



Three Northeast Ohio projects, including ASM headquarters and dome, win state tax credits

By Michelle Jarboe, The Plain Dealer

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Courtesy of ASM International

The geodesic dome built by R. Buckminster Fuller as part of the headquarters of ASM International on Rte. 87, near Rte. 306 in Russell Township, Geauga County. The complex, called Materials Park was completed in 1959. On Thursday, the state announced a tax credit award to help with renovation and rehabilitation of the office building.

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CLEVELAND, Ohio -- An overhaul of the eye-catching ASM International headquarters in Geauga County, a renovation project in PlayhouseSquare and a makeover of a movie theater in Oberlin received some coveted financial aid on Thursday.

The three Northeast Ohio properties were among 12 projects that collectively won \$23.7 million in state tax credits for the restoration of historic buildings. Fifty-five applicants, 21 of them in Northeast Ohio, had been competing for the incentives.

Since launching the program in 2007, Ohio has awarded more than \$222 million in state historic preservation tax credits. The credits offset liabilities such as state income taxes or corporate franchise taxes, and property owners can sell them to raise money for rehabilitation projects. Thursday's announcement was the third round of the program -- and differed from prior rounds in that projects competed based on their economic impact and location, rather than when the state received their applications.

That put Cleveland applicants at a disadvantage, since the city raked in nearly \$94 million in tax credits for 34 projects during the first two rounds. This time, Cleveland grabbed only one award -- \$1.6 million for the Cowell & Hubbard Building on PlayhouseSquare -- as the state tried to find a geographic balance. The two-story building, at 1305 Euclid Ave., has begun an \$8 million transformation that will make it a key part of a planned District of Design, populated by companies and retailers focused on product and industrial design.

Kent State University's Urban Design Collaborative is scheduled to move to the second floor of the building early next year, from its current home in the wedge-shaped Pointe at Gateway building at Huron Road and Prospect Avenue. PlayhouseSquare Foundation aims to bring design retailers and a restaurant to the first floor.

"This just truly unites Ohio's past, present and future," Gov. Ted Strickland said of the tax-credit program during an appearance in Cleveland on Thursday afternoon.

Strickland and other state and local officials gathered at the University Lofts apartments, a few blocks from the Cowell & Hubbard Building and one of the first projects completed with the help of the credits. The Kaufman brothers, who own a printing business next door, turned the buildings at 2010 and 2020 Euclid Ave. into 30 apartments and are building condominiums on a former parking lot to the east.

Among the projects that won awards Thursday, the ASM International headquarters might be the most unusual. The semicircular building, built in 1959, sits beneath the world's largest open-work geodesic dome along Ohio 87 in Russell Township. The dome was designed by famed engineer and architect R. Buckminster Fuller.

The building is home to a nonprofit scientific society that gathers and shares technical knowledge on metals and other materials. ASM's property was added to the National Register of Historic Places in October, and the state earmarked \$1.4 million in credits to support a \$5.8 million renovation of the headquarters.

"We're going to be basically pulling the entire building apart and updating all of its systems," said Michael Chesler, a Cleveland redeveloper working on the project. "The dome is in pristine condition. It will not be touched. It does not need to be touched."

Chesler said manufacturer Parker Hannifin Corp., based in Cleveland, is interested in buying the state credits, along with federal historic tax credits allocated for the project. Construction could start in April and take 12 to 16 months.

The third Northeast Ohio winner is in Oberlin, where an Oberlin College subsidiary plans to remake the vintage Apollo Theatre as a mixed-use space to host movies, live performances, a media education center and cinema studies programs. The state awarded \$2 million in credits for the project, which could be finished in two years.

Beyond the region, properties in Cambridge, Cincinnati, Columbus, Ironton, Portsmouth and Youngstown won awards. The state estimates that the 12 projects will involve \$6.72 in private investment for every dollar that Ohio puts in.

In Cleveland, some high-profile applicants were left empty-handed. The owners of the Standard Building, at 1370 Ontario St. downtown, had applied. So had investors who own three buildings near East Ninth Street and Euclid Avenue. State development officials said applicants who did not win awards automatically will be entered into the fourth round of the program. The next application period starts Jan. 1, and roughly \$22.1 million in awards could be announced by June 30.

Brian Intihar, a member of the investor group at East Ninth and Euclid, said he and his partners would love to have the credits now, rather than six months from now. But missing out this time will not derail the investors' plans to turn the former Schofield Building into a hotel and apartments and to renovate the nearby Truman and Security Federal buildings.

"We definitely are doing everything we can to move forward," Intihar said.

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