

THE REAL DEAL

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Judge tosses out case against Park51

Firefighter claimed placement of proposed Islamic cultural center caused him distress

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Soho Properties CEO Sharif El-Gamal and a rendering of Park51 community center

A state Supreme Court judge dismissed a suit by retired New York firefighter who alleged the proposed Park51 Islamic cultural center in Lower Manhattan inflicted emotional distress on him.

Vincent Forras, the ex-firefighter, was injured during his role as a first responder during the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. The firefighter had leased office space and lived, on a part-time basis, at 257 Church Street, fewer than 10 blocks from the proposed Park 51 site at the corner of Park Place and Church Street.

In the ruling, Judge Lucy Billings said Forras' case was without merit.

The developers of the planned cultural center countered that the suit was just a front for anti-Muslim bigotry and had no standing or merit to stop the project.

"After three lawsuits, almost a thousand pages of documents, threats on our security, hundreds of hate mail and emails, and an outpouring of hatred from all over the nation, we can now put this matter to rest with today's resounding victory in state Supreme Court," Adam Leitman Bailey, attorney for the developers told The Real Deal, in a statement. "Our client has the right to build what it wants on its property."

Larry Klayman, attorney for the plaintiff, was not immediately available for comment, and did not return an email query at press time.

Billings also ordered lawyers for the plaintiff to reimburse \$1,500 to the defendants lawyers, citing the failure of the firefighter's lawyers to appear at a March 2011 hearing.

In 2011, Supreme Court Judge Paul Feinman tossed a separate suit by former firefighter Timothy Brown, who sought to overturn a ruling by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to deny landmark status for the 150-year old site, the location of a former Burlington Coat Factory.