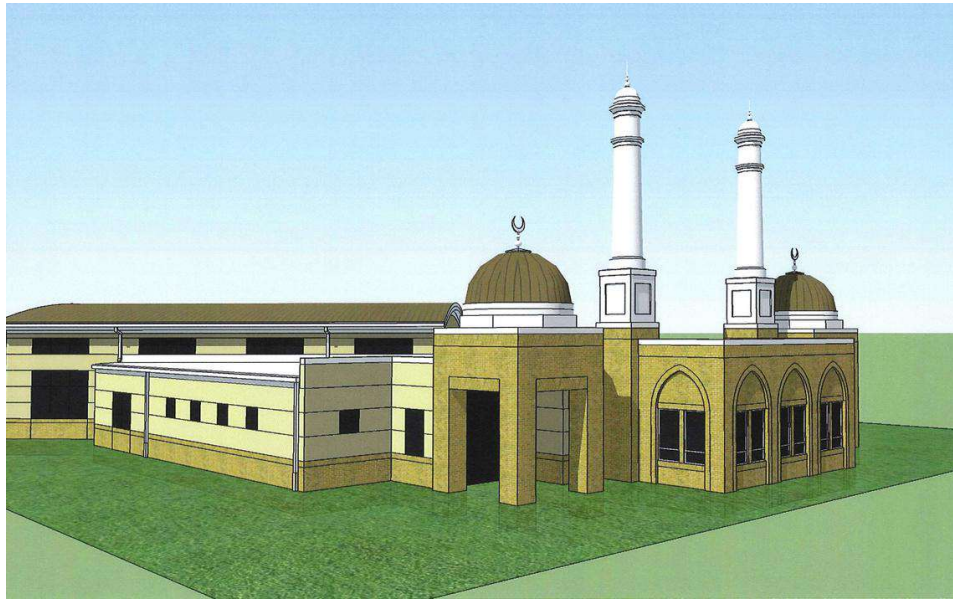


News

Afton Islamic center approved

Written By: Amber Kispert-Smith | May 13th 2016 - 10am.



In front of a packed house, Afton City Council approved a conditional-use permit for a new Islamic center during its April 19 meeting.

The Islamic Society of Woodbury-East Metro plans to build a 10,800-square-foot Islamic center, which will include a 4,200-square-foot multipurpose hall, which will be used for religious services, educational events, youth activities and social services.

Services are typically attended by 150 to 200 people and weekend events typically serve the same size crowd, but not all the same people.

Afton allows for places of worship within its rural residential zoning district.

“I have never been so proud of the people I serve here in Afton as I have been during the processing of this application,” Mayor Dick Bend said. “They care about the solitude, but they all understand the need to go ahead with this application, and they are very sad about the loss of solitude as a consequence of this.”

Prior to City Council discussion, several members of the community spoke in support of, and opposition to, the project.

Many of the opposing views related to the lighting and increased noise that will come with a new place of worship in a residential neighborhood.

“It kind of takes away our peace of quiet,” Afton resident Sandra Paulson said. “If I wanted to live by a church or school, I would have bought by a church or school.”

“It’s an injustice to these people to see their homes depreciate in value,” Afton resident Steven Swanson said.

However, a number of comments deviated from the land-use proposal in favor of comments regarding religion.

“There are several pathways to God,” Woodbury resident David Nimmer said. “I would welcome our Muslim brothers and sisters on that journey.”

The main topics discussed by council members last week related to lighting and the need for additional screening.

City Council decided that additional trees, or a berm, would be a nice addition on the eastern side of the property, which is adjacent to the residential properties.

Additionally, City Council directed City Administrator Ron Moore to work with the Islamic Society of Woodbury-East Metro to design the least obtrusive lighting plan, whether that means down lighting, lights on timers or softer lighting.

Following City Council’s unanimous approval last week, the at-capacity city hall chambers erupted into applause. Many residents even stayed behind to welcome the Islamic Society of Woodbury-East Metro to the community during a council recess.

“I’ve been in your position before and I know what it's like to make difficult decisions,” former Afton Mayor Jon Kroschel said. “You guys have a great opportunity. It’s such a huge step in the right direction. I only wish I had a chance to vote on something like this when I sat up there.”

For the past five years the Islamic Society of Woodbury-East Metro has been holding worship services in a 2,500-square-foot office space along Commerce Drive in Woodbury.

However, as the congregation has grown, it soon discovered that it needed a larger place of worship, one that it can call its own.

In 2013 the Islamic Society of Woodbury-East Metro took the first step in finding a place of its own when it purchased a 29-acre parcel, located at 12585 Hudson Road in Afton, to build an Islamic center.

It was in 2012 that the Islamic Society of Woodbury-East Metro first began looking for possible locations for its new Islamic center when it came across the property in Afton, which is a former hobby farm.

In addition to the facility itself, the Islamic Society of Woodbury-East Metro is also proposing to have a recreational area, near an existing house it purchased, for picnics, a community garden and other recreational activities.

About 20 acres of the property will continue to be used for agricultural purposes.

Members of the Islamic Society of Woodbury-East Metro are raising \$500,000 to help fund the building project.

The Islamic Society of Woodbury-East Metro is hoping to have the Islamic center completed before Ramadan in 2017, which will begin the end of May.