

MUSLIM COUNCIL OF CALGARY

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BEARSPAW ISLAMIC CENTRE - PROPOSAL REJECTION

The Muslim Council of Calgary (MCC) working with the Islamic Association of NW Calgary plans to build an Islamic Centre in the Bearspaw area, that would take care of existing and future needs of the Muslims of the Bearspaw and surrounding communities, providing facilities for prayer, a community centre where people can come together for various activities, but also providing a place that allows to build bridges and is a beacon of communal harmony and dialogue.

MCC worked with a reputed company to undertake the surveys and studies and worked closely with MD of Rockyview to satisfy any technical issues that may arise. We had received 20 letters of objections and 14 letters of support. MD of Rockyview received more letters of objections after they decided to expand the area from 1 km to 2 km radius, adding 25 more letters of objection just in the month of March 2018, some of these amounting to outright discrimination and hate. (The letters can be found at <https://www.rockyview.ca/Portals/0/Files/Government/Council/Agendas/2018/2018-04-10-Council-Agenda-Full.pdf>).

The proposal was brought to the 9-member council for Rocky View County on April 10th, 2018, where it was rejected, taking the stance that the project "does not conform to the area needs." In doing so the council failed to recognize that there are at least 313 families in the T3R area who would directly benefit from this facility and disregarded clear needs of a large section of the community who live in that area.

The application presented to the Council had passed technical review by Rocky View planners with respect to traffic, water-use, and the like. The rezoning process has already taken many years and is very disappointing to the Muslims of Bearspaw and surrounding neighborhoods as they continue to struggle to find appropriate places of worship like any other faith group. In our view, the two councilors who supported and voted for us, clearly upheld the true Canadian values.

We'd like to believe that council's decision to reject this application was based on rational grounds, and that the choice of faith of our congregation was not a factor. However, we believe that refusal to provide a place for religious assembly is against the spirit of Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. It is to be noted that there is past precedence of other places of worship of different faiths being approved and rezoning permitted for both public and private use. We are expecting that we will be given a recourse to build centres which are essential for community's growth and development and for their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.