

Via email and in-person delivery

Hoboken City Council

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Mayor Dawn Zimmer

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March 7, 2017

To Hoboken City Council and Mayor Zimmer:

We are writing to express our concern about the zoning board meeting held in Bayonne on March 6, 2017. We understand that the purpose of this meeting was to vote on a proposed Mosque for the city of Bayonne. We write now to build on Mayor Zimmer's statement [that she, too, was surprised](#) by the fact that the proposal failed to receive an affirmative five votes to move forward.¹

We are particularly alarmed by some anti-Muslim attitudes that were voiced at the meeting. According to several outlets, many speakers [voiced anti-Muslim sentiments](#) that received admonishment from the board.² According to other sources, at least one resident suggested asking the Bayonne Muslim community "[what they believe](#)" before approving mosques.³ Such a request would effectively amount to an ideological test, which has no place in a country that prides itself on freedom of religion as a constitutionally-guaranteed right.

It does not escape our attention that this board meeting occurred the same day as the most revised version of President Trump's executive order targeting primarily-Muslim countries. In this time of federal policies that create divisions between neighbors and foment racial violence, it is imperative on our cities to take bold and affirmative steps to reassure all residents that they are both safe and valued.

The sentiments voiced by some community members at Bayonne's zoning board meeting on Monday stand in stark opposition to what we believe the city of Hoboken stands for, and they do not represent widely held values of Americans today. Freedom of religion is a right that is engrained into the very fabric on which our nation was founded. For community members to target the values of a religion based on personal biases, vendettas, or hateful uninformed rhetoric severely upends our sense of community and will disenfranchise those who feel victimized by these words. We refuse to stand idly by while a small group of individuals attempts to victimize fellow Americans while destroying some of the very things that make our country great: freedom of religion and conscience.

¹ <https://twitter.com/dawnzimmernj/status/839168295135760386>

² <http://pix11.com/2017/03/07/residents-clash-over-proposed-construction-of-bayonne-mosque>.

³ <https://twitter.com/mattkatz00/status/839170948414701568>

With this in mind we request that your offices:

- issue a statement on behalf of the city of Hoboken condemning hate-filled speech in our communities, and reaffirming the widely-held belief that the city of Hoboken welcomes individuals and families of all creeds, colors and religion;
- issue a statement emphasizing that Zoning Board of Adjustment decisions for religious facilities in the city of Hoboken will be made independent of any explicit or implicit religious or racial bias;
- offer any and all consultative resources and expertise on zoning to the City of Bayonne in quickly selecting a mutually-agreeable site for a Mosque/Muslim religious center.

Sincerely,

Ariela Rutbeck-Goldman, Hoboken Resident

Eric deRuijter, Hoboken Resident

Alexander Gillette, Hoboken Resident

Peter Kim, Hoboken Resident

Mitchell Fagen, Hoboken Resident

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