



Site Tools Sponsored By

dollarbank.com

# THE PLAIN DEALER

## 2 homeowners stymie land buy to build new school in Hough

Thursday, June 02, 2005

**Ebony Reed**  
Plain Dealer Reporter

The Cleveland school district will spend millions of dollars and deal with hundreds of property owners over the next few years to build or expand 10 schools as part of its \$1.5 billion construction plan.

Although the state will pay for two-thirds of the construction, it will not pay for land purchases. So, the district must cover that cost out of the \$380 million in local taxes approved for the project in 2001.

Paul Flesher, the district's chief of capital programs, said by the time the project is finished in 2013, the district will spend between \$4 million and \$8 million on property.

Almost \$1 million of that will go toward a new Willson School for grades kindergarten through eight, one of four new schools in the plan. When the school year ends next week, the old Willson Middle School on East 55th Street will close, along with 10 other schools. The new Willson will be built near East 87th Street where more students need it, school officials say.

By this fall, the district plans to finish buying about 4.5 acres for Willson, but the land is divided into 60 parcels with 21 different owners.

The negotiations are being handled by district lawyers and Allegro Realty Advisors Ltd., which has a \$500,000 contract to find property and work on land purchases districtwide.

To entice property owners, the district is offering them a relocation plan, which includes moving expenses and payments toward either a new house or apartment. So far, the district has spent \$6,100 for three moves, Flesher said.

Not all Ohio districts pay for moving expenses. The Lima school district bought 197 parcels to build a new high school, which opened in August. The district did not pay moving expenses or take any of the land through eminent domain, said Ronnie Boedicker, who heads the district's operations.

Flesher said Cleveland's moving plan is modeled after Ohio Department of Transportation and city of Cleveland guidelines.

But in the Hough neighborhood, Shirle Crumbs, hasn't been moved by the district's incentives. Crumbs, a 30-year resident, said he may eventually agree to sell his house for a new Willson School, but the district needs to offer him more money.

"It will be hard for me to find another place," he said. "I am 75 years old.

"From what I hear, you can't say no. They'll find a way to take it anyway."

Crumbs and his next-door neighbor, Barbara Brown, are the only residents who have said they will not sell their property for Willson, Flesher said.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett, Cleveland schools CEO, said the district historically has not used eminent domain, which allows government agencies to take residents' land for public use. The district is trying to work out a compromise with the homeowners, but it's also investigating whether it can still build the school without the two houses, she said.

Crumbs moved to Ansel Road almost four decades ago, becoming the second black homeowner in a

mostly Polish area, he said. The neighborhood was quiet until a grocery store moved in and fights and drugs infused the community, he said. About 10 years ago, the store closed and the fights subsided, he said.

"Now it's nice and quiet," Crumbs said. "I can finally sit on my back porch."

Brown moved into the neighborhood in 1976 when her mother bought a house next door to Crumbs.

She said she worries about how moving would affect her mother, who has Alzheimer's disease. She said she also wants more money from the district, which has offered her \$80,000 through Allegro.

"I was thinking I would get at least \$100,000, considering they are displacing us," she said.

City Council member Fannie Lewis said she is opposed to the district forcing people to sell. She said she will try to block the district from buying any property on Kosciuzsko Avenue because district officials did not speak to her before they talked to residents on the street.

"The elementary school, it's a good thing," Lewis said. " But you can't come in and bulldoze people and do what you want to."

District spokesman Alan Seifullah said the district made every effort to keep Lewis informed about the project.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:

ereed@plaind.com, 216-999-4848

© 2005 The Plain Dealer

© 2005 cleveland.com All Rights Reserved.