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Public Hearing To Air Selling Of Former School

Dick Lilly

[Nation / World](#)

Seattle Times Staff Reporter

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The sale of the former **Colman Elementary School** to a nonprofit group for use as an African-American heritage **museum** is expected to move forward tonight when the Seattle **School** Board is to schedule a public hearing on the transaction.

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The proposed sale of the abandoned **school** building at 1515 24th Ave. S. to the newly incorporated African American Heritage **Museum** and Cultural Center for \$445,000 represents a turning point in the building's history.

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Led by Earl Debnam, a group of community activists occupied the building near Interstate 90 in 1985 after the **school** district had moved out to make way for freeway construction.

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Hoping to force a quick decision on the building's future, Debnam and others expected to stay inside illegally for only 90 days.

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They ended up staying eight years to keep alive the African-American community's dream of a cultural **museum**.

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Mayor Norm Rice stepped in three years ago and late last year the African-American-heritage group reorganized under the leadership of Bob Flowers, a senior vice president with Washington Mutual Savings Bank.

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The group already has obtained a \$65,000 matching grant from the city's Neighborhood Matching Fund for a new roof and window repairs and a \$175,000 grant for design of the new facility from the state Building for the Arts Council, according to Pat Chandler of the Department of Neighborhoods.

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Flowers said yesterday that he hopes the transaction will close

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The **School** Board's public hearing on the proposed sale is expected to be Sept. 4 at 7 p.m. at the district's administration building, 815 Fourth Ave. N.

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For the **museum** board, the next step will be a major fund-raising drive for building renovations.

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