



Foreclosed Homes and their Impact on Neighborhoods

by Sheriff Ted Mink

Jefferson County, like the rest of the country, has seen a recent spike in the number of foreclosed homes.

Foreclosed homes can be problematic for neighbors in the area. Unlike other empty homes, which are usually under the watchful eye of the owners or a real estate agent, foreclosed homes are often left unattended for months — from before a bank takes ownership of the house until after it's sold. Because the widespread foreclosure problem arose from mortgage defaults, it affects all types of neighborhoods — from the lowest to the highest income areas.

There is some evidence that as foreclosures mount in a community, the community's crime rate may rise. Even if crime doesn't increase, foreclosures usually present a quality-of-life issue for neighbors. Consider the following.

Break-Ins, Squatters and Partiers

Criminals may view a vacant home (or business) as a ripe opportunity to steal copper pipe, fixtures or appliances. Homeless persons or runaways may seek shelter in the buildings, and in colder weather may even start fires inside. Squatters may attempt to rig wiring to get power to the house; doing so is dangerous and can spark an electrical fire. The homes may be appealing to others as a secret place to party. And in some cases, meth labs may spring up in vacant houses. Over time, vandalism (broken windows, graffiti) may occur.

Other Quality-of-Life Issues

Most foreclosed homes in Jefferson County are not plagued by crime. But many undergo a transformation after being vacated. When a foreclosed property is not maintained, it can become an eyesore, affecting nearby property values. Grass and weeds grow amok. Newspapers, notices and mail pile up. Mosquitoes multiply near standing water (swimming pools or fountains).

Report Suspicious Activity

The foreclosure and resale processes are often long, and can be frustrating for neighbors. There are a few things you can do in the meantime to help maintain safety and quality of life in your community.

Report suspicious activity by calling 303-277-0211. If possible, report it as it happens. To report a crime in progress, call 911. The Sheriff's Office needs your eyes and ears to help identify illegal activity. To report zoning violations such as noxious weeds or excess trash, please contact Jefferson County Planning and Zoning at 303-271-8725.

Neighborhood Watch

If you and your neighbors do not participate in Neighborhood Watch, having a foreclosed home nearby is a great reason to get involved. Through Neighborhood Watch, residents partner with law enforcement to identify, prevent and solve crime in residential neighborhoods. To start a Neighborhood Watch group in your area, or to learn more, contact your local crime prevention deputy: 720-377-2002 (south Jeffco), 303-271-5363 (north Jeffco), 303-670-8125 (mountains).