Joyce Cooks, an artist and former school teacher who has been in her house for decades, does not want to move. But if some city officials get their way, she could be forced out of her home as early as June.

The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, currently in South City, is considering moving to a new location in the region. In order to keep the NGA within St. Louis City, city officials are considering using eminent domain to clear out a neighborhood on the north side. It goes without saying that the people who would lose their homes in the deal are unhappy about it.

Joyce lives in a three-story brick Victorian house built in 1893. Her mother bought the house in the 1960s and she grew up in the neighborhood. “I love my home,” she tells me. If the city uses eminent domain, that home would be bulldozed.

One would hope that city leaders would resort to eminent domain—the power of government to remove a person from their land—only when there’s a very clear public benefit and no clear alternatives.

But in the case of the NGA, there are alternatives. In fact, there are three of them. One in particular, a parcel of land in St. Clair County, would have the advantage of being adjacent to an existing Department of Defense campus at Scott Air Force Base. Of the four proposals the NGA
is considering, only the one in St. Louis City requires the use of eminent domain to raze an entire neighborhood.

When I asked Joyce what she’ll do if the city is successful in forcing her to move, she was despondent. “That’s my biggest fear,” she admitted. Joyce still has no idea where she’ll go if it comes to that. “What will I do?”

I have my own questions: Why is the city serving as an agent of the federal government and using eminent domain to clear a tract for a federal agency that may not even locate within the city of St. Louis? Is keeping the NGA within the city worth keeping property owners in limbo while the NGA decides where to relocate? And if the city does use eminent domain to clear out this neighborhood on the north side, where will its residents go?

About the Author

John Wright  
Policy Analyst  

John Wright was a policy analyst focusing on government transparency and labor relations.

Read Online


Links


Mission Statement

Advancing liberty with responsibility by promoting market solutions for Missouri public policy.

Show-Me Institute

5297 Washington Place  3645 Troost Avenue  
Saint Louis, MO 63108  Kansas City, MO 64109  
Phone: (314) 454-0647  Phone: (816) 287-0370  
Fax: (314) 454-0667

Email: info@showmeinstitute.org

Support Our Work

The Show-Me Institute is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Make your tax deductible contribution today: http://ShowMeInstitute.org/donate