

Why do some properties remain vacant for years?

Ever wonder why a property remains vacant for years on end? Whether a vacant parcel, or a parcel with a building that has sat empty, there is usually a story behind these eyesores that remain in cities across the country.

For Lakewood, the following are typical reasons for vacancy.

1) Contamination on the site

The City has approximately 35 sites that are contaminated with either no development allowed, or restrictions on what type of development may occur and where on the property. Here is a link to a [memorandum to City Council](#) (see page 3) on contaminated sites for City of Lakewood. We are working with many of these property owners to perform cleanup so as to improve the health and safety of the community, and to allow for redevelopment. One site, on the list, has recently been deemed with no further action required which means that the site may be developed. If you drive down Gravelly Lake Drive (GLD) much, you've noticed this vacant lot at the corner of GLD and Alfaretta. The site is owned by Chevron.

2) Legal issues complicating a sale or redevelopment effort

The City of Lakewood has what is called a Dangerous Building Abatement program. This program ensures that unsafe buildings are attended to and appropriate measures are taken to ensure that they are brought up to code. If not, the City can do the work, put a lien on the property and charge 12% interest on repayment of work performed. One such building is the former QFC adjacent to Colonial Plaza. Legal matters around this property are causing delays on progress and redevelopment.

3) Owner is holding out for a big price, not realistic for the market

Sometimes a property, whether free and clear or mortgaged, sits empty because the property owner wants more for the property than the market will pay.

4) Ground characteristics making site development problematic

Lakewood generally has good soils that drain well, and are easily developed. However, there are certain properties for which this is not the case. For example, if there is very dense glacial till below the surface it is very difficult and costly to do site development work and build.

5) Building code issues that are cost prohibitive to come into compliance

As eluded to in the "legal issues.." item above, sometimes it is just too expensive for the property owner to take on. One example is the former Lakewood Theater. A review of the building was done in 2011 that indicated it would be a minimum of \$1 million to bring the building up to code. The property is debt free, and the owner is satisfied leasing the parts of the building that are usable, and leaving that portion empty. Another consideration is that some properties may be used as right offs for a certain period of time.

