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Vera Coking has been trying to save her home from the casino wrecking ball for 17 years. Donald Trump says he wants Coking to clean up a property he calls "a terrible blight on Atlantic City."

Woman says she's Trump target in a battle to save her A.C. house

She said she got a demolition notice two weeks after Trump complained. Casinos have long eyed her land.

By Jacqueline L. Urgo
INQUIRER CORRESPONDENT

ATLANTIC CITY — Within two weeks of receiving a complaint from a lawyer representing the Trump Organization, the city issued a demolition notice to a woman who has been battling to save her home from the casino wrecking ball for 17 years, according to testimony at a hearing yesterday.

Vera Coking, who has become a local legend, two weeks ago received a notice from the city declaring that if she refused to make certain repairs to her home at 127 S. Columbia Place, the building would be demolished.

Coking has been given until Feb. 1 to make repairs on the property and hire an engineer or an architect to submit a report on further structural work that needs to be done to bring the building into compliance with local building codes, according to Nick DeMarco, the city's building and fire code official.

James Herzog, the city's demolition coordinator, yesterday testified in the hearing before DeMarco that

ing several exterior building-code violations, including missing and broken windows, masonry cracks, a broken fire escape and the sign.

Coking said the notice was the latest attempt to persuade her to sell her property.

City officials said it was a routine action taken by building-code employees when properties fall into disrepair.

Donald Trump said his representative wanted Coking to clean up a property he called "a terrible blight on Atlantic City."

"We're trying to build a beautiful park, and it's tough to build a beautiful park when there is an eyesore like this sitting in the middle of it," Trump said in a telephone interview from his New York office yesterday.

During a planned \$35 million expansion to his Trump Plaza property, Trump had the steel superstructure that surrounded Coking's house demolished in 1993.

In the process, according to a lawsuit by Coking, the J.J. Iaconelli Construction firm of Pleasantville

Trump Organization as a defendant in the suit that she has filed against Iaconelli.

"I guess it's just a coincidence that this notice was issued shortly after that motion was filed," Zeitz said.

Herzog acknowledged under questioning from Zeitz that some of the conditions noted in the demolition report may have existed in 1993 and 1994, but were not addressed until after Trump's lawyer complained.

"Every time we get a complaint like this, we go out and check it out," Herzog said. "It's a matter of routine."

Coking and her home have been centers of controversy for nearly 17 years, since Penthouse International Ltd. acquired the surrounding property with the aim of linking two hotels to create a casino complex.

At the time, Coking reportedly refused offers of millions of dollars to sell and forced Penthouse to build the connecting steel frame around her home.

Coking, and her daughter, Barbara Torpey, deny that any such offers were made, but said oral offers of "a couple of hundred thousand dollars" were proposed.

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