

County claims parcels in hock

GENESEE COUNTY

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GENESEE COUNTY - Friday was decision day for more than 1,000 property owners forced to choose between keeping their homes, businesses or land and paying off overdue tax bills.

It also was the day county officials started asking themselves what they'll do with a former sausage factory and the old Russellville Ballroom.

While hundreds of people paid up on 2003 taxes this week or were granted extensions, more let the county take over mostly low-value properties that have more liabilities than they're worth.

More than half the parcels headed to foreclosure this week had a market value estimated at \$14,000 or less.

A few properties with high values apparently also ended up in the county's lap, including Flint Sausage Works Inc., home of the St. John Street plant that produced Salay Meats products since 1924.

The Flint meat-packing institution went out of business in 2003 - 87 years after Emil Salay Sr., a Hungarian immigrant, started the company. It has an estimated market value of nearly \$190,000, according to county records.

Members of the Salay family said Friday they paid the taxes and the county records were mistaken. Paul Salay said the family is still hoping to sell the building in an industrial area north of downtown Flint - something that hasn't been easy - once the tax issue is cleared up. Flint Sausage Works owes about \$3,300 in taxes from 2003, according to the county treasurer's office.

"We've got it up for sale (but) but who wants to buy down there?" Salay said. "That's all I can tell you."

Salay wasn't alone in waiting until this week to make what can be a difficult decision - even for high-value properties. Many companies or individuals that owe taxes and penalties dating back to 2003, also owe penalties and property taxes for subsequent tax years.

A representative of St. Augustine University Foundation, which has owned the former Russellville Ballroom in Richfield Township since 2001, said the group planned to pay off back taxes Friday, but Treasurer Daniel T. Kildee said that apparently never happened.

The Richfield Township Board voted in March to order the building torn down because it constitutes a safety hazard.

Kildee said as the new owner of the building, the county Land Bank would work with the township about the future of the property.

The treasurer said an increasing number of homeowners asked for delays in paying 2003 taxes.

QUICK TAKE

What's next for foreclosures?

- The approximately 1,000 properties that passed into Genesee County's hands at the end of Friday will be assigned into broad categories such as commercial, residential and industrial.

- Within a month, officials from the county Land Bank and other contract employees expect to visit properties to evaluate them further.

- The Land Bank takes possession of the parcels from the county at the time of an auction sale in August or September. Only about 10 percent of the properties are typically sold at auction.

- Remaining properties are held for future use, sold to next-door neighbors, rehabilitated, and resold.

Details: County treasurer's office, (810) 257-3054.

"The number of properties in jeopardy of foreclosure has gone up," he said. "It's just simply the tide of the economy working against us."

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