

Georgia City Under Fire for Blocking Mosque From Retail Space

A suburban Atlanta city has rejected a request by Muslim residents to put a prayer center in a local shopping center, setting up a potential lawsuit over what the group says is a violation of religious freedom.

The City Council in Kennesaw, Georgia, denied an application for the mosque on Monday night in a 4-1 vote because zoning regulations do not allow places of worship in that particular shopping center, city spokeswoman Pam Davis said on Tuesday.

"It's a land-use issue," she said.

Douglas Dillard, an attorney for the Muslim residents, told the *Marietta Daily Journal* that the rejected application was an attack on the group's First Amendment rights.

Dillard, who could not be reached for comment on Tuesday, told the newspaper the residents might file a lawsuit challenging the council's decision.

"We think it's discriminatory, and it violates equal terms," Dillard said. "They had no reason to deny this."

Nayyer Islam, a spokesman for the Muslim residents, also did not immediately return phone calls.

Before the vote, about 10 protesters outside City Hall waved American flags and held signs that read: "No mosque," the paper reported.

The city spokeswoman acknowledged a Christian church had been allowed to operate within another shopping center in Kennesaw, a city of 30,000 residents about 30 miles northwest of Atlanta.

But that location had “completely different zoning” than the one where the Muslim residents are seeking to establish a prayer center, Davis said.

Kennesaw Mayor Mark Mathews declined to comment on the issue, citing the possible litigation.

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