

As yards or gardens, \$1 side lots assets to neighborhood – study

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, April 15, 2006

By Ron Fonger

rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

GENESEE COUNTY - Most abandoned lots that have been sold for \$1 to next-door neighbors in Flint have grown into well-maintained lawns and gardens, according to a study of the program.

The county Land Bank has sold 142 such lots since 2002 and in most cases improved neighborhoods by fostering improvements, the study by students in the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture & Urban Planning says.

Lots are sold to neighbors after the Land Bank takes over property where the owner failed to pay back taxes and if the Land Bank has no plans for properties.

The study recommends the agency use pamphlets and television commercials to promote the program and grants to pay for lot improvements. It suggests expanding the program to include churches and other nonprofit organizations and to expand the program into other areas of the county.

The findings came as no surprise at Second Avenue and Mason Street, where Peggy Brisbane-Noblit keeps adding to the variety of several gardens she has planted on a lot she bought from the county for \$1.

"I would have been devastated if I had not got that lot," said Brisbane-Noblit. "When I was able to buy that for a dollar, I was elated."

Brisbane-Noblit said she already had started taking care of the property and planting her English garden since moving into her home seven years ago.

"It is just awesome. I've gotten so used to having it (and) everybody pretty much respects my lot," she said.

Students Laura Bozgo, Jessica DeWit and Sarah Haradon presented the report to the Land Bank Board of Directors recently after interviewing 21 side lot owners and checking all other properties to determine what happened once new owners took control.

Most lots sold to neighbors were used as additional yard or garden space, and only a few have had a negative impact on the neighborhood, they said.

Almost 400 lots remain available in the program, not counting more than 900 properties that are headed to the Land Bank because of tax foreclosures this year.

"That's a lot of property, and we really need to think about ... more outreach," said Dan Kildee, Land Bank chairman.

©2006 Flint Journal

© 2006 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

QUICK TAKE

A study of the Genesee County Land Bank's side lot program says yes. Here are some of the findings by students in the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture & Urban Planning:

- The majority of the lots are well-maintained and in good condition.
- Buyers are satisfied with the property transfer process.
- The program's positive impact should be capitalized on by turning available, remaining side lots into neighborhood assets.