

# Judge dismisses most of suit challenging Tennessee mosque

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. (ABP) – A judge has thrown out most of a lawsuit seeking to halt construction of a mosque on the outskirts of Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Chancellor Robert Corlew III ruled this week that 17 plaintiffs challenging zoning approval for construction of a new Islamic Center of Murfreesboro failed to prove they are being harmed by the project, the *Daily News Journal* reported.

The lawsuit, filed last September, claimed plaintiffs “have been and will be irreparably harmed by the risk of terrorism generated by proselytizing for Islam and teaching the practices of Sharia law.

At a county commission meeting last August, some of the plaintiffs warned about dangers of Islamic law “including but not limited to death edicts to apostates, death edicts to homosexuals, death edicts to women who have been subject to rape, allowance of youth brides, amongst other reprehensible sections.”

“We must note that, under the law, the Plaintiffs have not demonstrated a loss different from that which is common to all citizens of Rutherford County,” Corlew wrote in his ruling. “That Islam is a religion has been proven in this case. That the county ordinance allows construction of a church or place of meeting within a residential planning zone as a matter of right in this case is further undisputed.”

The only part of the lawsuit left standing is a question of whether the Rutherford County Regional Planning Commission gave adequate notice

before approving the mosque's site plan under Tennessee's Sunshine Law. County officials opted to advertise the meeting in the *Murfreesboro Post*, a free weekly newspaper that plaintiffs contend does not meet qualifications for a "newspaper of general circulation."

Soon after the vote, someone vandalized a sign at the construction site announcing it as home of the future mosque by painting the message "Not Welcome" over it. In June the sign was vandalized a second time, this time slashed in two. In August four pieces of heavy equipment at the site were doused with an accelerant and burned.

Imam Ossama Bahloul said he hopes the judge's decision will allow the community to move forward in peace.

"It is obvious that we are the ones being harmed," he told NBC affiliate television station WSMV. "We had arson. We had vandalism."

The Islamic Center of Murfreesboro has been a part of the city's religious community for many years, but plans to relocate from overcrowded facilities inside the city limits to a 15-acre campus -- with plans for mega-church style amenities like athletic fields, a gym and a swimming pool -- raising questions about possible sources of outside funding.

Mosque opponents at a court hearing last fall argued that Islam isn't a religion at all, but rather a political system aimed toward world domination. The dispute has garnered widespread media attention, including a recent hour-long documentary on CNN.