

A glimmer of hope for LV housing

Sales stats seen as indication bottom of slump is near

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REVIEW-JOURNAL

Nobody's ready to declare that the Las Vegas housing market has reached bottom, but some real estate experts are convinced the floor is at least being established.

The inventory of homes for sale receded slightly in November to 23,494, about 400 fewer than the previous month, and sales remained below 1,000 for the third consecutive month, the Greater Las Vegas Association of Realtors reported.

Inventory is up 19.1 percent from a year ago and sales are down 37.4 percent, but the hard numbers have leveled off over the past few months.

"It appears we have reached the bottom everyone is waiting for," Robin Camacho of American Realty & Investments said. "December is looking horrible, but it's December and it's always the worst month. November did finish flat. Pending sales were rising, then stalled. Now they are rising again, which means in 30 to 60 days, sales should be rising.

"Unfortunately, foreclosures and short sales are still rising. But listings are decreasing and pending sales are rising. These are the positive signs we've been watching for."

The number of condominiums and townhomes listed for sale fell 0.9 percent in November to 5,989.

Realtors sold 968 single-family homes in November at a median price of \$273,500, an 11.2 percent decline from a year ago. Condo and townhome sales fell 50 percent to 162 and the median price is down 10 percent to \$180,000.

Association President Devin Reiss said November statistics reflect slower sales and stable inventory that the holiday season traditionally brings. However, he still believes it's a good time to buy a home because of low interest rates, abundant housing choices and a strong local economy.

A study recently published by Applied Analysis, a Las Vegas financial research firm, concluded that Las Vegas will experience a housing supply shortage by late 2009 or 2010. The data further support the assertion that it is a buyers' market, Reiss said.

Debi Averett of Phoenix-based Housingdoom.com said the market is definitely in the "winter doldrums." Inventory is down because few people want to sell their home during the holidays. They'll take it off the market, wait 90 days and list it again so it doesn't look like it's been on the market forever, she said.

"The median (price) has been declining faster than I thought, courtesy of the credit crunch," Averett said. "The good news there, though, is for all the pain the market is going through, we are headed back to the world where Las Vegas housing is in line with people's wages. No one likes

picking up the paper and reading that their net worth is dropping every month, but at least when things eventually stabilize, people should have more money in their pockets to do something besides make the house payment."

Camacho said she expects sales to drop again in December and January, but not as much as would generally be expected for the winter holiday season.

"Prices are still dropping, in large part because investors are buying up the best deals," she said. "But with sales flat and pending sales rising, it shouldn't be long before prices stabilize and begin to climb as excess inventory is absorbed. Prices are still dropping while sales are rising. I think we have an ideal buyers' market that won't last much longer."

The Greater Las Vegas Association of Realtors' statistics are based on sales through the Multiple Listing Service and do not necessarily include sales of new homes by builders and other transactions not involving a Realtor.