

**STATEMENT FROM THE MAYOR'S ADVISORY COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS
BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS MEETING
PRESENTED BY DEE THORNTON
FEBRUARY 26, 2018
6:00 PM – THE PALLADIUM**

The Mayor's Advisory Commission on Human Relations was created by Mayor Jim Brainard in 2009. The mission of the Commission is to advise the Mayor on ways to better recognize and appreciate the contributions of our citizens of all races and ancestries, and to identify any obstacles that may prevent full citizen participation in all civic and other activities taking place within Carmel's corporate boundaries. The following statement represents the consensus of the Commission.

The Mayor's Advisory Commission on Human Relations has been closely following the request by the Al-Salam Foundation for a zoning variance to permit the construction of a mosque and community center at 141st Street and Shelbourne, as well as the remonstrance against such a variance. Press coverage of the matter has cast Carmel in a negative public light, which undermines all the good things happening in Carmel and erodes the City's ability to attract new residents and businesses. The Commission believes strongly that it is important to ensure Carmel is an inclusive community that celebrates diversity and finds strength in our differences.

The Commission also recognizes that neighbors of the proposed mosque may have legitimate concerns with regard to such things as traffic, noise, light and other environmental factors. The Commission urges the Board of Zoning Appeals, other representatives of City government, and those speaking both for and against the zoning variance, to limit and focus their discussion and review to the actual merits of the proposed facility and legitimate concerns of neighboring property owners.

More specifically we urge the Board of Zoning Appeals and other interested parties to be sure that discussion and resolution of this issue avoids any element of bigotry or intolerance based on religion, race or national origin. Property use, land value, traffic, noise and similar matters are legitimate issues for public discussion. We value the right of all Americans, both Christian and non-Christian, native-born and immigrant, to worship freely. Any attempt to limit this right on the basis of bias or bigotry has no place in this decision-making process and no place in Carmel.