

## Metro

### Town votes to ban Muslim development

By David Dishneau  
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HAGERSTOWN, Md. — A decision barring an American Muslim group from holding large national gatherings in the rural town of Walkersville is discriminatory, a lawyer specializing in religious rights cases said yesterday.

The Walkersville Board of Zoning Appeals voted unanimously Thursday night to deny the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA permission to use farmland there for religious purposes.

Roman P. Storzer, representing the owner of the 224-acre parcel at the center of the dispute, said his client may file a federal lawsuit under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, which bars local governments from using land-use regulations to discriminate against religious entities.

"The board's decision is irrational and discriminatory," Mr. Storzer said

He also said the decision was discriminatory because "this conflict has been defined from day one by a desire to keep a Muslim group out of the area."

He cited fearful statements made by Walkersville residents shortly after the Ahmadi announced their plan in August. Ralph Whitmore, mayor of the town of 5,600, said in September that "Muslims are a whole different culture from us" and that the Ahmadi proposal made people "antsy." Mr. Whitmore is not a member of the Board of Zoning Appeals.

The town attorney said the hearing was "fair and impartial."

Ahamadi community spokesman Syed Ahmad said the Silver Spring-based group would wait to read the board's written decision before commenting. The group's agreement to buy the farmland from Mr. Storzer's client, David W. Moxley, is contingent upon zoning approval.

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