

Olmsted Board approves giving land next to FMC to city for park

By GREG SELLNOW
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The city of Rochester is soon to receive a 34-acre gift from Olmsted County.

Olmsted commissioners voted unanimously Tuesday to give the city a large piece of county-owned land west of the Federal Medical Center for use as a city park.

The move appeases homeowners in the area who had feared the county would sell the property to the Federal Bureau of Prisons for expansion.

Commissioners authorized the county's legal staff to draw up the paperwork to transfer the property, which is located on both sides of Center Street just west of the Federal Medical Center, to the city free of charge.

Board members asked that a stipulation be included in the agreement that requires the city to give the property back to the county if the city decides not to use the property for a park.

Curt Taylor, city superintendent of parks, said the Rochester Park Board has already informally approved the acquisition and is expected to decide next week to recommend to the City Council that the city assume ownership of the land. He expects the council to support the move.

"I think we can make a very nice park out of this," he said.

Taylor said he will propose that the city develop the property over three to five years.

Tentative plans for the land, about half of which is already being used by city recreation programs under an informal agreement with the county, include the construction of tennis courts, outdoor volleyball and basketball courts, picnic facilities, a playground, a shelter and rest rooms. The portion of the land located north of Center Street will continue to be used for youth soccer, football and softball, he said.

Taylor said at least seven of the eight buildings on the property will probably be torn down or moved. He said the city will explore uses

for the eighth building, the former home of the state hospital director.

There is enough money in the 1987 parks budget, Taylor said, to clean up the property and remove some unwanted shrubs and fences.

The county got the property in January of 1983 when it purchased the former Rochester State Hospital campus from the state for \$1. A year later, the county sold most of the buildings and property on the west side of the campus to the Federal Bureau of Prisons for use as a prison hospital.

Residents of the area strongly opposed the sale and banded together to form a citizens group, Olmsted Citizens for a Better Community, which filed an unsuccessful lawsuit against the county seeking to block use of the property as a prison hospital.

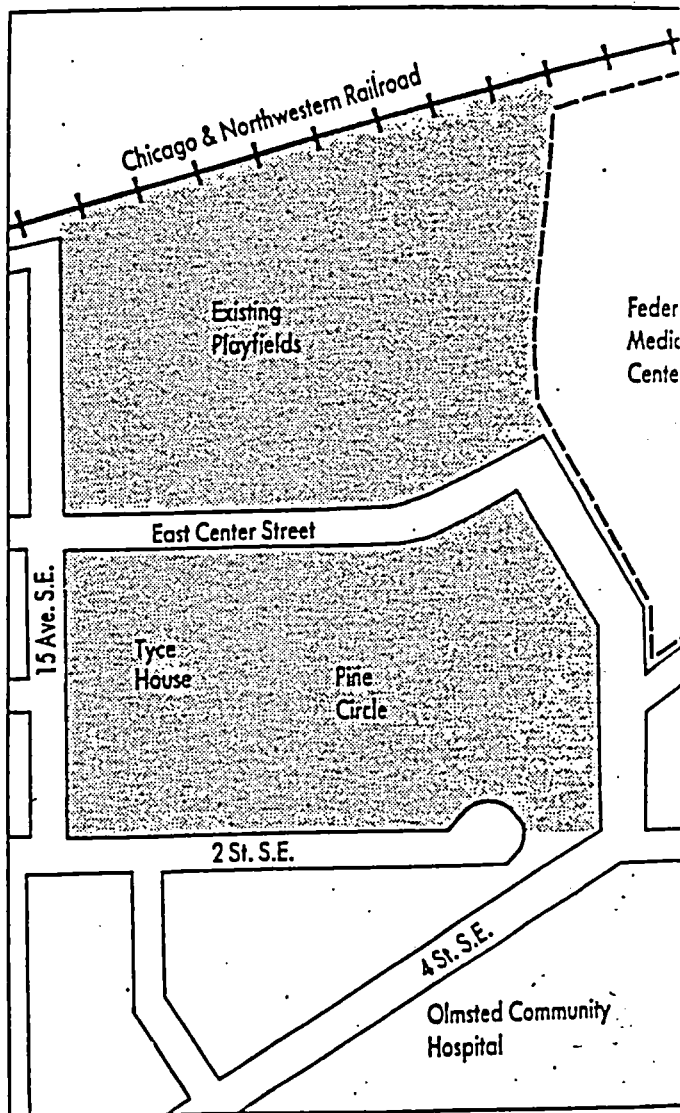
Once it became clear that the Federal Medical Center was here to stay, residents of the neighborhood, led by retired Rochester State Hospital employee Berdine Erickson, turned their attention to the county-owned property just west of the prison hospital.

They told commissioners earlier this year the land should be developed into a permanent park which could be used as a buffer zone between the Federal Medical Center and the neighborhood.

Commissioner Chub Stewart, whose district covers the area near the prison hospital, requested in January that the Rochester-Olmsted Consolidated Planning Department conduct a study of the site and make recommendations.

Consolidated Planning Director Gunnar Isberg presented a report to commissioners Tuesday which included a recommendation that the property be transferred to the city.

County Administrator Richard Devlin endorsed the recommendation, saying the city is better equipped than the county to maintain the property. He added that once the property is under city ownership, the county will no longer be liable for accidents that occur on the portion of county prop-



The shaded portions of the above diagram indicate property Olmsted County Board has decided to give to the city of Rochester for use as a city park. The area north of Center Street currently youth football fields; the area to the south of Center Street is the former residence of the Rochester State Hospital director.

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erty now used by the city for recreation programs.

All seven commissioners firmly supported the transfer.

"I will probably be criticized for selling out to the city," said Commissioner Jim Rossman of rural Douglas. "But I think this is the

logical use for this property. Commissioner Mike... predicted some citizens fault the board for giving valuable piece of property. "But it only has value if going to commercialize," he said. "If it's a park it's a liability."

