

Baton Rouge ordered to pay millions to church that lost land for planned airport expansion

 theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/courts/airport-expansion-court-church/article_6e867f1a-e800-4dc6-9041-b3e8fd4287ee.html

BY QUINN COFFMAN | Staff writer

September 4, 2026



A district court judge has ordered the city-parish to pay more than \$17 million after 4 acres of a Pentecostal group's campus were taken in 2020 as part of a planned expansion at Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport.

Judge Eboni Johnson Rose ruled on Aug. 26 that the city-parish's original payment of just over \$175,500 focused only on the acreage while ignoring the fact that the expansion would cut off access from the campus to Plank Road.

Located in the 8000 block of Plank Road, the Saintville campus functions as the Louisiana headquarters for the Church of God in Christ and represents "one of the larger edifices erected by a Black church in the State," Judge Johnson Rose said in her ruling.

The Saintsville site includes a full 30-acre campus with two sanctuaries, multiple residential dorms, a fellowship hall, warehouse, gymnasium and other event facilities.

The city-parish petitioned to expropriate just over 4 acres of the campus in October 2020 as part of an airport master plan.

The plan involves moving approximately a mile of Plank Road to make room for a standard safety area and protection zone at the end of one of the airport's runways. That runway butts up against Plank Road, and FAA regulations require protections to prevent a plane from rolling off the runway and onto the road.

According to October 2020 plans, taking the 4 acres for the new Plank Road would cut the campus into two separate parcels, according to the lawsuit.

In her ruling, Johnson Rose said the impact on the campus was larger than just the number of acres lost.

Specifically, Saintsville will lose direct visibility and access to Plank Road, and congregants will instead have to access the campus from the rear of the property, the judge said.

"The court finds this change significant," Johnson Rose wrote. "Although this proceeding involves a partial rather than a total taking, the determination of just compensation cannot be limited to the acreage physically acquired."

Expert sources for both sides estimated the value of the acres actually taken at around \$215,000.

But Josh Korman, an expert witness on real estate appraisal who testified on behalf of Saintsville, said there was more to it.

Korman, a partner with the KOR Group, characterized Saintsville as a "special use" property that could not be easily resold due to its nature as a religious site.

In his methodology, Korman evaluated the campus's market value both before and after it lost the acreage. The just compensation for Saintsville was based on the difference, with Korman calculating the church deserved around \$17.73 million.

In her ruling, Johnson Rose said the relevant question is not whether the Church of God in Christ can continue conducting church services somewhere on the remaining property, nor is it a question of whether the campus' buildings will remain standing.

Instead, the question centers on the value of the land that remains compared with its value from before the 4 acres were taken.

In her conclusion, Rose quoted portions of the 1974 state constitution, which expanded what rewards could be granted to those losing land to the government.

The landowner “must not only be paid the market value of property taken” but also be rewarded so that he “be put in as good a position ... as he would have been had his property not been taken,” the quoted portion reads.

Judge Johnson Rose writes in her ruling that this holds true even if the new evaluation is higher than the market value.

“The Court finds that just compensation is not limited to the approximately \$215,000 value of the property physically acquired,” Rose wrote. “That consideration is especially important here because the taking eliminates Saintsville’s existing driveway and direct Plank Road access and alters the relationship between the campus and the roadway.”

She ordered that the city-parish pay around \$215,000 for the 4 acres taken by the airport, on top of the approximately \$17.512 million owed to the church for its loss of access to Plank Road.