

Furore over plan for \$4m mosque in Swan Valley

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A plan to build a \$4 million mosque complete with a 19m minaret in the Swan Valley has divided the local Muslim and non-Muslim community, with some residents worried it will destroy the identity of the area as a tourist, viticultural and horticultural hotspot.

The Bosnian Islamic Society plans to build the 1277sqm mosque on a 9400sqm block on Smallbrook Retreat in Caversham on the edge of the valley. The society bought the land two years ago for \$280,000. The design includes several buildings linked by courtyards, a large archway entry and parking for 87 vehicles.

But the design is not the problem, according to Swan Valley Progress Association chairman Rod Henderson, who said the use of the proposed building as a mosque did not fit within the character of the area.

He believed the mosque's construction would be inappropriate under the Swan Valley Planning Act 1995, which was designed to protect the region from inconsistent developments. "If someone were to come in and buy a block of land to make shoes, for instance, that would be contrary to the Act," he said. "If someone wants to come in and put up a mosque, that is also contrary to the Act. It should be put up in a suburban lot in an appropriate area. There's no delineation here, it's not a matter of bias."

But the proposal has been developed with advice from the City of Swan, whose chief executive Mike Foley said the plans would not have been allowed to progress if they did not meet its guidelines.

Bosnian Islamic Society president Sajit Smajic said the land had been chosen because it bordered Beechboro and Lockridge, where 85 per cent of Perth's Bosnian Muslims lived.

"I think this building can embellish the whole area and can be another attraction for tourists, I don't think it

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will make the Swan Valley ugly or that it is out of context with the whole area," he said.

Mr Smajic said he was not surprised by the community's reaction to the mosque because many people had negative stereotypes about Muslims. "We can sit down and put everything on the table and see what the people are concerned about and if it is possible to solve the problems, we will," he said. "Once they sit down with us, they will realise we are not a threat."

Mr Smajic said the prayer room would be big enough to hold 350 peo-

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Controversial: An artist's impression of the mosque proposed to be built in the Swan Valley. Pictures: Archetype Design

ple. No Australian mosques broadcast a "call to prayer".

The public comment period on the plan closed last Friday, with the City of Swan receiving 139 objections from 143 submissions. The plan is unlikely to go to council before March.