

Dear Representative Helm,

As I came to understand, our problem was typical of many around the country. An older couple lost their house to foreclosure, but their middle age drug-using son did not leave and others joined him. The ownership of the property was bundled with foreclosures from other areas, that bundle was sold and resold as a group. Individual deeds were never established, so ownership of and responsibility for the houses could not be determined.

That placed each of them in a vague status termed "zombie," where in spite of the orderly neighborhoods surrounding them, each became largely anarchic, metastasizing crime centers.

The house on SW. 124th Ave, Beaverton, 97005, unincorporated Washington County, is about 800 sq. ft. I talked several times with some of the more coherent occupants, who told me there were around 30 people staying inside with no utilities. They used the toilet until it was piled full of feces, then hauled in water to flush it down and started over. There were others living in tents in the back yard and a prostitute conducting business in the crude tool shed along the back fence. Children were in and out. Suddenly, we had rats.

The area around for many blocks experienced a crime wave; the favorite target seemed to be bicycles, and what I saw coming up the sidewalk made me think they were bringing in bikes from other parts of Portland on TriMet. There were so many bike frames stacked in the back yard, the piles lined the fence and rose well above it. This, in an area where the HOA dings people regularly if their recycle bins are in any way visible from the street, or their yard has dandelions. The uneven enforcement dismayed many of us, but due to the unknown ownership, the place seemed to be untouchable.

Residents of the neighborhood called the Washington County Sheriff's Department very frequently, but while deputies did respond, they told us there was little they could do unless someone was breaking a law outside where they could see it. I personally knew two neighbors, one of whose bicycle was stolen and the other, an iPhone, who went to the front door of the zombie house themselves and recovered their belongings. Either of those could have turned very bad. Some others went on social media with the idea of forming a sort of vigilante group to take physical action if necessary, but they were talked down.

It could very easily have become a real nasty fight. There is no doubt of that. Things were taken from open garages and back yards, I think we were very lucky nobody was seriously injured by a self-defensive homeowner. I heard that there were fights with weapons inside the house that sent people to the hospital, but they hid the real site of the fight to protect their "sanctuary."

It was a horrible failure of social structure, of the protections that responsible, tax paying citizens should be able to expect.

We were fortunate that County Commissioner Greg Malinowski took action, and that the title to the zombie property was bought by a local corporation with an employee living on our block. They evicted the squatters, people in hazmat suits did the initial cleaning out, and at least six large walk-in dumpsters of garbage were hauled away. The house was completely redone inside. One of the contractors on that

job told me it would have been much cheaper to raze the structure entirely and build new.

This ghastly mess seriously affected security, safety, quality of life, and perceived values through an area much larger than the middle of SW. 124th Avenue. Residents are still upset. The nearby TriMet station facilitated people coming from around the Metro area to what was effectively a safe house from law and decency. It did damage beyond the physical depredations of theft and derelict people staggering up the sidewalks. And it is representative of a national problem.

The State must find remedies for these things. This was responsible families bearing the burden of the irresponsibility and lack of accountability of large financial corporations, but this is Oregon and we deserve better.

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