

After Legal Threats, Georgia City Lets Muslims Open Mosque

City officials in an Atlanta suburb voted on Monday night to allow Muslim residents to open a mosque in a local shopping center, reversing, under threat of a lawsuit, a decision made two weeks earlier.

The City Council of Kennesaw, a community of 30,000 residents 30 miles northwest of Atlanta, voted unanimously to allow the prayer center, city clerk Pam Davis said.

On Dec. 1, the council voted 4-1 to deny an application for the mosque, saying that zoning regulations did not allow a place of worship in that particular shopping center.

An attorney for Muslim residents of Kennesaw called that decision an attack on his clients' rights to freedom of religion under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and said he had recommended they file a lawsuit.

Davis acknowledged a Christian church had been allowed to operate within another shopping center in Kennesaw.

But she said that location had "completely different zoning" from the one where the Muslim residents are seeking to establish a prayer center.

Before the original vote, about 10 people demonstrated against the mosque outside City Hall, waving American flags and holding signs that read: "No mosque."