

# Getting rid of lot in depressed area proves to be a real challenge

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**Q:** Six years ago, I inherited a vacant lot from my dad when he died. My dad purchased this lot in 1963. However, he never did anything with it. The lot is located in an unsightly area in my hometown.

When my dad purchased the lot from a friend of his, homes were being built in this community. More than 50 years later, no one is buying or building in the community.

I don't plan to do anything with the lot. People are constantly dumping things on the property that I am then responsible for cleaning up or getting rid of, otherwise I get fined by the city.

I've been trying to sell this lot on and off for the past six years I've owned it. At one point, I had the property on the market for two-and-a-half years straight without even a nibble. I even tried selling by owner for six months.

After receiving the most recent letter from the city about dumping on the lot, I'm determined to get this lot off my hands. At this point, I feel like my only option is to just stop paying the property taxes on the lot and let the city confiscate and deal with it. However, since the property taxes on the lot are not that high (I only pay \$50 per year), I'm thinking that it will be awhile before the county actually gets around to doing anything about it. Plus, I'm sure they don't want that lot any more than I do.

I thought about trying to contact adjoining property owners to see if they might be interested in the lot but in looking up the owners of these properties, most of them seem to be in the same boat I'm in. Other owners appear to be landlords. Many of the surrounding properties are vacant lots just like mine.

I've also thought of trying to donate it to a church that is in the community but, seeing that it really is not near the church, I can't see them actually wanting it.

I'm at a loss for what to do with this



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property and really need someone else's opinion and insight into what I should do with it.

**A:** You're in a tough situation. When an area gets depressed, undeveloped land can be hard to maintain. As you perceived, other property owners in the area with buildings appear to rent out their properties, and there isn't much that you can do with your property. At this point the property is more of a liability than an asset.

You're on the right track in trying to find a willing buyer for the property. You might want to see if your city has a program for vacant lots. Some cities try to work with vacant lot owners to get something built on those lots. If the city has a plan, you might be able to participate in the plan. Even if you donate the lot to the city, it may be better for you than holding onto the

property and having to clean it up to meet city ordinances.

There are also charities that try to build in areas with a lot of vacant land. Those charities typically have a goal of keeping communities together. A charity like Habitat for Humanity might be worth a call to see if they would be interested in you donating your lot to the cause.

You might try to call a meeting of all the vacant land owners in that neighborhood and see if you can find a home builder that might be willing to build homes or an apartment building on all of those lots. There are news reports that indicate the some home builders are finding it hard to find land to put up homes. Some of these same builders are looking closer to cities and downtowns to develop.

Finally, if you fail to make your real

estate tax payments, it could be years before a tax buyer ends up with your property. In the meantime, as the owner of the property, you might still have to pay for the cost of cleaning the lot and the fines that may come with the issues you are facing.

We don't have a magic wand that can produce a sale. Assuming you priced the property correctly (and, since you've offered to give it away for free, we assume you're aware of how little value it actually has), you've tried all of the normal ways to dispose of an unwanted parcel.

Other than going big (by getting your neighborhood organized so that you can entice your city to help you find a builder), we don't have any other suggestions for you. But if we get any letters with other suggestions, we'll be happy to publish them here.