

Board Draws Back From Mosque Fray

No Walkersville Zoning Change

By Philip Rucker
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The Walkersville Town Commission has postponed a decision on an amendment to zoning laws that could have blocked a Muslim sect's proposal to build a retreat and prayer center on a farm in the [Frederick County](#) town.

In a 3 to 2 vote Wednesday, the commission decided to delay action until January. That leaves the proposal's fate to the town's Board of Appeals, which is scheduled to hold a final public hearing and vote on the mosque proposal Nov. 1.

But town officials said yesterday they expect to hold the meeting Dec. 6 because the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA has requested more time to prepare its presentation.

Meanwhile, [Walkersville](#) officials are being accused of discriminating against the [Silver Spring](#)-based Islamic group, which is seeking to [build the retreat and worship facility](#) on a 224-acre farm.

An attorney for the farm's owner has called on the [Justice Department](#) to investigate whether town officials violated the federal law that prohibits discrimination against religious institutions in land use applications.

The attorney, Roman P. Storzer, said he had obtained a sworn affidavit from a resident of a neighboring town alleging that a Walkersville commissioner, [Chad W. Weddle](#), who is serving as the town's spokesman on the Muslim retreat issue, advised a group opposing the proposal on how to stop the Ahmadiyya community from locating in Walkersville.

The affidavit claims that Weddle pledged to give \$500 to the group, Citizens for Walkersville, and gave its members a list of "talking points" to use in opposing the proposal at public hearings.

"This is one of the most blatant examples of hostility to a particular religious group that I have ever seen," Storzer said in a written statement. "Zoning permits should not be denied and ordinances should not be passed to keep a particular religious group out, just because they may 'change the culture' or are perceived as different or unfamiliar to the community."

Weddle denied yesterday that he gave the group money and said he met with constituents Oct. 13, before Citizens for Walkersville formed. "I advised them to organize," Weddle said.

"This is simply the landowner trying to create a ruse," he added. "This is all smoke and mirrors by the landowner to try and scare the town."

Weddle said he welcomes a Justice Department investigation. "Our town has done a full and fair job," he said.

Syed Ahmad, who is handling the land purchase for the Ahmadiyya community, said his sect is

unaffiliated with Storzer or the landowner, David Moxley, and is not calling for a federal investigation.

"I understand anybody like himself is going to do whatever it is he thinks is best to protect his own interests, and I think that's what he's doing," Ahmad said of Moxley.

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