

Central Corridor seeks 8th eminent domain option (update)

by Bill Clements

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Involves property at 29th Avenue and University

The Central Corridor project will ask the Metropolitan Council on Wednesday for permission to initiate eminent domain proceedings on more than one-third of an acre at 29th Avenue and University Avenue Southeast in Minneapolis.

It will be the eighth such request for the project; so far, two cases have landed in court.

Prospect Park Properties Inc. owns the entire block between 29th and 30th Avenues Southeast and Fourth Street and University Avenue Southeast.



Central Corridor officials want the option of using eminent domain to obtain part of the property at 29th and University avenues in Minneapolis. It would be the eighth such case along the project; two have gone to court.

The project, which plans to build a transit station at 29th Avenue, is eyeing

a decorative pond on the property in front of the Overflow Espresso Café and six of 30 auto bays on the southeast corner of 29th Avenue Southeast and Fourth Street Southeast, said Central Corridor project spokeswoman Laura Baenen.

Mark Fuhrmann, head of rail projects for Metro Transit, the transit arm of the Met Council, said the property is also needed for LRT tracks where the Central Corridor trains will leave 29th Avenue and return to University Avenue.

Dave Barnhart, the owner of Prospect Park Properties Inc., said he has been unable to get clear information from the project officials.

"It's been a strain trying to get accurate information," Barnhart said. "We're trying to evaluate the situation from all possible angles and figure out what to do."

The block includes a 22,000-square-foot building that faces Fourth Street Southeast and a 60,000-square-foot building that faces University Avenue Southeast. Barnhart described the buildings as "mixed-use," with retail, storage and auto operations but not residential.

Prospect Park Properties and the Met Council have been negotiating the project's purchase of a permanent easement of 14,229 square feet and a temporary easement of 8,571 square feet, as well as a "building removal easement" of 4,297 square feet, which refers to the auto bays.

The Central Corridor light rail transit project recently filed its second eminent domain case in court, against the owners of a 31,362-square-foot surface parking area (known as the Hellervik parking lot) that is adjacent to the former Bremer Bank building site at 360 Cedar St. in downtown St. Paul.

The tentative court date in the case is Nov. 28 in Ramsey County District Court, Baenen said.

The Bremer Bank building itself was subject to possible eminent domain proceedings before being acquired for \$2.65 million. Crews demolished the building earlier this year to make way for the

CCLRT's Fourth Street Station. The tracks will cut diagonally from Fifth and Cedar streets to Fourth and Minnesota streets; the University Club Building at 340 Cedar St. will remain.

The other eminent domain case in the Central Corridor project that has gone to court involves the biggest such case — the former Gillette/Diamond Products site at 310 E. Fifth St. (also 340 Broadway St.) in St. Paul's Lowertown.

A hearing in that case is scheduled for Oct. 12. In all, the Gillette/Diamond site covers 21.3 acres and includes two connected buildings totaling more than 800,000 square feet of space.

The Central Corridor project has \$43.1 million budgeted to retrofit the one-story, 180,000-square-foot former distribution facility.

The 11-mile Central Corridor light rail transit line, due to open in 2014, will connect the downtowns of St. Paul and Minneapolis. The cost of the construction project — the largest publicly financed project in state history — is \$957 million.

In addition to the Bremer site, other cases involving possible eminent domain action include:

- A small strip of about 2,600 square feet of a driveway at the Central Presbyterian Church, 500 Cedar St. in downtown St. Paul; negotiations are under way;
- One-third of an acre adjacent to a Walmart store at 1450 W. University Ave. in the Midway area of St. Paul; negotiations continue;
- 8,120 square feet of the former Boeser sheet metal plant at 2901 Fourth St. S.E. in Minneapolis, acquired for \$1.2 million. (The project had permission to take the property via eminent domain, but it wasn't needed.); and,
- A skinny sliver of Burlington Northern Santa Fe property, just north of the University of Minnesota transitway and east of 25th Avenue Southeast in Minneapolis. The property is needed to shift a bike trail several feet north; BNSF and the Met Council came to an agreement.

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