

Ground Zero church starts legal action in bid to rebuild

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(RNS) Nearly two years after negotiations abruptly ended over where a Greek Orthodox church destroyed on 9/11 may rebuild, legal action has begun against several agencies and officials involved in the Ground Zero land dispute.

Until talks broke off in early 2008, leaders from St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and Ground Zero developers had reached a preliminary agreement to rebuild on a larger piece of property at 130 Liberty Street, allowing the original 155 Cedar Street lot to be used for a vehicle security center.

Under the deal -- either binding or tentative, depending on which side you ask -- the church would also get \$20 million towards its rebuilding costs, which include enhanced security requirements for the Ground Zero area.

In a statement released by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the agency blames the tiny church's escalating demands for the 2008 stalemate, and reiterated that it supports "the return of the church to its original home" on Cedar Street.

But church leaders insist the old lot is unsuitable, and that years of planning have already gone into the new site. Now both sites are under heavy construction -- neither with the church's permission, said

the Rev. Mark Arey, spokesman for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

"We've spent a year and a half trying to reach out to the Port Authority, but they still haven't spoken to us directly," he said. "There has been no phone call, no telegram, no fax, nothing."

In addition to the Port Authority, the church's legal claim also names the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the New York Urban Development Corporation and three Port Authority officials as potential defendants.

The legal notice was filed Monday (Dec. 6), coincidentally St. Nicholas Day, the annual feast day of the tiny church's namesake. Sixty days must pass before a lawsuit may proceed, most likely in federal court, church officials said.