

# Elder files suit over demolition of church

BY CAROLYN P. SMITH  
News Democrat

**EAST ST. LOUIS** — A church elder has filed a lawsuit against the city of East St. Louis, alleging his church building was illegally demolished by the city.

Elder Edward Vinson, pastor of Harvest Church of Our Lord, is seeking more than \$50,000 in damages, according to a lawsuit he filed Tuesday in St. Clair County.

Vinson's attorney, Edward Blake Jr., said in the lawsuit that Vinson, who acquired the property at 1101 State St. in 2003, never agreed to a demolition of the church building.

The suit included a copy of a notice of demolition and renovation referencing the State Street property and identifying the owner of the property as East St. Louis and George Edwards as the person to contact.

Edwards, who is in federal custody on a charge of trying to extort money from a professional athlete, is the former demolition chief for the city. His position was not funded in the city's 2007 budget.

Blake, in the lawsuit, said on April 25, 2005, the city placed a lien on the State Street property for more than \$18,000 for labor and material spent on or around Jan. 15, 2005, to demolish the building.

The lawsuit alleges the city failed to account for the proceeds from the sale of the building, the bricks, oak floors, laminated beams, 12 new ceiling lights and fans, and a new air conditioner.

**WEB EXTRA:** To read the lawsuit and previous stories on this issue, go to [bellevillene.wsdemocrat.com](http://bellevillene.wsdemocrat.com).

Mayor Carl E. Officer said news of the lawsuit was not surprising to him.

"We're aware of several incidents," Officer said. "This is what prompted me to call for a federal probe into the demolition program. I and other City Council members voted to freeze our demolition program because of these incidents."

Last month, a house at 1830 St. Clair Ave. was demolished by the city, even though the owner said he had put a lot of money into it recently to fix it up, and that he had received no notice that the structure would be torn down.

Officer said Richard Bonner, director of the Tax Increment Financing Department, has been working with Madison Mayor Jack Hamm to make sweeping changes in the demolition program in East St. Louis.

"They have one of the best demolition programs around," he said.

Officer declined to comment on what legal negotiations the city would be involved in. However, he said, "There has to be negotiations between the city attorney and the property owner, but I am sure there will be some type of compensation."

Contact reporter Carolyn P. Smith at [csmith@bnd.com](mailto:csmith@bnd.com) or 239-2503.