

Frederick Town Board Rejects Mosque Plan

By [Philip Rucker](#)

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After months of heated debate, the zoning appeals board in Walkersville late last night rejected a proposal by a Silver Spring Muslim sect to build a mosque and retreat facility on a 224-acre farm in the rural Frederick County town.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's plans to build an Islamic worship center that would host up to 10,000 people annually for a national religious convention stoked intense public outcry in Walkersville, a mostly white hamlet of about 5,000 people nestled near the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

But although [the proposal stirred religious tensions](#), the Walkersville Board of Zoning Appeals cited more pedestrian reasons for denying the request, saying the facility would attract too much traffic and threaten the town's water supply. The board's decision came on the third straight day of public deliberation over the proposal.

An attorney for the landowner who was selling his farm to the Muslim group called the board's decision "both irrational and discriminatory."

"This conflict has been defined from day one by a desire to keep a Muslim group out of the area," attorney Roman Storzer said in a statement.

It is unconstitutional to make land-use decisions on religious or racial grounds, so the town could deny the sect's proposal only if it identified legitimate concerns about traffic, infrastructure or planning.

The mosque would have been built on Walkersville's largest farm, once occupied by the town's founding father, John Walker. The colonial-era farm house would have been converted into living space for an imam and other clergy.

David W. Moxley, who owns the farm, said the sect's leaders handled the issue with "patience and grace."

"It's unfortunate that they have had to suffer such hostility at the hands of a vocal opposition intent on keeping them out of Walkersville at all costs," Moxley said in a statement.

The Ahmadiyya community's quest to build in Walkersville was one of the latest examples of local opposition to Muslim groups trying to build facilities to accommodate growing congregations across the nation.

The Ahmadiyya sect is distinct from the larger Sunni and Shiite sects and fled persecution in Pakistan when the government there ruled they were not Muslims.