

News

Attempts to Create Muslim Cemeteries Meet With Backlash

Opposed say it's about land use, burial practices but activists say the backlash is thinly veiled bigotry

Denise Lavoie
Associated Press

DUDLEY, Mass. (AP) — On the site of a long-idle dairy farm, leaders of a local mosque hope to build a final resting place for about 500 Muslim families — to the dismay of many residents of this quaint town in central Massachusetts.

In arguments cemetery developers and activists decry as thinly veiled bigotry, neighbors say they fear burial practices could contaminate groundwater because Muslims traditionally do not embalm bodies and bury their dead without coffins. They also cite concerns about noise, vandalism and increased

traffic on the narrow road where the cemetery would be built. One resident said he worried he would have to put up with “crazy music” like the Islamic call to prayer.

Similar sentiments have been expressed by people in communities around the country where Muslim cemeteries have been proposed, including Farmersville, Texas; Walpole, Massachusetts; Carlisle, Pennsylvania; and Farmington, Minnesota.

In some cases, opponents have succeeded in defeating the new cemetery projects, while in others, Muslim groups have appealed and judges have cleared the way.

In Farmersville, near



In this April 12, 2016 photo, Amjad Bhatti, president of the Islamic Society of Greater Worcester, poses inside the mosque in Worcester, Mass. He and other leaders of the mosque are hoping to build a Muslim cemetery on farmland in Dudley, Mass., but residents are vigorously opposing the project.

Dallas, some residents were openly hostile during meetings on a proposal to build a Muslim cemetery on a 35-acre site just outside the city. Farmersville is not far from Garland, where police fatally shot two Is-

lamic State followers last year after they opened fire outside a cartoon contest lampooning the Prophet Muhammad.

“People don’t trust Muslims. Their goal is to populate the United States and take it over,” Barbara Ashcraft said



In this April 12, 2016 photo, Desiree Moninski, stands on land located across from her house in Dudley, Mass., which is the site of a proposed Muslim cemetery. Regarding the land once farmed by her grandparents, Moninski said she and other opponents have legitimate concerns that have nothing to do with Islam. “I grew up here. It’s farmland, and I’d like to see it stay that way,” she said.

“We were absolutely flabbergasted, to be honest, to see that kind of opposition,” said Ismail Fenni, a representative of Al-Marhama Islamic Burial, which wants to build a cemetery in Wal-

pole, south of Boston.

drawing a round of applause. Jason Talerman, a lawyer for the Islamic Society, said he believes the opposition is rooted in Islamophobia.

“They like to say it

“All we’re trying to establish is a place for a final resting place for the loved ones of the Muslim community members. No other activity is going to be happening in a cemetery except what is customary for a cemetery

ing facility planned for this site ... no terrorist activity associated with this site ... no plans for a mosque at this site.”

Diane Piwko, a Farmersville resident and business owner, said she worries the cemetery — proposed for prime property overlooking a lake — won’t be maintained and will become an eyesore at the entrance to the city.

“I am not basing any of my decision on why I’m against the cemetery on religion,” she said. “I base it on bad business practices.”

Muslim leaders have been taken aback by the level of resistance.

“All we’re trying to establish is a place for a final resting place for the loved ones of the Muslim community members,” he said. “No other activity is going to be happening in a cemetery except what is customary for a cemetery.”

In Dudley, the proposal from the Islamic Society of Greater Worcester has been met with angry comments at local meetings.

“You want a Muslim cemetery? Fine. Put it in your backyard, not mine,” Daniel Grazulis said during a zoning meeting in February,

under the guise of, ‘Oh, we’re just trying to protect our water supply,’ but it’s thinly veiled,” he said.

Desiree Moninski, who lives across the street from the site, once farmed by her grandparents, said she and other opponents have legitimate concerns that have nothing to do with Islam.

“I grew up here. It’s farmland, and I’d like to see it stay that way,” she said.

“A lot of people moved here because it’s peaceful and quiet. I just don’t want a cemetery here,

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Obituary: Jean Blocker

October 17, 1935 - April 22, 2016



Jean Blocker

Services will be held on Monday, May 2, 2016 at Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church, 3138 N. Vancouver Ave., Portland, OR 97227.

Viewing will be held at 10:00 a.m. and service at 11:00 a.m.

Final resting place: Willamette National Cemetery.

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