



Sarah Kenney <skenney@barringtonhills-il.gov>

VBH BOT FYI Building&Zoning

1 message

Robert Kosin <rkosin@barringtonhills-il.gov>
To: Dolores Trandel <clerk@barringtonhills-il.gov>
Cc: Sarah Kenney <skenney@barringtonhills-il.gov>

Sat, Apr 2, 2011 at 6:06 PM

Monument turned nightmare
Financial troubles doomed \$25 million Burr Ridge mansion that owner says was a tribute to cultural integration
By Ted Gregory, Chicago Tribune reporter
April 1, 2011 6:15 p.m. CDT

The Villa Taj, 6501 S. County Line Road, Burr Ridge, originally listed for \$25 million. Some neighbors mistakenly believed a mosque was being built, but the owner, who is beset by liens, described his mansion as a monument to cultural integration. It's current asking price is \$13 million, after pipes burst in February and caused \$6 million in damage in the unoccupied home. The main entrance is at right. (Chuck Berman, Chicago Tribune / April 1, 2011)

Dr. Husam Aldairi envisioned his dramatic mansion as a monument to the blending of cultures. He named it Villa Taj and made it hard to miss.

Situated on a prominent intersection in the exclusive Chicago suburb of Burr Ridge, the home has a gold Jerusalem limestone exterior done in neo-Byzantine Moorish revival. The interior, appointed in Brazilian wood and Italian marble, features nine fireplaces, a soaring ballroom and 20-car basement garage.

But the path to completion became a nightmare. Residents who mistakenly thought a mosque was being built phoned Village Hall and complained. Aldairi, a dentist, says officials unfairly imposed excruciating construction delays. Then came a sexual harassment judgment against his business — not him — and a bankruptcy filing.

Finally, in late February, pipes burst in the unoccupied mansion and an estimated 6 million gallons of water soaked the home.

An estate once valued at \$25 million is now in receivership. The village is expecting a crew to strip the interior and cart away debris. And what was meant as a monument to cultural fusion — the name Villa Taj is an Italian-Persian mix meaning "crown jewel country residence" — now faces an uncertain future.

At the same time, liens against the Villa Taj property now total more than \$9 million, records show. The dentist, meanwhile, contends that his original vision will be vindicated.

"It was meant to be a good thing," said Aldairi, who now works at a dental clinic in San Diego. "It was not meant to insult anybody's taste."

Aldairi, 44, is reluctant to discuss personal details. A federal judge

once threatened to put him in custody for refusing to answer questions about where he banked, court records show.

In his bankruptcy hearings last year, he said that he lived in Burr Ridge and that his wife and children live near San Diego, but he also testified that he oversees the clinic there.

He has practiced dentistry in Illinois since 1993, owned about 10 dental clinics in the Chicago area and engaged in residential real estate development, according to court records and the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation.

In 2005, he bought property for Villa Taj — 2.5 acres at County Line and Plainfield roads — for slightly more than \$1 million, Cook County recorder of deeds records show. Burr Ridge issued its first building permit in March 2006.

"He was very friendly, very outgoing," neighbor Barbara Sheridan said of Aldairi, who visited the construction site with his wife and two young children.

He told her he wanted additional property to build a pool next to his home and offered to split the cost of evergreens Sheridan wanted to plant as a privacy buffer, she said.

But trouble was brewing. A sexual harassment complaint filed in 2004 by a female employee at Aldairi's Melrose Park clinic went to trial in U.S. District Court. She alleged that dentists there made degrading, sexually explicit comments about women and that one dentist — it wasn't Aldairi — grabbed her buttocks, court records show. When she brought her concerns to Aldairi, he fired her, the records say.

In April 2007, the jury delivered a judgment in the woman's favor that later was reduced to about \$390,000. So far, she has received almost \$34,000, her attorney, Dana Kurtz, said.

Records show that in July 2008 Aldairi filed for bankruptcy protection for two of his dental companies. But the U.S. trustee supervising the bankruptcy stated that Aldairi's businesses were profitable. The trustee also said the businesses were "recalcitrant" about providing financial information, according to records.

Evidence was presented that Aldairi had purchased a 2007 Bentley for \$193,000 about three weeks before filing the bankruptcy petition, that he was making payments on a Florida condo, and that he was covering other personal expenses with \$1.6 million that should have been used to avoid the bankruptcy filing, according to court records.

By January 2010, the judge presiding over the bankruptcy dismissed it, saying, the only purpose of the filing was to delay paying the sexual harassment judgment.

"This debtor refuses to cooperate with any of the court processes consistently," said U.S. District Court Judge Jacqueline P. Cox.

Aldairi's legal troubles continued. On Thursday, the judge ordered him to pay more than \$314,000 to cover the former employee's legal fees.

Even before the bankruptcy filing, Aldairi contends, the village was

making construction of his dream home almost impossible.

"Never in the history of the state of Illinois was somebody charged and penalized on renewing permits and building a home like I have been," Aldairi said.

The village approved his plans for the home's large foundation only to direct him — after the hole was complete — to move it 20 feet, he said. Burr Ridge unnecessarily stopped construction multiple times and imposed fees totaling nearly \$60,000, he added.

Village Administrator Steve Stricker said he was unable to recall the foundation dispute. Community Development Director Doug Pollock said the village's strict building code is imposed on all construction projects.

"It's not the first time I've heard that from somebody," Pollock said of Aldairi's complaint that he was treated unfairly. "People make that accusation not really having firsthand knowledge that other people are held to the same standards."

The work stoppages added costs to Villa Taj, Aldairi said, and by late May 2009, he had changed his mind about living there. The home was placed on the market for \$25 million.

Virtually complete in March 2010, Villa Taj never was occupied but was listed for sale four times while the asking price dropped to \$13 million, records show. The listing expired in November.

In mid-February, bathroom pipes in several places on the second floor broke, creating a deluge that wasn't discovered until a real estate agent visited the estate on March 5. Village officials said enough water poured from the pipes to supply the entire village for three days.

After viewing the buckled floors and drywall hanging from the ceilings, Pollock and a building inspector deemed the place unsafe for occupancy. Aldairi disputes that.

The damaged home, which was insured, is under the control of an independent receiver while its financial obligations are untangled.

Aldairi, meanwhile, is running the Addison dental clinic while shuttling between the Chicago area and California.

The Villa Taj, he said, will be redeemed.

"One day, (people) will come back and say it's a monument that they can be proud of, no matter what happens," Aldairi said. "It was meant to be a good thing. The future will show us."

tgregory@tribune.com

###