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Long-time Azusa furniture store to close after losing battle against city, eminent domain

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Conrad Sosa, left, and John Gorman load a couch onto a delivery truck at Furniture Station in Azusa on Tuesday. After a long battle, Furniture Station has settled with the city to sell the property and move out by the end of the month. (Watchara Phomicinda Staff Photographer)

AZUSA - After a prolonged battle, the owner of the Azusa Furniture Station has finally settled with the city to sell his property and move out by the end of the month.

Roy Fowler had been fighting with the city for nearly two years over the city's use of eminent domain to purchase his property on the corner of Azusa Avenue and Arrow Highway.

The city wants to redevelop the area, once known as Corky's Corner after the strip club of

the same name that used to sit adjacent to the furniture store.

The area has been cleared of all other buildings except for Fowler's store, which he had hoped to keep.

"We wanted to stay there. We have never hurt anyone or harmed anyone in that city," Fowler said of the

39-year-old store.

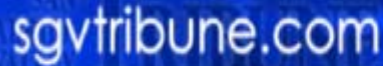
The city has been working on improving the area for years. At different times since 1977, Corky's Corner has been home to the strip club, a petting zoo, a swap meet, a medical building, a stereo store and a homeless camp.

The city in 2008 annexed much of the formerly unincorporated county land into city limits.

And in January 2010, the City Council voted unanimously to purchase Fowler's property.

"When you look at the entire property, it was pretty clear the thing was rundown," City Manager Fran Delach said. "It wasn't so much the furniture store, it was the entire property. (The council) wanted to improve the whole property."

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Delach said the property is blighted, has inadequate

parking, and has problems with outside storage of retail products.

Azusa won a court case in October regarding its use of eminent domain to purchase the property.

"We were terribly disappointed with the court decision," Fowler said. "We wanted to continue running our family business. After the court ruled in city's favor, we felt we had done all we can do."

A trial date was set for June to determine the value of the property, but Fowler said his lawyer advised him to make the city an offer prior to trial.

So he made an offer to city officials. Though they were initially cold to the offer, they decided to accept it following Gov. Jerry Brown's push to dissolve redevelopment agencies, Fowler said.

"They had a change of heart," he said.

Delach said the city paid \$1.45 million for the property.

In earlier negotiations, a land appraisal done by the city put the land value at \$1.1 million, which was the city's original offer. Fowler initially asked for \$3.3 million.

"I think it was a reasonable settlement," Delach said. "I am not sure we are satisfied with it. Happy isn't the right word."

Delach said the finalized deal opens the door to bring in new development almost immediately. He said the city is negotiating with a "very exciting" potential suitor, but he declined to comment on which store before a deal is finalized.

A deal could be announced within the month, he

said.

As for Fowler, he still owns another Furniture Station in Covina on Arrow Highway and Citrus Avenue.

The Azusa store is discounting much of its merchandise, which Fowler hopes to sell before they are forced to move on May 2. What remains will be moved to his Covina store.

Fowler said he was hurt by the way Azusa handled the entire affair.

"The thing that disappoints me the most is the city never came to us and asked us if we would be willing to sell the property to them," Fowler said. "Their attitude was we have eminent domain."

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