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Judge Deals Blow to Quest for Mosque in Yonkers

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The property in Yonkers that the Islamic Community Center of Mid-Westchester wants to turn into a mosque.

(Image: Google)

Jul 25, 2017 · by [Matt Katz](#)

Amid an increase in acrimony over the construction of Islamic house of worship, Muslims in Yonkers are appealing a ruling by a federal judge that affirmed a decision by city officials to effectively prevent the conversion an old mansion into a mosque.

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The Islamic Community Center for Mid-Westchester purchased the \$750,000 medieval-revival home in 2015 in order to turn it into a mosque. Zoning allowed a house of worship, but the following year, acting at [the request of a local activist group](#), city officials designated the early-20th century building a historic landmark, citing its unique architectural qualities. That restricted the Muslims' ability to renovate it without going to the Yonkers Landmarks Preservation Board for approval.

All Democrats on the Yonkers City Council opposed the decision; all Republicans voted in favor.

The Muslims called the move discriminatory and illegal, and they sued under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act. This was the same kind of suit pursued by Muslims in Bernards Township, NJ, which led to a Justice Department settlement. It forced the town to reverse its decision, [approve](#) a mosque application and pay \$3.25 million in damages. President Trump's Justice Department is also currently [investigating a possible violation of the law](#) in Bayonne, NJ, where planning officials rejected a proposal to convert a warehouse into a mosque.

Typically, mosque applications are held up due to zoning concerns. The case in Yonkers is the first known to involve a historic designation. But in a ruling late last month, Judge Vincent L. Briccetti wrote that the matter did not rise to a federal violation, and he dismissed the suit.

Omar Mohammedi, the attorney for the Islamic Community Center for Mid-Westchester, said the judge failed to adequately evaluate possible religious discrimination. "We will appeal this decision and will vigorously defend ICCMW and its members' religious rights," he said.

A notice of appeal was filed Tuesday.

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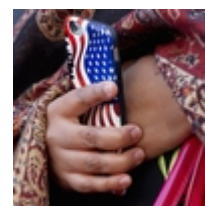


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