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## Offering Support for a Menorah, Unofficially

By MARTIN FORSTENZER

FORT COLLINS, Colo., Dec. 16 — For the second year in a row, this normally serene university town at the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains is embroiled in a dispute over holiday symbols.

The controversy, similar to recent wrangling over Christmas trees at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, centers on the refusal by Fort Collins to allow a menorah to be displayed downtown during Hanukkah, near a Christmas tree and other Christmas displays.

In November 2005, Rabbi Yerachmiel Gorelik of the Chabad Jewish Center of Northern [Colorado](#) asked the city to place a nine-foot menorah near a Santa's workshop display in Old Town Square, a popular gathering spot surrounded by shops, art galleries, restaurants and bars.

The Downtown Development Authority, a quasi-governmental agency that owns the square, allowed a menorah-lighting ceremony but refused Rabbi Gorelik's request to leave the menorah there for the eight days of Hanukkah. He then asked the city if he could place it with a Christmas tree display in Oak Street Plaza nearby. The City Council refused that request, saying it would have to study the issue.

All six members of the Council later voted against allowing a menorah on city property. This month, the development agency, whose board the Council appoints, again decided to turn down the rabbi's request to place the menorah in Old Town Square during Hanukkah. The Fort Collins city attorney, Stephen J. Roy, said the city relied on several court rulings as the legal basis for its decision, including one by the [United States Supreme Court](#) in a 1989 Pennsylvania case.

"In the courts' view," Mr. Roy said, "a Christmas tree is a secular symbol, while a menorah has both secular and religious significance."

But Nathan Lewin, the lawyer who represented Rabbi Gorelik's organization and who argued before the Supreme Court in the 1989 case, wrote the city last year saying that its refusal to allow the menorah in Old Town Square violated the First Amendment rights of the rabbi and the Chabad group.

Rabbi Gorelik said the Council was "not being fair." "They were saying that the Christmas tree and Christmas were American," he said, "but that Hanukkah and the menorah were something that doesn't belong."

Several Council members said they were concerned that allowing a menorah display would open the door for other religious groups and organizations to request that their displays also be included.

"Someone said there are 79 recognized religions in the world," said one member, Karen Weitkunat. "Where do you draw the line?" Another member, Diggs Brown, said: "If we were to open it up to a menorah, then

everyone wants to get involved. You're going to get sued if you allow religious displays, and you're going to be sued if you don't have them."

The mayor of Fort Collins, Doug Hutchinson, who cast the lone dissenting vote last summer to allow the menorah for the duration of Hanukkah, said he was "very disappointed" by the Council's decision.

"Great cities are inclusionary, and I believe Fort Collins is inclusionary," Mayor Hutchinson said. "I thought it was a step backwards."

Phil Koster, chaplain at the Poudre Valley Hospital and a member of the Inter Faith Dialogue Group, a local organization, called the decision "discriminatory."

"It communicates to all those who are members of minority communities that you don't have the same rights if you live here as the dominant culture does," Mr. Koster said

Many residents of Fort Collins, the home of [Colorado State University](#), were angered by the city's decision and have responded with a campaign of support for the city's Jewish residents, who number only a few thousand in a total population of about 137,000. In a show of solidarity, some non-Jewish residents and a growing list of businesses are displaying menorahs in their windows.

"I think the City Council is trying to cover themselves legally, but they're shortsighted about the long-term implications of how this impacts groups," said Jill Kuhn, a psychologist here who is not Jewish. "We're going to put a menorah in our window, and we're going to light it. We hope other people do that too."

This year, as it did last year, CooperSmith's Pub and Brewing, which sits on Old Town Square, has allowed the rabbi to move the menorah to its grounds, where it will remain for the duration of Hanukkah.

"We're not in agreement with the City Council's decisions," said Ted Devitt, managing partner of CooperSmith's. "It's not what we thought the community stands for."

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