



Michigan Association OF County Treasurers

22 April 2020
Opinion Editorial

Contact: Jenny Beemer-Fritzing
(989) 539-7801 or beemerj@clareco.net

Seek foreclosure prevention plan before COVID-19 extension runs out

Sooner rather than later. That's the advice we at the Michigan Association of County Treasurers have for business and residential taxpayers who are finding themselves at risk for tax foreclosure because of COVID-19 circumstances.

Although Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued Executive Order 2010-14 in March "to temporarily suspend rules and procedures so as to extend the deadline for redemption of property foreclosed for nonpayment of delinquent property taxes," county treasurers are strongly encouraging those already at risk – or who think they may become at risk because of the rapidly changing coronavirus impact – to call now. We can offer resources and options that could help them build a plan to avoid forfeiture or foreclosure.

Last year our work prevented 93 percent of foreclosures in Michigan. We're essentially the foremost experts on tax foreclosure. We work for the taxpayers and no one else. That's why MACT's Legislative Committee and consultants, including Kalamazoo County Treasurer Mary Balkema and Washtenaw County Treasurer Catherine McClary, worked with Governor Whitmer to shape the extension on foreclosure proceedings for Michigan residents. With common goals of doing everything possible to ease pressure on people during the stay-at-home order, MACT provided Whitmer with fact-based information and data so she could craft a well-educated executive order. But it likely won't be enough for those who were already in trouble and have been set further back by losing income.

When the recession of the late 2000s hit, treasurers worked with many property owners on ways to keep their land, homes and businesses. We can do many of the same things now, including setting up alternative or partial payments and offering hardship extensions. Many treasurers have also expanded their partnerships with community action agencies for other financial assistance resources and financial literacy programs, and connected with local nonprofits that can help property owners alleviate other burdens and put more money toward their tax debt.

There are many other options which can vary by county or region of the state. We all have the same goal in common, which is to prevent people from losing something they've worked hard to build. Many county treasurers' offices are operating on limited hours during the shutdown, but people can still make appointments to talk by phone. We strongly encourage business and residential property owners to reach out and start working on alternatives.

Governor Whitmer's order is effective until May 29, 2020, or 30 days after the termination of the state of emergency, whichever comes later. Thankfully talk is starting on how we might reopen our state slowly and safely. The governor graciously granted everyone more time, but to have a positive long-term outcome, people must call their county treasurer as soon as possible. Acting early is vital.

People are struggling on many levels. This order gave those facing the tragedy of tax foreclosure some emergency relief to ensure their homes and businesses are not taken from them while they work to keep their families safe and healthy. Treasurers hate foreclosing property and will work extra hard during this crisis to help people stay safe and healthy, whether they're tucked away at home or doing their job as an essential worker in a vital sector of our economy.

Jenny Beemer-Fritzinger is president of the Michigan Association of County Treasurers.