The planned construction of a Muslim community center in Lower Manhattan morphed into a controversy about Sept. 11, Islam and freedom of religion that echoed worldwide in 2010.

The community center is part of a complex called Park51, planned for a site two blocks from ground zero.

The [organizers of the project](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/11/nyregion/11mosque.html)  were Feisal Abdul Rauf, the imam of a mosque in the financial district; Daisy Khan, his wife; and Sharif el-Gamal, a young real-estate investor born in New York. Their first public presentation of the project —an appearance at a meeting of Community Board 1, the largely advisory body that represents the neighborhood in Lower Manhattan — was on May 5, 2010.

Later that month the community board backed the project and [gave approval with a 29-to-1 vote](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/26/nyregion/26muslim.html), with 10 abstentions. The board’s vote was advisory — it did not have the power to scrap plans for a center — but it was seen as an important barometer of community sentiment.

But over the next few months as word of the project spread there were angry protests from some relatives of 9/11 victims, politicians and others who said it would be insensitive to build a Muslim institution close to where Islamic radicals attacked the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. The furor was fanned by Internet-based activists who viewed Muslim influence as a threat and called the project a “victory mosque.” The developers, [unprepared for the outcry](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/11/nyregion/11mosque.html), were thrown into disarray, trying to defend a plan that was still embryonic.

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[In August 2010, the project received its final city approval](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/04/nyregion/04mosque.html) when the landmarks commission voted 9 to 0 to deny granting historic protection to the building in Lower Manhattan.

**MOVING AHEAD**

[A year after the controversy](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/02/nyregion/new-quiet-effort-for-big-islamic-center-near-ground-zero.html) the project’s developers quietly moved ahead. Mr. Gamal severed ties with the project’s original imam, Mr. Abdul Rauf. They have hired paid staff, started [fund-raising](http://park51.org/video/) [drives](http://www.prayerspacenyc.org/video/) and continued holding prayers and cultural events in their existing building two blocks from ground zero.

But they also embraced what they call a slower, more deliberate and more realistic approach to the project, acknowledging it will take years of hard work to determine what kind of facilities Muslim and non-Muslim visitors want and need, to raise money, and to build public support.

That means it could be five years before they even try to begin any physical transformation of the property, now a bare-bones building that once housed a Burlington Coat Factory store. And the Muslim center might never become the 15-story, $100 million edifice that the developers had once envisioned, and that some opponents had labeled a “megamosque.”

Mr. El-Gamal said his vision remained: a Muslim-led community center modeled on the Jewish Community Center on the Upper West Side, where his children learned to swim. It would be open to all, with a pool, a theater and cultural, religious and interfaith programming. And the site, which is already used for Muslim worship, would include a mosque.

One thing that is not in question, he said, is the center’s location. Legally, he is entitled to operate a religious institution there; the project required no zoning approval.

At the same time, Mr. El-Gamal said he would no longer have an imam as the center’s public face. Personality conflicts and philosophical and tactical disagreements ended his relationship with Mr. Abdul Rauf, whose views were criticized by opponents and whom some Muslims said was out of touch with their concerns.

**THE FUROR**

The complex’s rapid evolution from a local zoning dispute into a national referendum was fueled in part by Republican leaders and conservative pundits. Sarah Palin, the 2008 Republican vice-presidential nominee, urged “peace-seeking Muslims” to reject the center, branding it an “unnecessary provocation.”

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The issue divided family members of those killed on Sept. 11. Some argued it was insensitive to the memory of those who died in the attacks. Others saw it as a potent symbol of tolerance to counter the religious extremism that prevailed on that day.

The Anti-Defamation League, an influential Jewish organization, unexpectedly entered the fray and [said it opposed the project.](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/31/nyregion/31mosque.html)

Rick A. Lazio, at the time a Republican candidate for governor of New York, appeared at a commission hearing in opposition to the project. Mr. Lazio called on his Democratic rival, Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo, to investigate the finances of the group spearheading the project, the Cordoba Initiative.

In [a poll conducted by The New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/03/nyregion/03poll.html), two-thirds of New York City residents wanted the project to be relocated to a less controversial site farther away from ground zero in Lower Manhattan, including many who say they favor it being built.

***Write a 1 page reflection: How does this relate to topics we have discussed in class? What do you think about the Issue?***