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Homeowners Hang In Doubt On Moving For Bulldozers

Two-Thirds Of Residents In Path Of Expressway Still Don't Know Prices To Be Paid For Houses

By CHARLES EDMUNDSON

After 11 years of suspense, about 1,000 homeowners in the path of the projected east-west expressway can, with sufficient effort, find out whether their houses are going to be bulldozed into limbo.

But two-thirds of them still don't know when they will have to move or what they will be paid for the homes they are living up.

So from where the six lanes I-40 dead-end at White Station Road near the eastern city limits to where the piers of the new Mississippi River bridge are being pinpointed at the foot of Winchester, there is frustration and confusion.

"You get used to hanging if you hang long enough," says Mrs. Herman W. Anderson of North Avalon, wife of a supervisor for the Illinois Central Railroad. "But you never learn like it."

The Andersons bought their comfortable, well-shaded brick residence 10 years ago and invested several thousand dollars to make it their ideal. Mrs. Anderson braided some hooked others to fit each room. Mr. Anderson refinished the tables to provide just the furniture.

Seven years ago they heard an expressway interchange was going to dispossess them. But nobody was sure whether public sentiment was going to let the super-highway through Overton Park.

The Overton Park right-of-way was more definite last spring. Now the Andersons have a letter from state Highway Commissioner David Pack saying the state will buy their home by July, 1967.

But there is a final sentence to the letter. "All plans are subject to final change."

The Tennessee Highway Trust Fund is eight million dollars short of the sum needed to complete the interstate network on schedule by 1972. Tennessee has its 10 per cent share of the money ready in the bank. But in view of the costly war in Vietnam, the Federal Government's 90 per cent share of the highway cost is less sure.

The Andersons' position is frustrating, but not as much so as that of some others. The Andersons have, for the moment at least, their ideal home.

Other couples, with growing families, leaky roofs and peeling wallpaper are afraid to spend what is necessary to make their homes roomy or comfortable.

"We terribly need to redecorate and to build an addition to our home," says Mrs. C. A. Strickland Jr. of 547 Gerald. "We understand we won't get our money back if we redecorate or convert the screened-in porch to a badly needed bedroom."

"A lot of people are renting their homes and buying elsewhere. Often they have to borrow money to buy new homes. We don't want to rent our house and we can't sell. We're hooked."

Gerald is a short, quiet L-shaped street halfway between Waring and Graham. When the Stricklands bought there two years ago, they were told the expressway would go south of them, but the right-of-way was shifted.

For homeowners in the mile-and-a-half stretch from White Station to Waring, the indecision is at an end. Virgil Rawlings, state right-of-way acquisition agent with offices at 3440 Poplar, already has begun buying the land, including a slice of the lot, but not the

house, of Public Works Commissioner Pete Sisson at 4464 Princeton.

The next section where homes will be appraised runs from Waring to Holmes.

"But the word is not down from Nashville yet as to when," says Mr. Rawlings. "The stretch from Holmes to Collins is pretty well firmed up. It will follow the Waring-to-Holmes sector in being appraised."

"From Collins to McLean the highway is in the design stage. I couldn't say precisely what is to be taken there. From McLean to Claybrook is pretty well firmed up but minute details are not settled."

From Claybrook to the river the right-of-way is for the most part definite and most of it has been cleared of houses.

West of Claybrook the expressway has knocked out all the houses on the south side of Overton Park Avenue and on transverse streets nearly to Peach West of Waring.

Peach Avenue itself is demolished, including the bordering line of apartments in the Dixie Homes public housing development.

If homeowners directly in the right-of-way are now beginning to be able to tell what their fate is, many homeowners on the fringe are less sure. The fate of houses on the edge of the right-of-way often depends on the grade of the expressway, and the grade at many points is not yet determined.

The valuation of homes being condemned has generated problems for County Tax Assessor George LaManna. Where the countywide reappraisal of property has caused an occasional home in the path of the expressway to be reduced in valuation, there have been protests. The owner often assumes the property was reduced in valuation so the state could acquire the right-of-way at a lower figure. Mr. LaManna denies this.

"We've never reduced the valuation of a piece of property so the state could buy it cheaper. But we have, time after time, had to refuse requests of property owners to raise their valuation so they would have a basis to ask the state to pay them more."

Most of the families being dispossessed think the state Highway Department could make their situation easier if it would.

Mrs. Kate Morton of 3428 Galloway has an eight-room frame home which she thinks she could rent easily enough if she could afford to make rather extensive repairs. But she gets different word from different state Highway Department agents on how much repair and remodeling would be repaid.

Mr. Rawlings' advice seems indefinite.

"Normal maintenance has always been OK'd. New additions are warned against. We suggest avoiding major expense on roofing. We advise patching the roof where possible. But these are only suggestions."

If a landowner who thinks he should receive more money from the Highway Department has enough legal and financial backing, he can challenge the department in court.

Some owners living in the path of the expressway believe the Highway Department should mail each homeowner a concise, comprehensible guide as to what maintenance and repair costs will and will not,

be repaid when the state buys his property.

Others believe the Highway Department should post in a public place, as soon as a portion of the route becomes final, a map showing just where the highway goes and what property will be taken. The only way to see such a map now is to go to Mr. Rawlings' office at 3340 Poplar.

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