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Pennsylvania county bids for Barnes Foundation

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A Pennsylvania county has offered to buy the buildings and grounds of the controversy-mired Barnes Foundation for \$50 million or more, in an effort to thwart a plan to move the foundation's multibillion-dollar Impressionist and Modern art collection to a tourism district in neighboring Philadelphia.

Mark D. Schwartz, an attorney representing Montgomery County, where the Barnes has been located since 1925, made the offer Tuesday in a letter to foundation President Bernard C. Watson.

The Montgomery County proposal would require "not one penny of tax funds," according to Schwartz. By contrast, a consortium of three Philadelphia philanthropies led by the Pew Charitable Trusts has obtained tax-deductible pledges of nearly \$200 million to re-create the distinctive installation of the Barnes collection in a new building on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, and the state of Pennsylvania has earmarked up to \$107 million in tax revenue for the move.

The county plan would employ bond sales and a lease-back arrangement to provide the equivalent of a \$50-million operating endowment for the financially strapped Barnes.