

**Proposed INS headquarters may hurt Cirque du Soleil;**  
**Two leases: The circus leases the Atlanta Civic Center parking lot. A developer has an option on the adjacent land.**

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## **Body**

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A plan to build an immigration services headquarters in an upscale residential neighborhood downtown could also threaten the popular Cirque du Soleil, which plans to hold its traveling circus this fall on the same site in the Civic Center parking lot.

Charles Ackerman, a veteran developer with a long-held option on seven acres of city-owned property adjacent to the Civic Center, has a signed lease agreement with General Services Administration for the proposed building. Construction is scheduled to begin in October, he said.

But the Civic Center also has a lease agreement with Cirque du Soleil for performances set to begin Oct. 5 and end Jan. 15. The circus has a 10-year option on the site.

Ackerman's lease agreement with the GSA, dated April 28, calls for him to deliver a five-story office building to house the district headquarters of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service by Feb. 13, 1999.

The city's lawyers are looking into Ackerman's deal to determine if his option on the property, which he has yet to formally exercise, takes precedence over the Cirque du Soleil agreement. City spokesman Nick Gold said the city believes "since Cirque du Soleil has a signed lease, it takes precedence."

At the same time, city planners have asked the lawyers to determine if Ackerman can move forward with his project --- which has the neighborhood up in arms --- without the City Council's approval. Ackerman contends he can.

"I can assure you the INS building will be nothing but an asset to the neighborhood," he said. "It's a mixed-use neighborhood. You strengthen downtown as a total neighborhood when you bring different uses together."

The building also will house the immigration court and the U.S. State Department of Diplomatic Security. INS officials said the building will not be a detention center, but it will contain holding cells for illegal immigrants who are being deported or must appear before immigration judges.

Ackerman said he believes the objections to his project center on the nature of the operation. "The issue is not use of the site for an office," he said. "The issue is the INS and the makeup of their service."

That's exactly the issue as far as Harold Barnette, chairman of Neighborhood Planning Unit-M, is concerned. "That kind of facility with ostensibly dangerous criminals coming in is completely inappropriate," he said.

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"Any person with common sense would say you don't put criminals smack dab in the middle of a residential neighborhood."

In the past decade, 1,238 apartments or condominium units in developments such as the Enclave at Renaissance, 450 Piedmont and Post Renaissance have been built in the blocks immediately surrounding the **Civic Center** and SciTrek. Several other complexes were built in an earlier urban renewal effort, giving birth to the Bedford-Pine community.

## Graphic

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Map :

Map shows location of the proposed immigration center site. Inlaid map

highlights area shown in relation to metro Atlanta. / SANDY PARKS / Staff

## Classification

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