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What's the big deal?

The Ohio Supreme Court is expected to rule soon on whether 75 homes and commercial buildings in Norwood were properly taken for the

proposed Rookwood Exchange

retail-office-and-condo project. The case at a glance:

Question: Why is

Norwood being called a test case?

Answer: Because it may determine how far governments can go in taking private property in Ohio. In this case, the city of Norwood took property from one private owner and gave it to another private owner for commercial development. Traditionally, eminent domain has been used to secure land for public projects such as roads, bridges, sewers, schools and stadiums - not for economic development. Norwood says urban renewal, a more traditional purpose for eminent domain, is its biggest reason for taking the property.

Q: Where does the case stand now?

A: Lawyers argued the case

before the justices on Jan. 11. Generally, the court rules on cases three to six months after hearing oral arguments.

Q: Are there larger

implications?

A: Yes. The Norwood case is the first to reach a state Supreme Court since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a landmark case last year that New London, Conn., could seize homes and businesses for private commercial development. At the same time, the court said that states could

impose their own limits on

eminent domain. Because it's the first, Ohio's outcome is being watched nationwide. It could foretell how other state Supreme Courts rule on that issue.

Q: What's happening with the site now?

A: Nothing. The only structures left are three houses formerly owned by the people legally challenging Norwood's right to take the property. Developers have been prohibited from

tearing down those houses until the court case is decided.

Q: Are people living

in those houses?

A: No.

Q: When will work on Rookwood Exchange actually get under way?

A: Construction can't start until the courts allow the developers to tear down the three remaining houses. The Ohio Supreme Court might rule on the right to demolish those houses when it issues a decision about

Norwood's right to take the property.

Q: What's envisioned for Rookwood

Exchange?

A: The \$125 million complex might someday feature trendy housewares, upscale furniture, classy office space, 275 luxury condos or apartments and a business-class hotel. Plans show 400,000 square feet of office space, 275,000 square feet of retail space and a 2,000-car public parking garage.

Q: What's the value



to Norwood?

A: The project would generate \$1.7 million a year in earnings tax revenue for the city,

according to a study conducted by George Vredeveld, a

University of Cincinnati economics professor, at the request

of developers. That amount would represent 15 percent of Norwood's total earnings tax revenue, Vredeveld says.

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