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'Bid' adieu to these properties All 9 city-owned buildings, land up for auction sold

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GARDNER Equipped with numbered paddles and pockets filled with thousands of dollars in cash, a few dozen people crowded into the Gardner police station on Thursday afternoon hoping to purchase property on the cheap.

Meanwhile, city officials eyed the crowd with a quiet satisfaction.

"We did much better than expected," said city purchasing agent Mary Delaney.

For the first time, the city used an auction house to sell several properties taken after the previous owners failed to pay their taxes. All nine properties sold on the auction block.

The highest seller, a single-family home at 40 Crawford St., sold for \$77,000. When the city declared it as surplus last year, they were asking for a minimum of a little less than \$17,000 though the assessed value was well over \$100,000.

"Doing the auction rather than a sealed bidding process definitely added to our ability to turn the prices up," said Ms. Delaney, who credited auctioneer Marianne Sullivan with much of the success. "The average person can't do what she did."

Hyping up the room of about 30 bidders, Ms. Sullivan of Sullivan & Sullivan encouraged bidding wars, getting at times reluctant people to pitch in another thousand dollars.

"We expect to sell everything," Ms. Sullivan said at the beginning.

Going into it, Ms. Delaney wasn't as confident everything would sell.

"We were hopeful, but it was a bit of a surprise we sold all of them," she said. "Typically, you sell most but not all."

The crowd was a mix of investors, people who flip properties as a hobby, and even a few people looking to move into the Chair City.

"We are here to buy a house. We're interested in two of them," said Fitchburg resident John Doucet. "It's a lot cheaper and Gardner is a much nicer place to live than Fitchburg."

Ultimately, the Doucets were outbid.

A three-family unit at 24 Regan St. sold for \$47,000; a decrepit single-family unit at 49 West Broadway sold for \$30,000; a 153 Washington St. home sold for \$10,000; a single-family unit with a garage at East Broadway sold for \$50,000; a plot of land at 96 Acadia St. sold for \$15,000; a plot at 88 Sherman St. sold for \$10,000; and 31 Grant St. sold for \$2,500.

The buyers have 30 days to close the sale with the city. All properties were sold as is. The auction company — which handles all advertising — charges a 6 percent premium on top of the bid price as its cut.



News staff photo by KATIE LANDECK

A member of the audience places a bid on one of nine properties up for auction Thursday at the Gardner police station.

'We were hopeful, but it was a bit of a surprise we sold all of them. Typically, you sell most but not all.'

Mary Delaney, city purchasing agent

"These properties are going to go back on the tax rolls and get fixed up," said Ms. Delaney.

Considering the pilot program a success, Ms. Delaney said the city will "absolutely" hold another auction in the future using a firm.

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