

Enough is Enough – Let the AUCC Islamic Community Center Open

Why are there so many issues surrounding the new Community Center on Oakdene Avenue? I understand it used to be a school and a church. Now it's a daycare facility, a mosque, and community center. So, what was once a school and house of worship is being renovated to a new school and house of worship for the whole community. Ok. Again, I ask why are there so many issues surrounding AUCC Islamic center on Oakdene Avenue?

Maybe noise is the issue? When the renovation began, some neighbors complained that there would be noise, parking, and traffic issues. They even hired a lawyer to stop the project. Of course, there was initial construction noise that comes with any renovation, but now the only noise that's heard is the sound of the children playing in the park, and on the playground. Parking and traffic are what's expected for a school zone, and at the same cadence and density as they were when the building was previously a school. So, again, I ask why are there so many issues surrounding the new center on Oakdene Avenue?

The building has been renovated from the inside and outside. There is a new, safer, more interactive playground with a safe, cushioned flooring and a safety fence on the Oakdene Avenue side, which is a significant improvement over the old playground. After quarantining, it's nice to be able to let the children be outside, have fun again and get a little exercise in the process. However, the town of Teaneck seemed to have issues with the new, safer playground because they issued multiple violations for upgrading the playground. Police were often called on the weekend programs. No one could explain why when it was being made nicer and safer for the kids.

The new center on Oakdene Avenue is doing great things for the community. AUCC remained safely open during the pandemic, following the strictest protocols, with no reported cross transmissions or outbreaks, so parents and children had available care. Today, they have youth programs on Saturday mornings, including sports programs for girls and boys. They hold frequent food drives including partnering with the Food Brigade to give out Thanksgiving Day turkeys. They offer daycare to essential workers in need, art and writing programs for youths, and are planning programs for seniors and children with special needs as well.

AUCC, Al Ummah Community Center, which means "The People's Community Center," was founded on the values of service, respect, equality, justice and peace for all. As an Islamic organization, the daycare facility, the youth programs, and the food drives are open to EVERYONE in the community with the intention of building bridges, providing support to local families, and creating a stronger community and world. This falls right in line with Teaneck's "Stigma Free" initiative.

So, what exactly are the issues surrounding the new Community Center on Oakdene Avenue? The town of Teaneck has yet to answer that question. In a town with 1 Buddha temple, 2 mosques, 18 synagogues, 26 churches, and more than 50 registered tax-exempt houses of worship, what is holding up a project that will benefit the entire community? Teaneck has been

holding up the opening of the AUCC for several years, costing its founders over \$400,000 in fines, unreasonable upgrade requests, permits, and delays. All of this with no end in sight.

Town officials frequently compared AUCC to the State Street project. I'm not sure why. The State Street Apartment project was approved 6 – 1. The 68 apartments are more than seven times what is permitted. Its 73-foot height to the roofline is more than double the maximum permitted height of 35 feet. And yet, it was approved 6 – 1, while AUCC is being held up with demands to expand their 64-space parking lot to approximately 300 spaces – a 368% increase from the previous church and school. At one point, even AUCC's Arabic name was an issue for Teaneck officials. The fact is, there is no issue with the new Islamic center on Oakdene Avenue. Not one. And yet it has been denied an ADA compliant ramp and an elevator to help with special needs children.

We live in the greatest country on earth. A country where the First Amendment gives all Americans five basic freedoms: speech, press, petition, assembly and religion. Denying one group of people their inalienable rights is a gateway to denying everyone their inalienable rights.

If you believe in justice and the betterment of your community, then GET INVOLVED. We are always looking for good people, like you, to join us and make a difference in Our community.

To learn more about AUCC and the lawsuit, please visit <https://aucenj.org/lawsuit>