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Whatever it is, it won't be for long

JASON HAGEY: The News Tribune

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One of the most colorful properties in Tacoma is on the market.

But it's really the land that's for sale.

The outlandish house near the corner of South 25th and Fawcett Avenue, with painted lumber scraps jutting skyward like some kind of art-deco cathedral, will be demolished soon, owner Vladimir Deriugin Jr. said this week.

After years of battling with the city over building code violations, the fight is over and Deriugin lost. In October, a Pierce County Superior Court judge upheld a city order declaring the house a dangerous building and ordering that it be repaired or demolished.

Deriugin, who lives in the house without electricity, listed the property with Coldwell Banker earlier this month and is working on moving out. The 9,000-square-foot lot includes a panoramic view and is within walking distance of the University of Washington Tacoma campus. Asking price: \$360,000.

The late-1880s-era house, which Deriugin dreamed of encasing in concrete and using as the core for a 500-foot office and condominium tower, will be torn down within the next couple of months, Deriugin said.

"I'm not going to get my cost out of it," he said.

Deriugin, 52, estimates he's invested \$2 million worth of time in "research and development" over the years.

But he has no option.

The legal battles have "drained me dry," he said.

The only thing that could salvage his dream now is a deep-pocketed investor willing to finance the demolition and construction of a new high-rise.

"The idea's not gone away," Deriugin said. "I'm not out of town yet."

This isn't the first time Deriugin has lost a house in a conflict with the City of Tacoma.

In the early 1980s, the city demolished the house where Deriugin lived with his then-wife and daughter in the old Hawthorne neighborhood. It stood approximately in the middle of what is now a Tacoma Dome parking lot.

A few years later, Deriugin bought the house on South Fawcett and used it as a studio for several years before moving in.

Deriugin, a self-described architect, sculptor and cinematographer, said he planned all along to develop it as a commercial building.

He wanted to call it the St. Irene Office Condominium Complex in honor of his late mother.

Deriugin, who grew up in Federal Way, drew plans for a high-rise with space for parking, offices and condominiums.

Features were to include "superior anti-terrorist design," an indoor pool and spa, a restaurant and an air taxi.

In anticipation of the helicopter shuttle service, the word "TAXI" is spelled out on one of two doors leading from the covered front porch of the existing house.

Above the door, behind a glass pane, sits a Randy "Macho Man" Savage action figure, circa mid-1980s, holding an eternal flex.

But Deriugin ran into problems with city building inspectors and with neighbors who complained about the unusual features he added over the years.

He called it "constructivist art" and said the structure was intended both as an artistic expression and as an advertisement for his sculpture and film business.

He fought the city in court for years, acting as his own attorney.

In court papers, Deriugin complained about a feud with his neighbors and claimed that city officials went back on an oral agreement they reached over the house in August 2000.

Now, with the court battle over, city officials are preparing to solicit bids for the demolition, but would prefer that Deriugin do it himself, said Assistant City Attorney Kyle Crews.

Deriugin doesn't know whether there's much demand for the property. He said he hasn't heard from his real estate agent since listing the property.

But there's no shortage of curiosity.

Every day, cars slow to a crawl in the street in front of Deriugin's dream house. Passengers crane their necks and point.

Deriugin is used to it. And resigned to the sometimes negative reaction.

"They either like or they don't," he said. "That's the way art is."

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