**County could remove use of plywood from ordinance**

With more than 10,237 foreclosed homes on the DeKalb County Foreclosure Registry, many South DeKalb residents are getting tired of looking at boarded houses in their communities.

Residents complain that the vacant houses, which are boarded up with plywood as dictated by current county code, leave their neighborhoods looking blighted and uninviting.

To fix that problem, the county launched a pilot program on Nov. 4 with **SecureView**, a company that has developed an alternative system of securing homes with a clear polycarbonate material that fits over windows and doors.

After watching the installation of the material, made completely from recycled materials, on a vacant ranch in Emerald Estates in Decatur, DeKalb interim CEO Lee May pronounced the covering as "much more aesthetically pleasing than plywood."

"Houses that are vacant and abandoned don't look that way," he said. "It aids law enforcement as a crime deterrent, and it helps preserve the quality of neighborhoods by keeping houses secure."

Howard Wedren, SecureView's president who came to DeKalb for the installation, says his product secures empty, foreclosed and abandoned properties without making them appear vacant.

"Most importantly, the product is virtually unbreakable, which means that intruders cannot enter in the first place."

May and District 7 Commissioner Stan Watson tested the strength of the material by whacking the covering with aluminium bats.

Watson said he put all his strength into it.

"The window behind it shattered but it didn't break," he said. "It looks like Plexiglas but is stronger."

Watson, whose Super District 7 accounts for more than 4,000 of the houses on the county's Foreclosure Registry, said the material makes the neighborhood look good.

"You can't tell that the house is vacant, and it helps the police as well. If there is a problem, Code Enforcement and police can see into the house."

Wedren said the product, developed three years ago by his company, is being used to fight blight in cities like Detroit and Chicago and in Ohio, New York, Maryland, California and Florida. He said the installation in DeKalb County is a first for Georgia, a market he is looking to expand into.

"Our goal is to make plywood go away," he said.

He said the SecureView window covers and door system run $800 to $1,200 per home.

While it is more expensive than plywood, Wedren says it lasts longer and doesn't have to be replaced like plywood, plus it looks better.

During the pilot program, DeKalb County is evaluating the performance and could consider changes to county code upon a favorable review.

Tonza Clark, the county's Foreclosure Registry manager, said that county ordinance requires the use of plywood but that the plan is to overhaul the county's Property Maintenance Ordinance in 2014 to accommodate changes that the community wants. She said one of those changes will be to look for alternatives to plywood.

Watson said the county may remove the use of plywood from the ordinance.

"We could make a resolution to require the use of this new technology," he said, but added that first they have to figure out how to pay for it.

District 3 Commissioner Larry Johnson, in whose district the test house is located, said use of the material could be a step up in terms of aesthetics in the short term.

"The best type of improvement is to remove foreclosed properties from the rolls and have people move into these houses," Johnson said. "That's the ultimate goal."

For more information, call Marcus Kellum, Code Compliance administrator, at 404-687-3711. To learn more about SecureView, visit www.secureviewusa.com.

## Foreclosure Registry grows

The DeKalb Foreclosure Registry now has 10,237 homes. The bulk, 7,541, was inspected by Code Compliance.

More than half of the homes, 5,947, are located in five ZIP codes:

30058 (Lithonia) 1,628

30045 (Atlanta) 1,183

30038 (Stone Mountain) 1,173

30083 (Stone Mountain) 1,026

30034 (Decatur) 937