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## Free house in Worcester; you just have to take it with you



Josue Rosa, owner of the Helen Dodge Three-Decker, one of Preservation Worcester's Most Endangered Structures, is offering the house for free. [T&G Staff/Christine Hochkeppel]

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**WORCESTER** - The fixer-upper three-decker has hardwood floors, original Victorian-era architectural details, and a \$0 price tag that's hard to beat.

But there's a catch: You have to move it.

“I’d give it to anyone for free,” said Josue Rosa, owner of the Helen Dodge Three-Decker at 570 Pleasant St., which is currently under a demolition delay. “I would like somebody to take it and restore it. I don’t know if that’s possible. I know people have it done.”

It is not your typical real estate sale, or your typical three-decker.

The Helen Dodge Three-Decker was built in 1912 in the Victorian Eclectic architectural style with a main facade featuring an end-bay entry with a three-tier porch with arched openings. The porch is flanked by a three-story stack of projecting square bay windows.

“This building really does have its own special character about it,” said Susan Ceccacci, education director at Preservation Worcester. “And it is really distinctive when you see it on the street. It gives its own character to the street.”

The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in February 1990.

It was also this week added to Preservation Worcester’s annual list of [Most Endangered Structures](#).

Mr. Rosa, 62, bought the building in November 2016 for \$200,000 “because it was an eyesore” next to his business, Tu Moda spa and salon. Mr. Rosa also owns the next two three-deckers on the street, which he rents out.

But he said that it would cost too much to renovate the Dodge house.

“I bought it for \$200,000, to stick another \$350,000 or whatever it is to restore it, it would be too costly,” Mr. Rosa said.

On Dec. 6, Mr. Rosa filed for a waiver to the city’s demolition delay ordinance, which puts a 12-month delay on the demolition of historic structures to allow time to explore alternative uses. After the delay expires, the property owner is free to raze the building without the need of approval from the city.

The Historical Commission voted unanimously 0-4 at their Feb. 16 meeting against granting the waiver, citing a lack of plans for the property. Mr. Rosa has said that he may use the lot for parking or to expand his business.

“I can’t think of a more clear example of demolition of a building that would be extremely harmful to the city, particularly on that street,” said Historical Commission member Andrew Shveda at the meeting. “It’s a significant building.”

But the building, which was assessed at \$133,400 in 2017, needs substantial work, according to Mr. Rosa.

During a tour of the building, he pointed out water damage on the third floor. Rotten gutters and slate from the roof had fallen off the building, and there were bricks missing on the edge of the

foundation. The building has been vacant for about three years, Mr. Rosa said, and was formerly covered with vines that made it “look like a haunted house.”

But it was also easy to see the building’s charm. Each floor had a claw-foot tub in the bathroom, unique transom decorations between the dining and fireplaced living room, and other architectural flourishes.

“It would be great for somebody who wants to live here and make it their primary home and rent the other two apartments,” Mr. Rosa said.

But it may be a tough sell.

“It’s possible to move it, it’s not preferable, especially given that it has other buildings that it complements next to it,” said Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester. “If it were moved, it would still be missing on that street.”

Moving a three-story building would also be difficult, Mr. Shveda said Friday. He noted that movers would likely have to take down streetlights and utility lines for a structure that size, or may have to remove the top floor and then reassemble the building on the new site.

“I think what’s best for that neighborhood, that stretch of street, and the neighborhood in general is to refurbish the building in place, and have it be a rental property,” Mr. Shveda said. “But in historic preservation you sometimes have to take what you can get.”

Meanwhile, the clock is ticking. The demolition delay expires Dec. 6, and Mr. Rosa estimates beginning the demolition process right away.

He estimates that the demolition would cost about \$40,000.

But Mr. Rosa said he doesn’t regret buying the house. The house had “a revolving door” of tenants, some of whom had been a nuisance to the neighborhood, Mr. Rosa said. He just never anticipated that anybody would care about it being torn down.

“It’s funny how people who owned it for maybe 60 years just let it go to the ground and nobody ever said anything,” Mr. Rosa said. “Now the property is getting attention.”