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HEADLINE: After suit, Road Commission owns gas station

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BODY:

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* ROCHESTER HILLS - Frank Awdish says a widened road cost him his business.

On Thursday, Awdish shut down Frank's Fast Break Sunoco at Crooks and South Boulevard after two years of trying to keep afloat.

He blames road improvements in the area - a widening of Crooks Road that necessitated a shutdown of one of the South Boulevard driveways into his station - for diminished traffic. He said after the driveway was closed two years ago, it cost him money every day he tried to operate the station.

"Customers, especially those wanting to get to the diesel pumps on that side of the station, couldn't get in," said Awdish, who was at the station Thursday assisting in an inventory and takeover by the Road Commission for Oakland County.

Awdish, 55, filed a lawsuit against the Road Commission of Oakland County. Earlier this year, Oakland Circuit Judge Daniel Patrick O'Brien agreed with his claims and made a judgment in his favor, to be paid today, in exchange for the property, Awdish attorney Alan Ackerman said.

"Most people would be excited getting a check for over a million dollars - I think the judgment will total nearly \$1.3 million," Ackerman said. "But he paid \$1.7 (million) for the business when he got into it over 10 years ago. And he has been losing over \$100,000 a year for the past two years."

Craig Bryson, a Road Commission spokesman, said the commission would abide by O'Brien's ruling, which has increased the cost of the \$20 million widening project between Square Lake and M-59.

"We have essentially bought the property but have no plans to operate a gas station," Bryson said. "We'll sell it and expect the new owner will disprove his claims that a gas station can't survive at the location."

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Land along Crooks directly across from the station is being cleared for a new Chase Bank, and two small shopping centers at the intersection appear busy. There are several subdivisions, including upscale gated communities, nearby.

Ackerman said while the Road Commission operates in good faith, "they made a big mistake here, and he lost a thriving business."

It's the second business loss for Awdish. Over a decade ago, a Hamtramck party store he operated was destroyed in a storm, Ackerman said.

"Frank's a great guy," said Brian Kennedy, owner of a Rochester Hills sprinkler company, who dropped in the station to say goodbye. "I can't believe they shut him down like this."

Awdish said while the court judgment will help pay off bills, he won't be made whole.

"I've been busy trying to find a job," Awdish said. "All I hear is I'm too old or else the pay is only \$8 an hour. I've got a big family to support. I don't know what I'm going to do."

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