

## Residents say city's 'land grab' ruined them

[BROOKE EDWARDS Staff Writer](#)

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VICTORVILLE • Two families say their lives have been torn apart in the city's attempt to buy land for the Victorville 2 Power Project.

“They ruined my life,” said Linda Iseman, who owns property north of Southern California Logistics Airport.

Complaints lodged against the city by Iseman and the family of an elderly woman, Frances Landwehr, include breach of contract, intimidation, unfair pricing and more.

Christopher and Linda Iseman never intended to sell their 10-acre parcel, east of Helendale Road and north of Colusa Road. It was originally zoned residential and they intended to retire there and raise horses.

After the city rezoned it to industrial, the Isemans began to reconsider.

In late 2006, the Isemans were approached by Bill Johns with Inland Energy, son to the company's owner, William Buck Johns. Johns said the city needed the land to build its Victorville 2 power plant and offered to buy the property for \$120,000, encouraging the owners to accept the offer and avoid the “time consuming and extremely costly” eminent domain process the city would likely undertake.

Linda Iseman said the surrounding land was going for easily twice that much — and with their property's proximity to the Mojave River and an established well, they thought it should be worth much more.

The couple rejected the city's offer and said they didn't hear anything for months.

In 2007, the Isemans started looking for their own buyer. They had the property sold in November 2007 for \$400,000. But when the Realtor proceeded to close the deal, the Isemans were told that an eminent domain hold had been placed on their property. Their buyer quickly backed out.

Victorville spokeswoman Yvonne Hester said no lien was ever placed on the property by the city.

But in June the Isemans received a letter from the city's agent, Epic Land Solutions, stating that an independent appraisal was completed on their property, citing the civil code relating to a property “under a threat of eminent domain.” The offer came in at \$522,000 and the Isemans accepted,

hoping to put the issue behind them.

Less than two weeks later, the Isemans received a letter from the city's deputy attorney stating their land was no longer needed for the project.

Now the Isemans say they've requested documentation to prove the title is clear so they can try to sell again — something their current real estate agent said is needed — but so far they've gotten nothing from the city.

Hester said that's because the city has never taken eminent domain action on the property.

A complaint was also recently filed with the city over a 5-acre parcel next door to the Isemans' property. In that 2007 case, Bill Johns was successful in getting Frances Landwehr, then 83, to sell her land for the city's offer of \$67,500.

Landwehr's family learned of this deal after the fact and said she was never notified of her right to have the property independently appraised.

As a result, her nephew, Robert Landwehr, said the land was sold for at least \$100,000 below its value and that Frances Landwehr has had to take out a reverse mortgage on her home to get by.

Hester said the Landwehrs' complaint will go before the City Council during closed session at an upcoming meeting. The council may then grant the request to pay Frances Landwehr the full price — another \$107,500 — or reject the complaint, in which case it would move to the city attorney as potential litigation.

Brooke Edwards may be reached at 955-5358 or at [bedwards@VVDailyPress.com](mailto:bedwards@VVDailyPress.com).