



Jackson County's Community Action Agency receives federal funds to counsel homeowners on buying, avoiding foreclosure

By Lisa Satayut on July 05, 2013



In 2012 Jackson County Treasurer Karen Coffman takes a look at a property left in serious disarray after its residents moved out when they lost it to the county due to non-payment of taxes. Coffman attempts to make as many personal visits as she can to the properties they county takes in. Though many are in poor shape, she does come across some that need nearly no maintenance. The homeowner of this property lost her house in 2012 after two years of non-payment of taxes.

JACKSON, MI – The Community Action Agency received a federal housing grant to assist Jackson County residents facing a tax or mortgage foreclosure. The \$21,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development will fund certified housing counselors that can direct Jackson County residents to state assistance programs like the Michigan State Housing Development Authorities Step Forward programs. About 1,861 properties in the county are in the forfeiture status with the county treasurer for non-payment of taxes, at least for now. These do not include Mortgage foreclosures. “The number is still high compared to past years but we will continue to whittle that number down,” Jackson County Treasurer Karen Coffman said early June. About 762 of the properties are located in the city. Since 2008 the number of parcels foreclosed on in Jackson County for non-payment of taxes has risen an astonishing 435 percent. The state identified Jackson County as a “hardest hit” area when it comes to foreclosures.

In 2008 there were 55 tax foreclosures. In 2009 that number almost doubled to 104. In 2011 there were 226 foreclosures and in 2012 there were 400. Jackson County residents facing a mortgage foreclosure have been steadily decreasing. The CAA counselors are certified through HUD and do not ask for payment for the counseling services. Housing officials have warned homeowners to be aware of foreclosure scams where the “counselor” or supposed mortgage company asks for money in return for services. This is a red flag. The CAA provides homebuyer education and counseling; foreclosure prevention financial management as well as assisting homeowners with budgets and home repair. The Housing Counseling program is open to all county residents regardless of income.

MSHDA announced this year for the first time its Step Forward Michigan program has been expanded in an effort to help homeowners facing tax foreclosures due to non-payment of taxes. In the past, this program was focused on mortgage foreclosures only. The change took effect Jan. 15. “Make no mistake, these grants will do a lot of good,” said HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan in a statement. “The HUD-approved counseling agencies this funding supports are crucial in helping families manage their money, navigate the home buying process, and secure their financial futures.