the Muslim group did not challenge the decision, the landowner who wanted to sell the property filed a religious discrimination lawsuit, which was settled in August 2009 when the town agreed to buy the land for \$4.7 million.

**Source:** [The Washington Post](#), [Md. Community News](#)

**Location:** Amherst, Mass.

**Proposed by:** Hampshire Mosque

**Background:** The Muslim community in Amherst, a college town, sought to convert a former Christian school and poultry farm into a prayer and educational space. Local officials were

supportive, but some neighbors expressed concerns about possible disturbance from increased traffic, parking and lights on the rural site.

**Current status:** In June 2010, the Muslim group withdrew its application, citing difficulties securing the property from its current owners, negative comments from neighbors and possible restrictions on future expansion.

**Source:** *Amherst Bulletin* [April 16, 2010](#) and [April 30, 2010](#), *Daily Hampshire Gazette*

**Location:** Roxbury Crossing, Mass.

**Proposed by:** Muslim American Society, Boston chapter

**Background:** The city of Boston gave permission for a mosque and community center to be built in Roxbury Crossing in 1992. Before construction began in 2004, opponents alleged that some of the mosque leaders had ties to radical groups. Controversy continued throughout construction of the \$15 million, 68,000-square-foot Islamic center, which can hold about 3,000 people.

**Current status:** The Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center officially opened in June 2009, although it had been used for daily prayers since fall 2008.

**Source:** *The Boston Globe* [June 11, 2009](#) and [June 27, 2009](#), [Harvard University](#)

**Location:** Grand Rapids, Mich.

**Proposed by:** Masjid Muhammad Islamic Center

**Background:** Organizers hoped to purchase a former child development center and turn it into a worship space for up to 50 people. Neighbors said they preferred to see the site developed for housing and expressed concerns about parking, noise and congestion. A Muslim leader attributed the opposition to “a whole lot of fear-mongering.”

**Current status:** Although city administrators initially recommended the sale, the Planning Commission unanimously rejected the proposal in September 2010, citing insufficient parking.

**Source:** *The Grand Rapids Press* [July](#) and [Sept.](#) 2008

**Location:** Madison, Miss.

**Proposed by:** Mississippi Muslim Association

**Background:** The Muslim association requested a special exception from zoning rules to build a mosque on a five-acre residential site north of the city of Madison. Residents voiced concerns



about the impact on property values as well as questions about water and sewage systems. About 400 residents signed a petition opposing the mosque, and some were quoted in local media expressing fears about Islamic radicalism.

**Current status:** The Madison County Board of Supervisors gave preliminary approval to the construction of the mosque in August 2009.

**Source:** [Madison County Journal](#), [Jackson Free Press](#)

**Location:** Northville, Mich.

**Proposed by:** Meadowbrook Islamic Center

**Background:** The Islamic center sought permission to build a parking lot on the front lawn of its building, a former single-family home in a residential area. Neighbors said they were concerned about property values, noise, traffic and overflow parking. Proponents of the mosque said that there would be no amplified calls to prayer and that the congregation had no intention of enlarging the building.

**Current status:** The Northville Township Zoning Board of Appeals voted in January 2010 to deny the proposed changes to the property.

**Source:** [The Detroit Free Press](#)

**Location:** Boonton, N.J.

**Proposed by:** Jam-e-Masjid Islamic Center

**Background:** A 4,000-square-foot addition to an existing mosque was approved by the planning board in 2006, but the town issued a stop-work order in August 2008 after a resident reported that the façade did not conform to the approved site plan. An amended application was rejected in 2008, causing the group to further revise the application.

**Current status:** Construction resumed in 2008 but has “slowed down considerably” since 2009 for “lack of funds,” according to the Islamic center’s website.

**Source:** [The Muslim Observer](#) (based on a *Daily Record* article no longer available online), [Jam-e-Masjid Islamic Center website](#)

**Location:** Piscataway, N.J.

**Proposed by:** Muslim Center of Middlesex County

**Background:** A proposed expansion would add a 45-foot minaret to an existing mosque, increase the facility's size by about 38,000 square feet and quadruple its parking spaces to nearly 300. Area residents expressed concerns about noise, lights, parking and declining property values.

**Current status:** The Piscataway Zoning Board of Adjustment held hearings on the project in late 2009 but has not yet rendered a decision.

**Source:** *The Star-Ledger* [Aug.](#) and [Oct.](#) 2009, *Courier News* [July](#) and [Oct.](#) 2009, [Religion News Service](#)

**Location:** Rockaway Borough, N.J.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of New Jersey

**Background:** Organizers converted an office building into a 14,800-square-foot mosque. Residents raised concerns at zoning board meetings about increased traffic and noise, questioning whether the site was large enough for the number of people expected to attend services.

**Current status:** The zoning board approved the proposal in January 2008. Residents filed a lawsuit to halt construction. A Morris County judge upheld the Rockaway Borough zoning board's approval of the project.

**Source:** [New Jersey Real-Time News](#), *The Daily Record* on Factiva (Factiva login required) [Oct. 2007](#) and [Oct. 2008](#), [The Star-Ledger](#) on Factiva (Factiva login required)

**Location:** Midland Beach, N.Y.

**Proposed by:** Muslim American Society

**Background:** The Muslim society agreed to buy a former convent from a Roman Catholic parish and planned to convert it into a mosque and community center. Residents opposed the sale, saying the convent had been built with donations from the parish. At hearings, neighbors also raised questions about possible terrorist connections and impacts on parking and traffic. The church's pastor withdrew his support for the sale in June 2010.

**Current status:** The church's board of trustees rejected the sale in July 2010. The Muslim society is facing financial difficulties as it continues looking for a new location.

**Source:** *Staten Island Advance* [July](#) and [Aug.](#) 2010

**Location:** Brooklyn, N.Y.

**Proposed by:** Muslim American Society

**Background:** A Muslim group in Brooklyn proposed to build a four-story mosque with a minaret in a residential area of Sheepshead Bay. After the city Buildings Department rejected the plan, the group scaled back the proposal and dropped plans for the minaret. Neighborhood opponents created a website and held a rally against the mosque in June, citing concerns about noise, traffic and property values as well as alleging that the Muslim American Society may have ties to terrorism. One protester was quoted as threatening to bomb the mosque if it is built.

**Current status:** Construction has not begun.

**Source:** [New York Daily News](#), [The Brooklyn Paper](#) [June](#) and [Sept.](#) 2010, [New York Community Media Alliance](#), [The New York Post](#)

**Location:** New York, N.Y.

**Proposed by:** Cordoba Initiative and American Society for Muslim Advancement

**Background:** A Muslim group plans to erect a building of up to 15 stories to house a mosque, an auditorium, a pool and other facilities two blocks from the former site of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. Some relatives of people killed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks and some national political figures, including Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich, vigorously opposed the project. President Obama said in mid-August that Muslims have a right to build in that location, though aides said he stopped short of endorsing the project. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has been an ardent supporter of the center.

**Current status:** New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission approved the project in August 2010, but construction has not begun.

**Source:** [The New York Times](#)

**Location:** Westbury, N.Y.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of Long Island

**Background:** The Islamic center originally sought permission for a three-story addition to its existing mosque, along with more on-site parking. Organizers later scaled back the proposal to a two-story building. Some residents supported the proposal, saying the mosque had been a good neighbor for many years. But opponents cited possible impacts on noise, parking and property values.

**Current status:** A special use permit for the mosque expansion was denied in June 2010 due to an unpaid parking variance fee. The Westbury Board of Trustees said it could reconsider the application at a future meeting.

**Source:** *Westbury Times* [Nov. 2009](#) and [June 2010](#)

**Location:** Sugarcreek Township, Ohio

**Proposed by:** Islamic Society of Greater Dayton

**Background:** In early 2008 the Sugarcreek Township Board of Zoning Appeals rejected an initial rezoning application for a new mosque, citing traffic and sewage concerns. Opposition to the plan was led by the pastor and members of a Baptist church. In response, the Islamic society scaled back the proposed building to 19,000 square feet and a capacity of 500 people, about half the size of the original plan.

**Current status:** In September 2008, the Board of Zoning Appeals approved a conditional use application to construct the mosque.

**Source:** *Dayton Daily News* [Jan.](#) and [Sept.](#) 2008

**Location:** Antioch, Tenn.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of Tennessee

**Background:** In September 2010, the Islamic center purchased a former movie theater and proposed to renovate it as a mosque. Some residents want the building to be used for a community college but say they would not object to having a mosque elsewhere in the community. Other residents have been quoted as saying they fear the mosque would become a training ground for terrorists.

**Current status:** The renovation is on hold as project leaders consider leasing or selling the building to Nashville State Community College. They are conducting a survey of local Muslims to help guide their decision.

**Source:** [WSMV Channel 4 News](#), [Nashville Public Radio](#), [WKRN News 2](#)

**Location:** Brentwood, Tenn.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of Williamson County

**Background:** The center applied to rezone 14 acres for a prayer space and fellowship hall with dining facilities for about 325 people; they emphasized that it would have few outside lights and no loudspeakers to broadcast calls to prayer. Opponents said they worried that the mosque's leaders might have ties to terrorists. They also expressed concerns about increased traffic.

**Current status:** The Islamic center withdrew its application in May 2010, citing community opposition and the \$450,000 cost of adding a turning lane to control traffic.

**Source:** [The Tennessean](#)

**Location:** Murfreesboro, Tenn.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of Murfreesboro

**Background:** Organizers plan to build a 10,000-square-foot Islamic center on a 15-acre lot to accommodate up to 1,000 worshippers. Community resistance has been vigorous. Some residents voiced fears that the growing Muslim population might try to impose sharia law in the area. But others demonstrated publicly in support of the new mosque. In September 2010, federal investigators ruled that a fire at the construction site was arson.

**Current status:** Rutherford County approved the proposal in May 2010; construction began in August.

**Source:** [The Washington Post](#), [USA Today](#), [The Tennessean](#), [The Associated Press](#)

**Location:** Green Bay, Wis.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Society of Wisconsin

**Background:** The Islamic society sought to rezone a former bait-and-tackle store and convert it into a mosque. In August 2010, the Green Bay City Council held a hearing on the project. Most of the handful of people who spoke supported the mosque, though one Green Bay alderman suggested that Islam was at odds with “the American way of life.”

**Current status:** The City Council voted 9-3 to approve the rezoning.

**Source:** [Fox 11 \(WLUK-TV\)](#)

**Location:** Wilson, Wis.

**Proposed by:** Mansoor Mirza, Islamic Society of Sheboygan

**Background:** Mirza, a physician, sought a permit to rezone and renovate a former health-food store into a mosque. Many of the residents who attended a town planning commission meeting in February 2010 spoke out against the mosque and Islam in general. The pastor of a nearby church also opposed the mosque, but about 30 other local religious leaders signed a petition supporting Mirza’s proposal.

**Current status:** Renovations were approved and completed; the first service was held in May 2010.

**Source:** [Time](#)