

PARK51 COMMUNITY CENTER

Fact Sheet/Timeline

KEY FIGURES

Sharif El-Gamal is the Chairman and CEO of Soho Properties, a Manhattan real estate firm. Soho Properties purchased 45-47 Park Place for \$4.85 million in July 2009, and also assumed a lease for 49-51 Park Place that runs until 2071. According to El-Gamal, the purchasing process took four years. El-Gamal was born in Brooklyn and is an American citizen. He is one of the founders of Park51, and currently serves as its Trustee and President, and is on its Board.

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf is a Kuwait-born imam, and is an American citizen. For many years, he has been involved in multi-religious and intercultural work. Since 1983, he has been the imam at a Sufi mosque in lower Manhattan, Masjid al-Farah. In 2003, Imam Feisal founded the Cordoba Initiative, a multi-faith nonprofit organization, where he serves as its Chairman. The Cordoba Initiative has no formal or legal connection to Park51. In December 2010, Imam Feisal and the Cordoba Initiative launched a new initiative called the Cordoba Movement. It is intended to expand the work of the Cordoba Initiative multi-nationally. Imam Feisal is also a founder of Park51 and serves on its Board. For much of the time Park51 has been in the media, Imam Feisal was also the informal “face” of the community center. A press release issued by Park51 on January 14, 2011 stated that this is no longer the case.

Daisy Khan is Imam Feisal's wife and a Board member of the Cordoba Initiative. She was born in India and is an American citizen. She is also the founder of the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA), whose mission is to foster an American Muslim identity through interfaith, youth and women's empowerment, and arts and culture initiatives. In the late summer and early fall of 2010, the media turned to Ms. Khan as a spokesperson for Park51 while Imam Feisal was traveling abroad on a State Department sponsored trip for interfaith initiatives. She has no official role with Park51.

TIMELINE

Shortly after September 11, 2001 Sharif El-Gamal began attending services at Masjid Manhattan, a 40 year-old mosque located a few blocks from Ground Zero, where he noted that there were many congregants and overflow attendance.

2003 Imam Feisal founded the Cordoba Initiative. This organization was named in reference to Cordoba, Spain, where during the 10th and 11th centuries, Muslims, Jews and Christians coexisted peacefully, and the city was a center of intellectual, spiritual, cultural and commercial life.

2006 Sharif El-Gamal attended Masjid al-Farah, where he noted overflow as well. As a real estate developer, he states that he began to think about where larger spaces for mosques in the neighborhood might be available. In addition, he notes that he began to think about Muslims from a variety of practices coming together in one space – similar to the model of a Jewish Community Center (JCC) – both for worship and community activities.

Sharif El-Gamal and Imam Feisal met at Masjid al-Farah. Imam Feisal states that he had long hoped to develop an interfaith Community Center, open to everybody, which would reflect the evolution of the

American Islamic identity. He states that he and Daisy Khan had written a proposal for this, which had been screened by interfaith leaders.

Imam Feisal, Daisy Khan and Sharif El-Gamal shared their visions with one another, and began working together, with El-Gamal conducting the real-estate search.

May 2008 Masjid Manhattan was evicted from their space and found a smaller space to rent two doors from its previous location. This resulted in people having to pray in the streets outside the masjid.

July 2009 Soho Properties purchased 45-47 Park Place, and acquired a 70+ year leasehold on 49-51 Park Place. This property is two and a half blocks from Ground Zero, and is a former Burlington Coat Factory which was damaged in the 9/11 attacks. At this time, the vision was to build a multi-story interfaith community center with a mosque taking up one floor.

Spring 2010 Sharif El-Gamal states that he and Imam Feisal embarked on a "Campaign of Awareness" with various New York City Council members, political figures and Community Board No. 1 to inform them of their plans for the community center; he reports that the project was supported by these representatives. The public name of the community center at this time was "Cordoba House."

May 19, 2010 Tea Party leader Mark Williams sparked controversy by protesting Cordoba House, calling it a mosque and blogging, "The monument would consist of a Mosque for the worship of the terrorists' monkey-god."

May 20, 2010 A press conference was held at the project's site with Imam Feisal, City Council representatives, State Senators, the Manhattan Borough President and a number of community members to denounce Mark Williams' comments and to express unequivocal support for the project, both from a legal and ethical standpoint. Organizations throughout the city wrote letters of support for the community center.

May 25, 2010 Blogger and founder of the Stop Islamization of America organization, Pamela Gellar, and various Tea Party members joined hundreds of people protesting against Cordoba House outside of a Community Board No. 1 meeting. In speaking of this occurrence, Sharif El-Gamal says it was then that he realized he had to build the community center at the proposed location, to combat ignorance.

July 2010 The community center's name was changed to Park51. Imam Feisal continued to refer to the project as "Cordoba House."

August 3, 2010 New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission voted 9-0 against granting landmark status and historic protection to the building, thereby allowing Park51 to be built.

August 2010 Widespread and internationally publicized protests and counter-protests around the issue of the community center took place in lower Manhattan, and across the U.S. Though much of the controversy focused on the community center's proximity to the Ground Zero site, anti-Muslim sentiment was expressed across the country. Many people condemned what they viewed as xenophobia and an effort to stop freedom of religion.

Imam Feisal was out of the country during much of the controversy, and Daisy Khan acted as a spokesperson for him and the community center.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg endorsed Park51 on the basis of freedom of religion.

August 13, 2010 President Barack Obama stated, "Muslims have the same right to practice their religion as anyone else in this country. And that includes the right to build a place of worship and a community center on private property in lower Manhattan, in accordance with local laws and ordinances." The following

day, after varied reactions to his statement, President Obama clarified and said he was speaking from a legal standpoint and "was not commenting...on the wisdom of making the decision to put a mosque there."

September 10, 2010 Sharif El-Gamal clarified that the "Cordoba House" at Park51 was the name only for the interfaith space in the community center, and not the name for the center itself.

November 2010 Park51 applied for a Lower Manhattan Development Council grant, intended in part for funding social service programs, Arabic and other foreign language classes, programs and services for homeless veterans, multi-cultural art exhibits and immigration services. This resulted in some negative attention.

December 8, 2010 Imam Feisal officially announced the launch of his Cordoba Movement, a multi-national, multi-faith organization dedicated to improving understanding and building trust among people of all cultures and faith traditions. According to Imam Feisal, the movement is comprised of, and represents moderates who are against hard-line extremists from all walks of life. Domestic and international speaking tours play heavily in the work of the movement.

Imam Feisal explains that his idea for Cordoba House(s) represents a separate initiative of the Cordoba Initiative. It is a concept for interfaith space(s) and programming, which Imam Feisal envisions in a number of cities across the world.

January 2011 Park51's new website was launched. It included a link to a separate organization called PrayerSpace.

PrayerSpace is a separate non-profit entity from Park51, and its function is to house a Muslim prayer space at 51 Park Place, which some would call a mosque and others may disagree on this nomenclature. PrayerSpace's landlord is Soho Properties. According to Sharif El-Gamal, the intention is that Park51 and PrayerSpace will each obtain its own 501(c)(3) status. They will have separate boards, sets of employees, missions, visions and governing statements.

Muslim prayers have started to be held in PrayerSpace. According to El-Gamal, approximately 1,000 people attend PrayerSpace on a weekly basis, and at least 600 attend for Friday prayers.

In an interview with the Buffalo News, Imam Feisal stated that if another site for the community center were available, "I would move; I would move because my whole life is about improving relationships with people."

January 14, 2011 Sharif El-Gamal issued a press release on behalf of Park51 stating that due to Imam Feisal "focusing most of his energies and passion on launching this new and separate initiative, it is important that the needs of Park51...take precedence. While Imam Feisal's vision has a global scope and his ideals for the Cordoba Movement are truly exceptional, our community in Lower Manhattan is local. Our focus is and must remain the residents of Lower Manhattan and the Muslim American community in the Greater New York area." The press release also stated that Imam Feisal and Daisy Khan would no longer speak for Park51, though Imam Feisal would remain on the Board. Imam Abdallah Adhami took over primary prayer service responsibilities from Imam Feisal, and was named a Senior Advisor of Park51. The press reported that Imam Feisal was unaware of this change.

Feb 4, 2011 Imam Abdallah Adhami stepped down from his position of Senior Advisor of Park51 to devote more time to completing a book. Between January 14 and February 4, 2011, there had been some controversy around Imam Adhami's comments around homosexuality. Park51 stated that Adhami's comments did not represent the views of the community center.

As of March 7, 2011, fundraising for Park51 and PrayerSpace was in the very beginning stages.

The estimated cost of the project was \$120 million.

Sharif El-Gamal said Soho Properties hopes to break ground in three to five years.

Park51 would create 150 full-time and 500 part-time jobs.

Reportedly, 501(c)(3) status is pending for both organizations.

The Board of Park51 consisted of Sharif El-Gamal, Imam Feisal, Nour Mousa (a partner in Soho Properties) and Sammy El-Gamal (Sharif El-Gamal's brother).

Mr. El-Gamal's vision is that the Board would eventually consist of 23 members with 50/49% Muslims so as to maintain the Muslim heritage aspect of the center.

A 9/11 Memorial will be part of Park51.

According to its website, Park51 is intended to be a 120,000 square-foot, 15-16 story community center open to all, which will include:

Children & Families

Child care facilities
Camps
Playground
Youth activities
Senior programming

Health, Fitness & Sports

Swimming pool
Fitness center
Sports center
Wellness center
Spa, Massage, Yoga/Pilates

Muslim Life

Islamic studies
Lectures
Youth activities
Arabic language
Holidays & Celebrations

Arts & Culture

Exhibition space
Art gallery
Artist studio/Residence
Culinary school
Art workshops & classes
Digital library

Education & Dialogue

Interfaith
Politics & current events
Culture & society
Science & discovery

Social Services

Social action
English as a Second language classes
Legal services (domestic violence, immigration)
Interfaith/Veteran/Homeless
Small business support

For more information: www.park51.org