

Shanghai house in road torn down after 14-year battle

A three-story house that had been standing alone in the middle of an arterial road in Shanghai's suburban Songjiang district was torn down in the early morning on Monday after a 14-year dispute.



Images of North Huting Road in Shanghai before and after the three-story house was demolished. [Cao Lei/For China Daily]

Old residential houses surrounding the building were torn down several years ago to widen North Huting Road to four lanes.

The owners of the house—known as a nailhouse, which describes a building whose owners hold out against developers—didn't reach an agreement for compensation with the relocation authority. So the four lanes, two in each direction, had to be reduced to two lanes to go around the structure.

Zhang Xinguo, the son-in-law of 89-year-old Xu Jun, who owned the house, said the family paid a big price in their everyday lives for standing their ground.

“It's noisy around the clock and particularly late at night when trucks come and go. My mother-in-law died of a heart attack three years ago,” said Xu, who lived in the house with his wife, father-in-law, son's family of three and a married daughter.

Despite the noise, dust and safety risks, there was also tremendous psychological pressure, Xu said, adding that the family moved to a rented apartment nearby on Friday before going to relocation homes offered by the government.

“I didn’t take pride in being the one to live in the middle of the road,” he said. “There have been three traffic accidents because drivers who were not familiar with the road were not able to make a sudden turn to avoid the building.”

Xu said the family didn’t want to inconvenience the public but remained in the house since 2003 because they didn’t agree with the amount of compensation they were offered.

“In the 1950s when the houses were built, my father-in-law held two certificates to show that the family owned two pieces of land for farmers to build residences on. But the relocation authority said one of them had expired,” Xu said.

In the end, family members thought they would not be able to get as much compensation as they had wished, so they agreed to be relocated on Aug 21.

Lu Hui, head of the relocation office of the Jiuliting subdistrict, said representatives talked to the family face to face and by phone dozens of times to try to persuade them to consider the safety and convenience of passing vehicles and pedestrians.

The family was awarded four apartments with a total area of around 400 square meters as compensation. The location of the apartments was not revealed.