

Hello my friends,

I write to you today to share a bit of concern that I have been carrying with me the past couple of days. I ask that you circulate this concern as you are able and try to bring as many people together on this issue as possible.

For many years (approximately 10, I believe), HOPE United Church of Christ worshiped on Sunday mornings in area schools and ran its office during the week out of a four-bedroom ranch-style home on 248th Avenue in Naperville. This home, along with its 14+ acres of farmland, was purchased initially with the idea that one day, HOPE UCC would build various buildings on the property as the church grew. That dream did not come to fruition HOPE UCC's portion of the land was sold back to the UCC. Our denomination's National Setting in Cleveland has allowed our church to use the home for offices and meeting space as well as the occasional worship service.

Our recent move to Quincy Avenue, to our transitional home, meant that the National Setting of the UCC could sell off the land since we were no longer using it. We supplied the contact information to a local group who was interested in purchasing the land and the process began.

All has been going well, looking as if the land would be sold soon and the denomination would regain some of their investment in the property. All has been going well....until this week.

The organization that is working to purchase the property is the Islamic Center of Naperville, some of whom are very connected with some of our HOPE UCC Partners. The intent would be that the Islamic Center group would use the property much like we have used it for the past ten years.

The property itself is still considered unincorporated Naperville and is in need of being annexed. Tomorrow, October 5, the Islamic Center's application is on the agenda for the Naperville Planning and Zoning Commission for annexation. The full agenda can be viewed here: <http://eagenda.naperville.il.us/sirepub/pubmtgframe.aspx?meetid=283&doctype=agenda>

The meeting is being held at 7 p.m. at the Naperville Municipal Center at 400 South Eagle Street. Here is information from the city's website in regard to the meetings:

*Most Planning and Zoning Commission meetings include a public hearing. The purpose of a public hearing is to give the public an opportunity to express their views on a given topic and to provide evidence in support of those views. Planning and Zoning Commission relies on this input when making recommendations that are then forwarded to City Council for consideration.*

*An agenda is established for each hearing and is available for viewing in advance of the meeting on the city's website or at the Planning Services Team offices located at 400 S. Eagle Street in Naperville. The Planning and Zoning Commission follows the order of business on the agenda unless it is altered by a majority vote. Members of the public are welcome to view a proposed application in advance of the meeting at the City Clerk's Office located at the Municipal Center, 400 S. Eagle Street.*

Along with the agenda on the website, you are also able to view the actual application that has been submitted.

When a property is annexed into Naperville, it is automatically zoned as R1, which would be for residential use.

Here's my concern...the meeting tomorrow evening is simply in regard to the application's request to annex the property. Yet, if you are to drive down 248th Avenue, you will more than likely see several signs posted on utility poles that read "Vote NO to Mosque on 248." I have removed four of the signs that have appeared on the property in the past couple of days and a friendly passerby stopped and removed a sign from the front yard that read "No Ragheads on 248."

This display of true ignorance (lack of knowledge, learning and information) breaks my heart, raises my concern and honestly angers me. The Islamic Center of Naperville has had to fight so hard for all that they have and this next chapter of their story appears as if it may play out just as difficult as the others.

Although I was not in Naperville when HOPE UCC and the denomination purchased the land on 248th, I can assume that there weren't any signs posted saying "Vote NO to Church on 248." But today is a different day, many carry around with them a fear of the unknown and a fear of that which is different. The unfortunate piece is seeing how it often plays out, with angry words and inappropriate actions.

I was thrilled when I heard that the Islamic Center was interested in the property yet I also knew that something like this would happen.

So I share this concern with you, in part to bring you up to speed on a situation that ties into the life of HOPE UCC in very unique ways. I also share this so that you may do your own reflection on the situation and decide if there is a need to respond. Perhaps you attend the City Planning and Zoning Commission meeting tomorrow evening at 7 p.m. Perhaps you write a Letter to the Editor, letting our community know how you feel. Perhaps you spend a few extra moments in prayer, asking God to open the hearts of those who are filled with so much anger.

But we must respond. We cannot sit idly by and watch as our brothers and sisters experience discrimination based on their religious tradition. We must work to educate others, standing side-by-side with the Islamic Center in saying that enough is enough.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss this further and/or to see how it is that you may play a role in this process.

HOPE United Church of Christ is planning to have a presence at tomorrow's meeting. Will you join us?

Blessings,

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