

SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

State ex rel. Wasserman v. Fremont

131 Ohio St. 3d 52, 2012-Ohio-27 (Ohio 2012) · No. 2011-0683 · Decided January 10, 2012

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Ohio held that a court may compel a public authority to initiate appropriation proceedings through mandamus only after determining that the claimant's property has been taken. The court reversed and remanded because the court of appeals granted the writ without first deciding whether the city had effected a taking, directing further proceedings on that issue and requiring clear and convincing evidence.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Ohio
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per Curiam; Chief Justice O'Connor; Justice Pfeifer; Justice Lundberg Stratton; Justice O'Donnell; Justice Lanzinger; Justice Cupp; Justice McGee Brown
JURISDICTION	Ohio
DECIDED	January 10, 2012
DOCKET	2011-0683
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The city and its mayor appealed the Sixth District Court of Appeals' judgment granting the Wassermans a writ of mandamus compelling them to commence an appropriation proceeding.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Supreme Court reviewed whether the court of appeals properly granted mandamus to compel an appropriation proceeding before determining that a taking had occurred. The relators bore the burden of proving entitlement to mandamus by clear and convincing evidence.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Ohio Supreme Court opinion; binding precedent in Ohio.
PARTIES	City of Fremont, Ohio, Terry Overmyer, Mayor v. Stanley Wasserman, Kathryn Wasserman

TOPICS

eminent domain municipal

remedies

municipal law

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

eminent domain

municipal law

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a court may grant a writ of mandamus compelling a public authority to commence an appropriation proceeding before determining that the authority has taken the relators' property.
2. Whether the Wassermans were required to establish that a compensable taking had occurred before obtaining mandamus.

HOLDINGS

1. A court may compel a public authority to institute an appropriation proceeding through mandamus only after determining that the relators' property has been taken; merely alleging a taking is insufficient.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“But to be entitled to the requested writ of mandamus to compel an appropriation proceeding, relators in these cases must do more than merely allege a taking—they must establish that a taking of their property by a public authority has occurred.” (¶ 3)

“In these [mandamus] actions, the court, as the trier of fact and law, must determine whether the private property had been taken by the public authority.” (¶ 3)

“Therefore, the court of appeals erred in granting a writ of mandamus to compel the city and its mayor to commence an appropriation proceeding when the court had not yet determined that the Wassermans’ property had been taken by the city.” (¶ 4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The City of Fremont constructed a reservoir on property associated with the Wassermans. The Wassermans alleged that the construction damaged drainage tiles belonging to them and interfered with their drainage easement over city property and their use of their own property because of inadequate drainage. They claimed these actions constituted a taking of their property.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Wassermans alleged that construction of a city reservoir damaged drainage tiles and interfered with drainage easements and use of their property, constituting a taking. The Court of Appeals for Sandusky County granted a writ of mandamus compelling the city and mayor to commence an appropriation proceeding. The Supreme Court of Ohio reversed and remanded for the court of appeals to determine, after receiving evidence, whether a taking had occurred.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The court of appeals was directed to conduct further proceedings consistent with the opinion, including permitting the parties to submit evidence concerning whether a taking of the Wassermans' property occurred. The Wassermans must establish entitlement to the writ by clear and convincing evidence.

CASES CITED

- State ex rel. Shemo v. Mayfield Hts., 95 Ohio St. 3d 59, 63, 765 N.E.2d 345 (2002)
- State ex rel. Duncan v. Mentor City Council, 105 Ohio St. 3d 372, 2005-Ohio-2163, 826 N.E.2d 832, ¶ 11
- State ex rel. BSW Dev. Group v. Dayton, 83 Ohio St. 3d 338, 342, 344, 699 N.E.2d 1271 (1998)
- State ex rel. Levin v. Sheffield Lake, 70 Ohio St. 3d 104, 108-109, 637 N.E.2d 319 (1994)
- State ex rel. Gilbert v. Cincinnati, 125 Ohio St. 3d 385, 2010-Ohio-1473, 928 N.E.2d 706
- State ex rel. Doner v. Zody, 130 Ohio St. 3d 446, 2011-Ohio-6117, 958 N.E.2d 1235, paragraph three of the syllabus

OPINION

State Ex Rel. Wasserman v. City of Freemont

2012 Ohio 27

PER CURIAM.

[Cite as State ex rel. Wasserman v. Fremont, 131 Ohio St.3d 52, 2012-Ohio-27.]

THE STATE EX REL. WASSERMAN ET AL., APPELLEES, v. CITY OF

FREMONT ET AL., APPELLANTS. [Cite as State ex rel. Wasserman v. Fremont, 131 Ohio St.3d 52, 2012-Ohio-27.] Court of appeals erred in granting a writ of mandamus to compel an appropriation proceeding when the court had not yet determined that relators had met their burden of proving that their property had been taken by the city. (No. 2011-0683—Submitted December 7, 2011—Decided January 10, 2012.) APPEAL from the Court of Appeals for Sandusky County, No. S-10-031, 2011-Ohio-1269. _____ Per Curiam. {¶ 1} We reverse the judgment of the court of appeals granting to appellees, Stanley and Kathryn Wasserman, a writ of mandamus to compel appellants, the city of Fremont, Ohio, and its mayor, Terry Overmyer, to commence an appropriation action “to determine whether or not a taking actually occurred in this case and how much compensation, if any, is due from” appellants. State ex rel. Wasserman v. Fremont, 6th Dist. No. S-10-031, 2011-Ohio-1269, 2011 WL 941375, ¶ 9. The Wassermans alleged that when the city constructed a reservoir on its property, the city damaged drainage tiles belonging to the Wassermans and that the city’s actions interfered with the Wassermans’ use of their drainage easement over the city’s property and with their use of their property, due to inadequate drainage. Thus, the Wassermans alleged that the city’s actions constituted a taking of their property.

SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

{¶ 2} It is true that “[m]andamus is the appropriate action to compel public authorities to institute

appropriation proceedings where an involuntary taking of private property is alleged.” *State ex rel. Shemo v. Mayfield Hts.* (2002), 95 Ohio St.3d 59, 63, 765 N.E.2d 345, judgment modified in part on other grounds, 96 Ohio St.3d 379, 2002-Ohio-4905, 775 N.E.2d 493; see also *State ex rel. Duncan v. Mentor City Council*, 105 Ohio St.3d 372, 2005-Ohio-2163, 826 N.E.2d 832, ¶ 11. {¶ 3} But to be entitled to the requested writ of mandamus to compel an appropriation proceeding, relators in these cases must do more than merely allege a taking—they must establish that a taking of their property by a public authority has occurred. See *State ex rel. BSW Dev. Group v. Dayton* (1998), 83 Ohio St.3d 338, 344, 699 N.E.2d 1271 (relator in mandamus action seeking writ to compel city to commence appropriation proceeding had the burden of proving a compensable taking). That is, “[i]n these [mandamus] actions, the court, as the trier of fact and law, must determine whether the private property had been taken by the public authority.” *Id.* at 342, citing *State ex rel. Levin v. Sheffield Lake*

(1994), 70 Ohio St.3d 104, 108, 637 N.E.2d 319. Thus, “appropriation proceedings may be compelled through mandamus, but * * * the court must initially determine that the pertinent property has been appropriated.” *Levin* at 109; see also *State ex rel. Gilbert v. Cincinnati*, 125 Ohio St.3d 385, 2010-Ohio- 1473, 928 N.E.2d 706 (affirming judgment granting writ of mandamus to compel appropriation proceeding on physical-taking claim that had been established by relators and denying writ of mandamus on regulatory-taking claim that had not been proven). {¶ 4} Therefore, the court of appeals erred in granting a writ of mandamus to compel the city and its mayor to commence an appropriation proceeding when the court had not yet determined that the Wassermans’ property had been taken by the city. Based on the foregoing, we reverse the judgment of 2 January Term, 2012 the court of appeals granting the writ of mandamus and remand the cause to that court for further proceedings consistent with this opinion. These further proceedings should permit the parties to submit evidence concerning whether a taking of the Wassermans’ property has occurred. The Wassermans must establish their entitlement to the writ by clear and convincing evidence. See *State ex rel. Doner v. Zody*, 130 Ohio St.3d 446, 2011-Ohio-6117, 958 N.E.2d 1235, paragraph three of the syllabus. Judgment reversed and cause remanded.

O’CONNOR, C.J., and PFEIFER, LUNDBERG STRATTON, O’DONNELL, LANZINGER, CUPP, and MCGEE BROWN, JJ., concur. _____ Davies, Ruck & Speweik, Ltd., Corey J. Speweik, Nathan T. Oswald, and J. Douglas Ruck, for appellees. Robert G. Hart, Fremont Law Director, for appellants. Michael DeWine, Attorney General, Alexandra T. Schimmer, Solicitor General, and Michael L. Stokes, Senior Assistant Attorney General, urging reversal for amicus curiae state of Ohio. _____ 3