

Minneapolis plans to buy boarded-up gas station at George Floyd Square

The Speedway, redubbed the "People's Way," has been the site of ongoing protests against police killings since Floyd's murder.

By **Susan Du** Star Tribune

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Minneapolis is negotiating to buy the obsolete Speedway gas station at George Floyd Square in south Minneapolis.

The Speedway, located at 38th Street and Chicago Avenue, has been boarded, painted over with protest art and renamed the "People's Way" since the murder of George Floyd. It continues to be a gathering site for protesters.



The owner wants to sell the gas station to Minneapolis so the city would assume liability for any possible environmental contamination and security needs, said Andrea Brennan, the city's director of community planning and economic development, at a South Side community meeting Monday night.

With City Council approval slated for November, Minneapolis could officially buy the property in December. There is no final purchase agreement, and no final price given. It last sold in 2010 for \$1 million and is currently assessed at \$585,000, according to Hennepin County records.

The city's proposition to take ownership of the site and hold it for an eventual national racial justice healing center received divergent reactions from the crowd. Some saw it as an opportunity for a needed face-lift of the economically depressed area at 38th and Chicago. Others chafed at the notion of the city changing an organically grown memorial and active protest site.

"It's mostly just coming to us today, hearing that the city is looking to purchase something," said protester Jeanelle Austin of the George Floyd Global Memorial. "Your timeline is moving really fast ... and just to have one community feedback, it feels like it's being done to us as opposed to including us."

In March, a 45-year-old man was found dead, his body allegedly lit on fire, inside the former gas station. The case has allegedly been fraught with lying witnesses and dropped charges. The incident raised alarms for the city as well as property owner Realty Income Corp., a California real estate investment group.

Brennan said there will be more public engagement next year around future development of the site, to be determined by the community. The city does not intend to be the long-term owner, she said. It's unclear who would be.

"Let's build up on that site to support the needs of the community," urged Alexander Bourne of Minnesota Rapid Response Coalition, which organized mutual aid in the area following the civil unrest of 2020. "Right now, [the gas station] just doesn't look good. You're seeing people's property values go down. You're seeing people's small businesses be adversely impacted. Something has to give and I understand the sense of urgency that exists. However, we can't move faster than community."

Ricky Turner, who grew up near 38th and Chicago, said it's important to respect that the condition of George Floyd Square is the result of the community's grief, which has not been "tidy."

"But I just don't see us leaving it as it is, as honoring what has transpired here," he said. "If a seed goes in the ground, hopefully it's going to bring forth some kind of plant and get some fruit. Now I agree it takes time. We showed you can't really rush that particular process, but we can make the garden look better."

Monday night's meeting was a part of 38th and Chicago Re-envisioned, an ongoing city project to reconstruct the historic intersection's aging streets.