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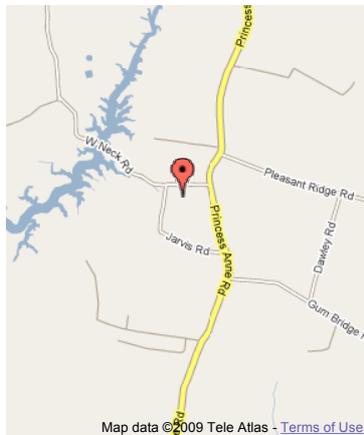
Beach, Buddhist monks agree on home worship

Posted to: News Religion Virginia Beach



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Chuc Hoi, left, and Chuc Thanh of the Buddhist Education Center of America Inc. look at one of many relics at their Pungo home Monday evening. A tentative deal has been struck to let the monks hold services there. (Stephen M. Katz | The Virginian-Pilot)



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By **Deirdre Fernandes**
The Virginian-Pilot
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VIRGINIA BEACH

The city and a group of Buddhist monks have reached a tentative settlement that would allow them to continue holding worship services in their Pungo home.

Under the settlement filed in federal court Monday, the City Council will consider giving the monks a permit to hold Sunday services, for no more than 20 people at a time, at their home off West Neck Road. In exchange, the monks will agree to find a new location for their three annual festivals and will not look to expand their educational center at the Pungo site.

"We've accomplished our objective," said John Stepanovich, the attorney for the Buddhist Education Center of America Inc. "It was always about the continued religious service."

The monks had alleged in a suit they filed in September that the City Council violated their religious freedoms when it denied them a permit to hold services in their home.

"We had a very good case, but litigation is not free," Stepanovich said. "These are Buddhist monks. They decided they'd rather get this resolved and move on."

City officials have insisted that this was a zoning issue, not a religious one, and that the local government, not the federal courts, should decide the outcome.

The city's primary concern was the festivals and any growth that would turn the center, which is in a rural residential neighborhood, into a large religious campus, Beach officials said.

"We couldn't live with the festivals," said City Attorney Mark Stiles. "Because that was a large part of the neighbors' concerns. With that came the tour buses, the portable toilets, the large traffic issues."

City officials will suggest possible off-site locations for the festivals, Stiles said.

The proposed permit includes the terms of the settlement and limits the number and size of statues on the property.

Councilwoman Barbara Henley, who represents the Pungo area, said she has spoken to some of the neighbors about the proposed settlement and they are satisfied with the terms.

"The settlement just seems to remove the issues that were a problem," Henley said.

The monks have been holding Sunday services at the home during the court process.

The City Council will likely vote on the permit in April, Stiles said.

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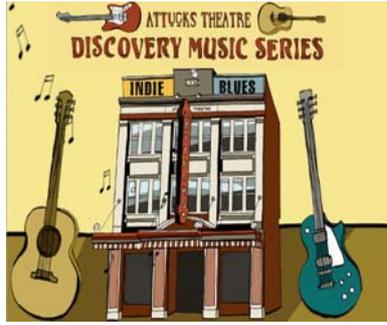
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Virginia Beach

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THERE IS AN INHERENT FLAW IN

Submitted by [richardm96179](#) on Tue, 03/17/2009 at 6:18 pm.

There is an inherent flaw in quoting the portion of the act below:

"protect(s) individuals, houses of worship, and other religious institutions from discrimination in zoning and landmarking laws"

There was no discrimination. The monks want to change the zoning to add a building. This is a fact.

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UGLY MEGA-CHURCHES

Submitted by [George K](#) on Tue, 03/17/2009 at 12:03 pm.

These uninspired monstrosities popping up like Wal-Marts seem to be well tolerated despite the murder of aesthetics. I'm just glad these monks did not have to douse themselves with gasoline and light it to get a fair shake.

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The monks' suit was filed under federal law, specifically, the *Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000*, which "protect(s) individuals, houses of worship, and other religious institutions from discrimination in **zoning** and landmarking laws... In passing this law, Congress found that the right to assemble for worship is at the very core of the free exercise of religion." If that doesn't make the issue, at least in part, about religious freedom, then I don't know what would. BTW, if the monks didn't have a strong case, do you think VB would have, as someone put it, "caved"?

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/housing/rliupaexplain.php>

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LAND USE ISSUE; NOTHING ELSE

Submitted by [waynes21170](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 10:14 pm.

Eco-Warrior is wrong; it is NOT a Constitutional issue, nor is it a Freedom of Religion issue. The other posters are right; it IS a zoning and land use issue, and the neighbors DO have a stronger claim towards the peaceable enjoyment of their properties. They are, after all, living in an area zoned as residential. There IS no restriction on the free exercise of the monks religion, but they DO (still) have to adhere to certain, specific and prescribed laws or ordinances in order to reasonably comply with that 'free exercise thereof' part. 'Freedom' doesn't mean 'absolute', unbridled freedom without responsibilities. It mean that, under a secular society, we agree to certain laws, rules, or restrictions which effectively guarantees the enjoyment of those same freedoms by ALL, and not just by a certain specific few.

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THE CITY CAVED IN

Submitted by [davidh36291](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 10:12 pm.

It's either a house or a church but it can't be both without a conditional use permit or a zoning change. If it was somebody running a daycare for only 20 children at a time would the city have done the same thing? I seriously doubt it. Hopefully these monks won't try and claim their "house" is exempt from real estate taxes

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HWATKINS

Submitted by [katet43483](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 8:48 pm.

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Submitted by [sd1955](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 7:33 pm.

Now how in the world could a bunch of chanting Buddhist Monks cause your neighborhood to become "unbearable"? If anything, I would welcome the quiet meditative serenity that one finds among Buddhists. Then again, perhaps you have never been around them or don't know anything about them. There's always the internet, library and other ways to learn...

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QUIET

Submitted by [sd1955](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 7:33 pm.

spirit and a quiet life we can all learn something from in this chaotic world right now, namaste....

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IT SHOULD NEVER HAVE GONE THIS FAR

Submitted by [Kawika](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 6:41 pm.

The CoVB dropped the freedom-ball on this one. The Monks should have been allowed to do what they do, regardless. On the first complaint, the CoVB should have verified the status of the Monks, their ability to host a moderate crowd, and observed a meeting in person.

Once aware of the passive and progressive nature of these meetings, the issue should have been dropped in favor of the Monks. Meditate away good Monks, promote peace and goodwill to your neighbors and beyond.

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ROUDY MONKS

Submitted by [Rich-N](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 4:57 pm.

Like I tried to say...

those monks are such a disruption... probably 10 times more disruptive than a strawberry festival...

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I AGREE

Submitted by [hwatkins](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 4:27 pm.

This is basically a land use thing. Doesn't matter if it is Buddhists or Baptists, if they make my neighborhood unbearable, they shouldn't be allowed to have their facility there.

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WASN'T A CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

Submitted by [EvanJ](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 3:59 pm.

It wasn't a Constitutional question even though someone tried to incorrectly argue it was. Then there's the Internet oddity where anything religion linked causes people to knee jerk themselves into back flips. It's a boring old zoning dispute.

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DARN THAT CONSTITUTION KEEPS GETTING IN THE WAY...

Submitted by [Rich-N](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 3:51 pm.

Too bad a small group of monks had to SUE to get the va beach leadership to take a peek at the 1st ammendment to the constitution... has some words about the free exercise of religion and oh... that darn right to peaceably assemble... gotta watch out for those roudy monks!

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances"

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TO EACH THEIR OWN

Submitted by [parkerp63396](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 3:10 pm.

i found this story to be pretty interesting personally. it's good to see that there was some middle ground to be found.

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IT'S BAAAACK

Submitted by [EvanJ](#) on Mon, 03/16/2009 at 3:02 pm.

The most uninteresting story that will never go away.

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