



County clerk maps foreclosures

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The Bexar County Clerk's Office this week launched an interactive map that plots the location of the monthly foreclosure postings onto the Bexar County map. The new tool gives seasoned real estate professionals, would-be investors and the merely curious a fast way to zero in on particular properties or neighborhoods.

The map currently shows all of the mortgage foreclosures and tax auction properties in Bexar County for the May auction on Tuesday. It will be updated monthly about two weeks before the auctions, which happen on the first Tuesday of the month on the steps of the Bexar County Courthouse.

"We identified a need," said Eric Hart, chief deputy for operations at the Clerk's Office. "We don't want to get all kinds of people speculating in real estate; but if they want to find the data, this makes it easier."

The map shows streets, city limits and floodplain information.

By clicking on individual houses on the map, users can find the document numbers for the official foreclosure notices, which can be accessed free through the county clerk's online public records database.

The map also connects to tax information from the Bexar Appraisal District.

A bird's eye feature lets users zoom in on aerial photos to view a house from different angles.

On the Web

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"This will evolve," County Clerk Gerry Rickoff said. "The philosophy is that we're not a records keeper, we're a records distributor."

The map is part of a two-year effort at the county to tap into Geographic Information Systems resources. The foreclosure-mapping Web site is the first resource supported by the county's GIS division to be made available to the public.

Bexar County Appraisal District and the Bexar Metro 911 emergency service provided tax data and street maps for the foreclosure maps.

Hundreds of properties get posted each month for foreclosure, although only about 40 percent of those homeowners actually lose their homes. The rest manage to catch up on their mortgage payments or go into bankruptcy, which can slow the foreclosure process.

The number of Bexar County foreclosures has risen dramatically in recent years.

In 2006, 8,819 homes went into foreclosure — nearly 60 percent more homes than in 2001.

On Tuesday, 677 homes will go up for sale at the mortgage auction.

Along with those rising numbers, investor interest has gone on the upswing.

Although foreclosure documents, land records and tax records have been available online for years, actually doing the research needed to buy a foreclosure could be daunting to newcomers.

And before the information was available online, buying foreclosures was even more of an insider's game.

"In the old days, people would horde the foreclosure book. They would rip out pages. This is money," Rickoff said, pointing to a screen covered with foreclosure postings.

"It was like hiding the skirt that's on sale," said recordings manager Racquel Montalvo, who used to have to figure out which pages had been ripped from the foreclosure book and replace them so other potential investors could do research.

Now that they have an interactive map, the clerk's office hopes to add archived foreclosure data later.

Eventually, they also could include information from other public databases such as assumed names, beer and liquor licenses and where probationers or sex offenders live.

Any database with an address could be mapped, said Colby Free, GIS manager with Bexar County's information services office.

"I can't wait to see what the sheriff does with it," Rickoff said.

The map is available at www.countyclerk.bexar.landata.com, along with a tutorial.

If you have any questions or difficulty using the Web site, you can call the clerk's office at (210) 335-2561.

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