

RMLS: Portland area sees spring bounce in March home sales (Update 1)

By Ryan Frank, The Oregonian

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Note: This post has been revised to reflect the story that appeared in the Business section on April 16.

The Portland-area housing market saw a little spring bounce in March when sales jumped weeks before the homebuyer tax credit expires and as interest rates tick up from record lows.

The Regional Multiple Listing Service report showed that after a dismal February, closed sales in March jumped 77 percent to 1,799 and pending sales rose 30 percent to 2,400.

The sales boost drove down the inventory of unsold homes to 7.8 months. The inventory -- a key measure of supply and demand -- measures how long it would take all homes for sale at the current sales pace.

But those sales came at discounts. The region's median home price remained stuck below \$240,000.

The \$238,900 median price in March was up a bit from February when the price hit a low for the downturn. But March price is still below the \$250,000 mark where prices settled in during 2009 and 20.9 percent off the 2007 peak of \$302,000.

The listing service's report covers home sales in a given month in Clackamas, Columbia, Multnomah, Washington and Yamhill counties.

March's home sales did erase a tough January and February. The inventory jumped to 12 months and sales flat lined in the middle of winter.

Economists said the original home buyer tax credit, which expired Nov. 30, encouraged buyers to purchase sooner than they would have otherwise. That movement contributed to lower than usual sales figures in January and February.

March's sales boost comes just ahead of a deadline for the expanded and extended home buyer tax credit. Buyers must have their home purchase under contract by April 30.

As of February, 18,151 Oregon home owners had collected the tax credit. Those credits have been worth \$130 million, according to IRS spokesman Richard G. Panick.

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