

Residential Real Estate

One Old House Is Flash Point for Enclave in Queens

By NADINE BROZAN

It took no more than hearsay to draw more than 60 neighbors and civic leaders to a stately 100-year-old Queen Anne colonial house in Douglaston Hill, Queens, on a bitterly cold afternoon last week to protest its rumored sale and possible demolition. "All you see is one house and a few people objecting, and everyone asks, 'What's the fuss?'" Elliott Socci, president of the Douglaston Civic Association, remarked.

"But then take a look at the patterns of dozens, maybe hundreds of houses in Bayside, Douglaston, Little Neck and similar communities being downgraded by the loss of classic homes like this," he said. "The character of the neighborhood is being changed, and houses are being replaced by unattractive crackerbox buildings."

The house in question is a graceful white clapboard structure with a circular porch at 240-35 43rd Avenue, owned since 1995, according to city records, by Sang Chun Kang and his

wife, Byung Won Kang.

It has come to symbolize the continuing tension between preservation and development in this genteel corner of the city, and is a focus of an effort to convince the Landmarks Preservation Commission to grant landmark status to most of the Douglaston Hill area. On Tuesday evening, about 55 people turned out at the Community Church of Douglaston to organize a letter-writing campaign to urge landmark designation for the area and preservation of the house.

"If that house goes down," said Kevin Wolfe, an architect and landscape designer who is the co-founder and vice president of the Douglaston-Little Neck Historical Society, which initiated the landmark drive 14 years ago, "there will never be a historic district because it is in the dead center of the proposed district. Also, it means that it will be the end of the area as a viable neighborhood where people interact and have a sense of place. It will become just another anonymous Queens district."

harmed the state's business climate. sions."

Concern about the fate of the house began to spread when a sign appeared briefly on its lawn in November. William Sievers, vice president of the historical society, whose home on 42nd Avenue backs up to the property, called the brokerage firm listed, Dae Ji Realty, and feigned interest in the sale. "I was told it was under contract," he said.

"The family that lives there now is Korean and doesn't speak much English," he continued. But his wife, Chizuko, was able to converse in Japanese with a member of the household. "While they were chatting over the back fence, a woman who lives there told her that they planned to move to Florida," Mr. Sievers said. "My wife asked her what was going to happen to the house, and she said it was going to come down."

Dae Ji Realty refused to discuss the transaction or clarify plans for the property. A broker at ReMax Universal confirmed that the agency represented the buyer, but would give no further information.

Residents are already concerned

about what they see as the proliferation of "McMansions" on almost every block, looming incongruously over the traditional colonials, tudors, ranch houses and Cape Cods. Another concern repeatedly voiced in the neighborhood is the prospect that the house will be demolished and replaced by multiple buildings. Zoning for Douglaston Hill requires plots measuring 60 by 100 feet for single-family dwellings. "That piece of property is 100 feet wide and 250 feet deep, so they could build four houses there," Mr. Wolfe said. "Through a loophole in the law, they could then build a 30-foot-wide private road."

Tony Avella, the area's city councilman, has taken up the cause of landmark status. "There are neighborhoods throughout the city that are indicative of an architectural style, and Douglaston Hill is one example," he said. "If not protected they will simply vanish from the city scene."

The councilman and several residents met last week with Robert B. Tierney, chairman of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

together. They have already formed

things that could make this really work for Brooklyn."



Ed Betz for The New York Times

If this house goes, neighbors say, Douglaston Hill's character will change. Talk of demolition has revived a campaign for landmark status.

"I am interested in doing things outside Manhattan, so this is getting a special look from me personally," Mr. Tierney said. "I have asked them to rethink their proposal and give me another presentation."

Asked why 14 years had gone by without a decision, Mr. Tierney said, "It is not foreclosed. What may be 'no' today may be 'yes' tomorrow. In the continuum of history, 14 years is not long."

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