

Planning commission advances mosque permit

By [Andrew Gaug](#)

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The first steps were made Thursday night for the first Islamic worship center in St. Joseph.

At a St. Joseph Planning Commission meeting, a conditional use permit was approved for the Islamic Center of St. Joseph, at 2201 Messanie St., with a 7-0 vote. Members Joseph Morrey and Reba Hebery abstained.

The estimated \$70,000 mosque, or Masjid, a steel construction building, will be the first in St. Joseph's history and one that president Ramadhan Washington, a lifetime resident, has been anticipating since converting to Islam.

"I've been waiting on the mosque going on 35 years now," he said. "Basically, we always went to Kansas City."

At the meeting, treasurer Ahmad Safi, a former reporter for the

St. Joseph News-Press, laid out the Islamic worship center's intentions.

"It is intended to be a bridge of understanding. It will offer religious and community events to educate the public and fellow Muslims about Islam," he said.

About 25 people currently meet at a temporary mosque. Mr. Safi said he sees the center as a place for personal growth and public understanding.

"Our mosques in the U.S. need to be more of a civic center, where Muslims can practice and incorporate their family life here," he said.

Though Islamic roots in St. Joseph trace back to the late 1800s with Alexander Russell Webb, an editor at the St. Joseph Daily Gazette, there are still questions from non-Islamic residents that Mr. Safi said they would like to address.

With the passing of the conditional use permit, the next step will be for two separate readings at City Council meetings, tentatively scheduled for January and February. By March, Mr. Safi said he hopes to break ground.

"We're looking at about a month construction once we break ground. The Masjid (building) itself is being built on-site in Southeast Missouri. So we're looking to have it done before next summer," he said.

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