

## Salt Lake County Has Creative Solution For Foreclosures

Reported by: *Cristina Flores*

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For the fifth time, Salt Lake County has bought a bank-owned, abandoned house to gut, remodel then sell it. It sounds like a "flip" and in some ways it is except the county is not doing this for a profit. It is a way to deal with the ever-growing foreclosure problem.

All over Salt Lake County - in luxury and modest neighborhoods alike - there are streets plagued by the ugliness of abandoned houses. Randy Jepperson, Housing Manager for Salt Lake County, said the county has at least four thousand abandoned houses. Many of those properties either are, or are about to be foreclosed. "It hurts values, it hurts the neighborhoods," said Jepperson. Rather than watch home values plummet further and properties deteriorate, the county, in partnership with the non-profit Community Development Corporation (CDC), buys foreclosed houses from banks at just below market value with grant money from the federal government. Once the houses are refurbished, they are sold to first-time buyers who qualify based on income. The income requirement is a maximum \$50,000 per year for a family of four. Bonnie Alexander bought her Kearns home from the county in June for about 130 thousand dollars. "I love it" said Alexander. She learned from neighbors that her 3 bedroom 2 bathroom house had been abandoned for almost two years before she bought it. "It looks like a brand new house not a house that is 20 or 30 years old."

Jepperson said the county's efforts are paying off. So far the first four houses have sold and he expects the fifth one will be an easy sell too. The fifth house, located at 4541 West 5335 South in Kearns, is an "Idea" house. The house, which is about 1100 square feet, will feature all energy-efficient appliances along with good insulation. On the exterior, the house will feature energy-saving siding and low-water landscaping. Jepperson said all that should cut the future owner's energy bills by two-thirds. The "idea" is that others can learn from the project and implement the same energy-efficient features in their own homes.

Jepperson said in the end, the neighborhood will be better off and the family that buys the house will have a good, solid house for years to come. Bonnie agrees. When asked how long she plans to live in her house, she said "Fifteen to 20 years, or longer."

The "Idea" house in Kearns will be ready for open house in early December. Currently, Salt Lake County is trying to secure more federal grant dollars to restore more abandoned houses.