

Islamic Association plans to build new Big Flats mosque

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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Area Muslims seek to build new house of worship in Big Flats**
- **Group has worshiped at Big Flats location since the 1980s**
- **\$1.5 million project tentatively scheduled for completion in June 2016**

The Islamic Association of the Finger Lakes plans to build a \$1.5 million mosque on Hickory Grove Road in Big Flats.

Since the association was established in the 1980s, its members have held daily prayer services and other related events at 62 Main St. in Big Flats, said Iman Zaman Marwat, who has led the congregation for the past six years. Prayer services average between 50 and 60 individuals.

As membership has grown, Marwat said, the present location has become too small. The Islamic Association primarily draws its members from Chemung and Steuben counties — some coming from as far away as Hornell.

The site plans for the project have been presented to the Big Flats Town Planning Board and will be reviewed by Chemung County planners at their Thursday meeting. The board meets at 2:30 p.m. at the Chemung County Commerce Center at 400 E. Church St.

The mosque will be constructed on a 2.5-acre lot north of the Hickory Grove Apartments, said Chemung County Planning Commissioner Randy Olthof.

Initially, the building will measure 4,750 square feet, with 70 parking spaces but it will eventually be expanded to 9,042 square feet, with 20 more parking spaces. A parochial schoolroom for Islamic religious instruction and an interfaith room, both to be located within the building, are also included in the project.

The initial phase of the project, Marwat said, will cost slightly under \$1 million, and Fagan Engineers of Elmira has been retained for the design work.

In addition to the town planning board approval, the project will also require an approval from the town's Zoning Appeals Board.

Olthof said the zoning ordinance in Big Flats allows buildings in the town's R1 zoning districts to cover 43 percent of the lot of which they are built. In this case, the mosque will cover 53 percent on the parcel it will be built on after the expansion.

A public hearing on the area variance will have to be scheduled by town officials prior to any action by the zoning appeals board.

Ground breaking for the project is tentatively set for June 2015 with the completion set for June 2016.

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