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Housing market stays hot despite some “lousy” February weather

KIRKLAND, Washington (March 4, 2021) – Housing activity during February remained hot around much of Washington state despite significant accumulation of lowland snow over the Valentine’s Day weekend, according to latest statistical report from the Northwest Multiple Listing Service.

“It’s amazing how close the February numbers are when compared to February 2020, which was, of course, right before our world changed,” said Mike Grady, president and CEO of Coldwell Banker Bain. “Despite our similarly lousy February weather, the data show that the market continues to be hot, with residential inventory very tight and median prices rising by double digits across most of our counties.”

Northwest MLS figures show brokers added a similar number of new listings of single family homes and condos last month (7,418) as a year ago (7,786), for a difference of 368 properties (down 4.7%). For residential units (excluding condos), there was a 6.8% year-over-year (YOY) drop.

Total active listings of single family homes declined nearly 44% from a year ago. The selection of single family homes fell more than 51% while condo inventory rose 7.9%.

“A decline in listing volume this year should not surprise anyone,” remarked James Young, **director of the Washington Center for Real Estate Research at the University of Washington**.

“We are virtually sold out of unsold inventory everywhere in the Central Puget Sound area except the Seattle city core,” stated J. Lennox Scott, chairman and CEO of John L. Scott Real Estate.

There are only about three weeks of supply (0.74 months) of inventory in the MLS database, which covers 26 counties. For residential only (excluding condos), the shortage is more pronounced at only 0.67 months’ supply.

Condominium shoppers will find somewhat more selection, with inventory up 7.93% from a year ago, and more than a month of supply (1.12 months).

“While pending condominium sales were down slightly in King County (-0.56%), it’s worth noting that several urban neighborhoods, including Queen Anne, Downtown Seattle, and Ballard performed better than expected. That suggests to me that there may not be the mass exodus from the core urban areas that many have been predicting,” commented Windermere Chief Economist Matthew Gardner.

Nearly six of every 10 pending sales of condos took place in King County last month, according to the Northwest MLS report. Pending activity nearly match the year ago totals for that county (716 versus 720). Pending sales (mutually accepted offers) were up sharply in several Seattle neighborhoods, including Queen Anne (48.8%), West Seattle (42.1%), and Ballard/Green Lake (32.5%). Even the Downtown/Belltown area registered an uptick (4.8%).

Gardner said it was particularly interesting to see the jump in pending sales in the Puget Sound region from January and February. For the tri-county area encompassing King, Pierce and Snohomish counties, the MLS report shows there were 4,896 pending sales in January and 5,232 sales in February for a month-to-month gain of 6.9%.

“This tells me that neither the snowstorm that hit the region nor the jump in mortgage rates deterred buyers who were still out in force last month,” said Gardner.

Lennox Scott also noted the slight increase in mortgage rates, saying it “created a mini power surge of sales activity intensity.”

Freddie Mac reported an average rate of 3.02% for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage for the week ending March 4. That’s up five basis points from the previous week, and the first time since July 2020 that the benchmark mortgage rate climbed above 3%.

Despite rates edging up and inclement weather during much of February, eight counties in the Northwest MLS report showed year-over-year gains in pending sales: Adams, Douglas, Grant, Kitsap, Lewis, Pacific, San Juan, and Walla Walla.

System-wide, there were 7,724 pending sales in February, a YOY drop of 7.5%, but compared to January when brokers reported 7,394 sales, the pending volume increased 4.5%.

Within King County, Gardner noted suburban markets such as Renton, Burien, “and interestingly, West Seattle (given the bridge issue),” continued to see significant sales activity in February, “but so too did more urban markets like Madison Park/Capitol Hill, Ballard/Green Lake, Queen Anne, and Magnolia, all of which reported sizable increases in home sales.”

Of the 30 neighborhood areas the MLS tracks within King County, thirteen of them showed year-over-year increases in pending sales.

Northwest MLS director John Deely, executive vice president of operations at Coldwell Banker Bain, said, “Like last year, before we knew what was just around the corner, buyer demand is high. There continues to be opportunities for buyers seeking condos, and median prices are more stable, so that’s also good news for buyers.”

On the residential side (excluding condos), Deely said he is hearing more and more about multiple offer situations. “Our brokers are working hard to help prepare buyers both emotionally and financially for the realities they face, and to help position them as the winning purchaser. With things opening up, and open house restrictions eased to allow more people at one time, brokers are also spending a good amount of time preparing their sellers to get comfortable with having people in their homes and to safely facilitate viewings, as well as managing and analyzing all the offers.”

Northwest MLS member-brokers reported 5,812 closed sales during February for a 10.4% increase over the year-ago total of 5,265 closings. The median price on last month’s completed sales jumped more than 15% from a year ago, increasing from \$445,000 to \$512,000. Twenty of the 26 counties in the report showed double-digit YOY price gains.

“Continuing low interest rates, jobs, and lifestyle changes are driving the real estate market,” said Dean Rebhuhn, owner of Village Homes and Properties, who also noted the uptick in multiple offers. “Prepared, aggressive buyers are winning the competition for homes. Smart buyers are making substantial offers to sellers prior to the offer review date, and sellers are considering them.”

Scott noted March historically marks the beginning of an eight-month primetime real estate market. “After an intense winter in the local real estate market, more new resale listings are on the horizon,” he remarked, adding, “The intensity we’re seeing should come down slightly as more available homes enter the market, but we have to play catch-up with pent-up buyer demand first.”

Grady expressed similar views. “The positive, optimistic mood is unmistakable, and we expect that to continue as vaccines roll out, things continue opening, and projects like the Northgate Link Light Rail station are completed, allowing people to move further out as they can more efficiently manage their commutes. We are bullish on the market this spring, and frankly, for the rest of the year. Bring on the Roaring ‘20s, version 2.0,” he exclaimed.”

Northwest Multiple Listing Service is a not-for-profit, member-owned organization that facilitates cooperation among its member real estate firms. With more than 2,500 member firm offices and 32,000 brokers across Washington state, NWMLS (www.nwmls.com) is the largest full-service MLS in the Northwest. Based in Kirkland, Washington, its service area spans 26 counties and it operates 21 local service centers.

Next page: 4-county pending sales statistical chart

Single Fam. Homes + Condos	LISTINGS		PENDING SALES	CLOSED SALES			MONTHS OF INVENTORY	
	New Listings	Total Active	# Pending Sales	# Closings	Avg. Price	Median Price	This month	Same mo., year ago
King	2,893	1,828	2,865	2,146	\$820,541	\$679,075	0.85	1.17
Snohomish	1,045	347	1,117	835	\$633,547	\$576,050	0.42	0.93
Pierce	1,239	520	1,250	961	\$496,160	\$455,000	0.54	1.09
Kitsap	313	136	368	251	\$499,463	\$427,500	0.54	1.32
Mason	88	48	93	79	\$338,069	\$344,000	0.61	2.17
Skagit	147	89	164	132	\$524,739	\$455,500	0.67	2.35
Grays Harbor	120	88	135	115	\$303,542	\$275,000	0.77	3.22
Lewis	95	89	139	77	\$346,655	\$319,900	1.16	2.64
Cowlitz	105	54	121	89	\$350,824	\$329,900	0.61	1.31
Grant	76	92	102	72	\$280,365	\$276,000	1.28	3.07
Thurston	357	144	360	299	\$457,533	\$420,000	0.48	0.93
San Juan	25	60	29	16	\$1,323,709	\$726,972	3.75	11.60
Island	107	65	108	96	\$486,954	\$432,250	0.68	2.09
Kittitas	61	47	58	56	\$552,223	\$482,500	0.84	3.08
Jefferson	31	46	37	36	\$478,389	\$425,000	1.28	2.59
Okanogan	24	64	39	27	\$354,037	\$285,000	2.37	6.65
Whatcom	295	224	298	214	\$467,171	\$440,000	1.05	2.53
Clark	72	36	75	49	\$494,065	\$420,000	0.73	1.63
Pacific	51	56	67	36	\$226,028	\$205,500	1.56	5.40
Ferry	0	16	6	6	\$162,583	\$186,000	2.67	32.00
Clallam	68	40	82	59	\$406,286	\$384,000	0.68	2.75
Chelan	62	59	63	47	\$519,837	\$450,000	1.26	3.23
Douglas	51	34	52	30	\$406,310	\$362,500	1.13	2.24
*Adams	11	14	12	12	\$294,334	\$298,812	1.17	3.29
*Walla Walla	39	38	43	34	\$364,958	\$354,250	1.12	6.50
*Columbia	6	6	5	2	\$190,000	\$190,000	3.00	N/A
Others	37	58	36	36	\$360,202	\$306,930	1.61	3.88
Total	7,418	4,298	7,724	5,812	\$617,113	\$512,000	0.74	1.45

*Adams, Walla Walla and Columbia counties are added as separate rows this month; previously, statistics for these counties were included in the row for "Others/Out of area."

4-county Puget Sound Region Pending Sales (SFH + Condo combined)

(totals include King, Snohomish, Pierce & Kitsap counties)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2003	4746	5290	6889	6837	7148	7202	7673	7135	6698	6552	4904	4454
2004	4521	6284	8073	7910	7888	8186	7583	7464	6984	6761	6228	5195
2005	5426	6833	8801	8420	8610	8896	8207	8784	7561	7157	6188	4837
2006	5275	6032	8174	7651	8411	8094	7121	7692	6216	6403	5292	4346
2007	4869	6239	7192	6974	7311	6876	6371	5580	4153	4447	3896	2975
2008	3291	4167	4520	4624	4526	4765	4580	4584	4445	3346	2841	2432
2009	3250	3407	4262	5372	5498	5963	5551	5764	5825	5702	3829	3440
2010	4381	5211	6821	7368	4058	4239	4306	4520	4350	4376	3938	3474
2011	4272	4767	6049	5732	5963	5868	5657	5944	5299	5384	4814	4197
2012	4921	6069	7386	7015	7295	6733	6489	6341	5871	6453	5188	4181
2013	5548	6095	7400	7462	7743	7374	7264	6916	5951	6222	5083	3957
2014	5406	5587	7099	7325	8055	7546	7169	6959	6661	6469	5220	4410
2015	5791	6541	8648	8671	8620	8608	8248	7792	7179	6977	5703	4475

2016	5420	6703	8130	8332	9153	8869	8545	8628	7729	7487	6115	4727
2017	5710	6024	7592	7621	9188	9042	8514	8637	7441	7740	6094	4460
2018	5484	5725	7373	7565	8742	8052	7612	6893	6235	6367	5328	4037
2019	5472	4910	7588	8090	8597	8231	7773	7345	6896	6797	5788	4183
2020	5352	6078	6477	5066	7297	8335	8817	9179	8606	7934	6122	4851
2021	5216	5600										

Risk fund manager explains why US housing “is smashing every record in the books”

Calling it one of the greatest comebacks in American history, professional fund manager Stephen McBride contrasted the current booming housing market with the downturn from 2006 to 2009. The crisis was devastating to millionaires and millennials alike who could not get mortgages.



The housing bust of 2006-2009 “shattered a whole generation of Americans who were starting to ‘grow up’” McBride remarked in a column in *Forbes*. Millennials were forced to backburner any dreams of homeownership.

Stephen McBride

This cohort, which numbers more than 72 million people, was “famously absent” for a decade, but now, according to the National Association of Realtors®, they account for the largest share of homebuyers.

Referring to a [chart](#) based on U.S. Census Bureau data of homeowner rates for Americans under age 35, McBride, the editor of the [RiskHedge Report](#) (“a disruption research firm”) described it as the most important chart in housing right now.”

The chart shows the number of under-35 homeowners peaked in 2005, then spiraled downward to record lows during the decade that followed before reversing course in 2019 “when a wave of young homebuyers burst into the market.”

DR Horton Inc, the country’s largest homebuilder by volume, told investors over 40% of its buyers are under age 34. *Bloomberg* called them a dominant force in high-end real estate.

Not only are millennials buying their first home, but some industry-watchers say they’re skipping the starter home. A Sotheby’s report on global luxury in 2021 said “remote work has allowed millennials to ascend the housing ladder in smaller, more affordable cities. It’s not uncommon for their first purchase to be a multimillion-dollar luxury home.” The report also noted millennials have “unique consumer preferences that will profoundly influence the direction of the luxury-housing market.”

In his *Forbes* column, McBride stated “what’s really interesting is only the first wave of young homebuyers has burst into the market so far.” He cited Pew Research data that shows the average age of a first-time homebuyer is 31, and that last year, the average millennial turned 31, “which means we’re just kicking off this massive trend.”

McBride believes the current housing boom has years left to run, but it is hampered by inventory shortages. The 2008 housing crisis not only dissuaded Americans from investing in housing, but it also shattered the confidence of homebuilders, he emphasized. “Builders have been sitting on their hands for the past 12 years. And it’s created a serious housing shortage in America today,” he wrote.

NAR statistics indicate there are currently only about 1 million homes for sale nationwide – the lowest number since the association started tracking that metric in 1982. That means there is less than a two-month supply.

In an interview with CNBC, Glenn Kelman, the CEO of Redfin, said he had never seen such low inventory, adding, “In Austin people are bringing lawn chairs to open houses because the wait is so long. In Salt Lake City, wait lists are 90 people deep.”

The pent-up demand bodes well for housing – and housing investments, according to McBride who says he is “pounding the table” on homebuilder stocks. Builders are ramping up to produce more homes, evidenced in part by the number of new home starts that reached their highest level in January since 2006. Even so, McBride, who describes himself as a professional investor, notes, starts are still lower than levels during 1959, while population has doubled over the past 60 years.

McBride said he expects the homeownership rates for young folks will surge to new heights over the coming decade, fueling the largest housing boom ever. “In short,” he stated, “homebuilders have to build tens of millions of new homes over the coming decade.”

NAR devises plans to boost homeownership for Black Americans, other minorities

Minority homeownership lags the rate for non-Hispanic white Americans, with Black Americans experiencing the largest gap -- nearly 30% -- according to [“Snapshot of Race & Home Buying in America,”](#) a report from the National Association of Realtors®.

Using data from the 2019 American Community Survey and the 2020 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers, NAR reported the U.S. homeownership rate was 64.2% in 2019. Non-Hispanic white Americans had the highest proportion of homeownership, exceeding the national average with a rate of 69.8%.

Among Asian Americans the rate was 60.7%, while Hispanic Americans had a 48.1% rate. Only 42% of Black Americans are homeowners.

NAR said Black Americans face “some of the toughest hurdles to achieving the essential part of the American Dream,” notably because of student loan debt and high rates of rejection for mortgage loans. Disproportionate job losses during the pandemic are another factor.

Black households have nearly double the likelihood of having student loan debt (43%) compared to their white counterparts (21%). They also have a significantly higher student loan debt (\$40,000 compared to \$30,000).

NAR also reported the rejection rates for mortgage loans had large disparities when comparing Black applicants with whites. While about 4% of white applicants experienced rejection, the rate was 2.5 times greater (10%) for Blacks.

Discrimination is another concern. Among those who said they witnessed or experienced discrimination in a real estate transaction, 41% of Black respondents said they faced stricter requirements because of their race. By comparison, only 16% of white respondents expressed that belief. Among Hispanics, the rate was 19% and for Asian respondents, it was 27%. Around one-third of Black homebuyers said they witnessed or experienced discrimination with the type of loan product offered.

"This data reinforces the need to implement key policy initiatives NAR developed in concert with the Urban Institute and the National Association of Real Estate Brokers to address the Black homeownership gap," said NAR President Charlie Oppler, a Realtor® from Franklin Lakes, NJ, and the CEO of Prominent Properties Sotheby's International Realty.

That initiative, developed in 2019, has five elements to help close minority homeownership gaps:

- Advance policy solution at the local level;
- Tackle housing supply constraints and affordability;
- Promote an equitable and accessible housing finance system;
- Provide further outreach and counseling initiatives for renters and mortgage-ready millennials; and
- Focus on sustainable homeownership and preservation initiatives.

NAR found wide variances in affordability when comparing states.

Nationwide, 43% of Black households can afford to buy the typical home compared to 63% of white households. More than 60% of Black households can afford to buy a home in Alaska, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Vermont. However, less than a third of Black households can afford to purchase a home in Washington and nine other states (California, Colorado, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Wyoming) plus the District of Columbia.

NAR's research found only four states where less than half of white households can afford to buy a home: California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington.

Black Americans were three times as likely than white Americans to tap into their 401(k) or pension funds as a down payment source for a home purchase, an action NAR noted could have a negative impact on future wealth growth and savings attainment. While 37% of white Americans used funds from the sale of their primary residence for a down payment, only 17% of Black Americans did so.

Commenting on the findings and the market's strong performance during the pandemic, NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun said greater numbers of potential first-time homebuyers – many of whom are minorities – are feeling discouraged by disproportionate job losses. “Essentially, they’re being priced out of owning a home because of rapidly rising home prices resulting from historically-low housing inventory. For Black Americans, in general, the greater likelihood of having student loan debt, combined with lower household incomes and accrued savings when compared to the national average, adds to the challenge.”

NAR believes policy proposals such as the Biden administration's first-time buyer tax credit of up to \$15,000 would help address many of these underlying problems. That proposal would mean home buyers would get the tax credit when making the home purchase instead of waiting until filing federal income taxes the following year. NAR also favors accompanying the first-time buyer tax credit with incentives to create more affordable housing units to prevent the credit from further aggravating the current shortage.

Within America's largest trade association several efforts are underway to combat bias and discrimination. NAR launched its fair housing [“ACT” plan](#) last year to emphasize Accountability, Culture Change, and Training. One component of this plan was the release [“Fairhaven,”](#) of an interactive training platform, designed to help fight discrimination in America's real estate market. Additionally, NAR developed an [implicit bias training video](#) with strategies to help members override biases in their daily interactions.

Four colors top designers' list for 2021

Four colors will dominate homes in 2021, according to five industry experts.

Shades that will “soothe and invigorate” will be well received, according to these trend spotters. They can be classified as warm neutrals, dramatic black, natural greens, and serene blues.

With shelter-in-place mandates still in effect in many areas the color experts agree transforming walls with color can have a huge effect on moods. Hues that provide healing and comfort, and instill confidence are expected to top the sales charts.

“Painting can be a low-cost, high-impact project that can improve more than the value of your home and might be a much-needed refresh in 2021,” suggested Erika Woelfel, vice president of color at Behr Paint.

Warm Neutrals

Within the “warm neutrals” category, interior designer Arianne Bellizaire favors taupe, which adds depth to a space while remaining neutral. “The rise of warm taupes can really be found in the contemporary-leaning, European designs we’re seeing today,” she says. “This organic trend is slowly creeping its way to the top of popular kitchen styles.”

Because taupe’s pink undertones flatter all skin tones, it is a natural choice for a bathroom refresh. Used elsewhere in the house, Bellizaire says taupe pairs “really well” with black and even some warm blue, green and gray shades.

Patrick O’Donnell, brand ambassador at Farrow & Ball, recommends Jitney, a muted, uplifting tone that is meant to evoke sandy beaches. This brown-based neutral would work well for a bedroom.

Woelfel says warm neutrals can energize a space without being overwhelming. She recommends using them in common spaces that need a little pick-me-up.

Warm neutrals will be used as “building blocks” between rooms to connect a palette, especially in gathering spaces, says Arianna Cesa, color marketing and development specialist at Benjamin Moore.

Dramatic Black

Designers say blacks are becoming more prevalent in rooms like kitchens and bathrooms that have a slightly more contemporary lean to them. “Like whites, blacks work with just about any other color in the spectrum,” according to Bellizaire, who adds, “What was once too stark to play anything but a supporting role is now embraced as a way to bring sleek sophistication.”

Sue Kim, color marketing manager at Krylon, would pair black with a chalky, but equally classic white. “Low-sheen and soft-touch finishes elevate the look,” she says.

Natural Greens

Green, a color that promotes coziness and relaxation, will remain popular, and is especially inviting in living rooms, according to O’Donnell. “Greens always exude calm, an essential state of mind for our busy lives,” he says.

O’Donnell thinks more kitchens will feature the color, too. He suggests his company’s ‘Green Smoke’ in Modern Eggshell as a timeless shade that works best below eye level on lower cabinets. “It can be combined with ‘Shaded White’ on your upper cupboards.”

Green can be used as a peaceful backdrop in multifunctional rooms, according to Kim. “Symbolic of peace, ‘Satin Jade’ from Krylon is a perfect blue-green that reflects the renewing power of nature,” she suggests, noting it can be paired with nurturing ‘Satin Pistachio’ to emphasize a healthy lifestyle at home.

Serene Blues

Blue, a shade associated with calming, remains a popular choice.

In addition to having multiple shades to choose from, blues pair well with whites and greens for relaxing space, says Bellizaire. “I consider blues to be more timeless than trendy.”

Bathrooms always look good in blue, according to O’Donnell. “It contrasts perfectly with classic white details most of us have in this room,” she stated.

For those looking for a “wow” factor, Kim suggests if you’re feeling inspired to stain an old wooden dresser, “try Minwax stain in Vintage Blue, its “color of the year.”

The color experts discussed their top color trends in interviews with [Dwell](#), “a platform for architects, designers, and enthusiasts to share and discover inspiring design.”

Gap between home sales and starts reaches historic level

Homebuilders can’t keep pace with demand – and that gap reached historic levels during 2020, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB).

Home building staged a dramatic rebound during spring 2020, which NAHB officials attribute to “low mortgage rates, an evolving geography of housing preferences, and favorable demographic tailwinds.”

Using Census measures of home construction, NAHB tracks seasonally adjusted annual rates of single-family starts and single-family home sales. (Note: “Starts” represent all home builds and account for the beginning of construction of homes, whether that construction is for a home already under a sales contract, being built for-sale, being built for-rent, or undertaken for a construction contract, such as a custom build on an owner’s lot. NAHB defines “new home sales” as signed sales contracts for new builds, whether that home has started or completed construction. This metric is a counterpart to NAR’s pending sales index, rather than existing home sales, which account for closed contracts.)

Robert Dietz, NAHB’s chief economist and senior vice president for economics and housing policy, plotted the difference between the monthly rates of for-sale starts and sales. His resulting [graph](#) depicts a peak at the end of 2020, indicating builders are selling homes that have not begun construction in greater numbers. In fact, Census estimates and NAHB surveys indicate a 69% jump in such home sales compared to a year ago.

In analyzing current and historic data, Dietz found three relevant periods over the last two decades where sales and for-sale starts disconnected.

The first period occurred during the housing boom when for-sale starts exceeded sales. That led to an inventory overhang that became part of the housing crisis preceding the Great Recession.

Plummeting single-family starts during the Great Recession marked the second period. That downturn, coupled with sales helped by the three stages of the federal home buyer tax credit, reduced excess inventory, which had peaked during spring of 2008 when the months of supply for new homes topped 11.

“The script is flipped today,” Dietz stated. Months’ supply for new homes is down to “a lean 3.3,” and the supply for existing homes is at a “very tight” 2.8, according to NAR data. Dietz said this third period of disconnect, occurring now, “is a signal of the degree to which home building will need to play catch-up with current demand.

With home building the last decade, (sometimes referred to as the Long Recovery) it was characterized by underbuilding due to supply-side limitations such as labor availability and law/regulatory cost impacts. Dietz described the lagging pace of construction relative to current sales as “an intense, compressed version of general economic trends.” Builders also cite lumber and material issues as additional factors in delaying some current construction projects.

The NAHB chief economist expects solid levels of home construction in the coming months, propelled by low levels of existing inventory, rising resale prices relative to new construction, strong builder confidence, and sales exceeding for-sale starts.

NWMLS revises, clarifies various forms

Northwest Multiple Listing Service revised several forms and unveiled various new forms on March 3. In some cases, MLS officials said there are significant revisions, while in other cases the revisions include minor clarifications and updates to outdated vernacular.

Documents with significant revisions include the Purchase and Sale Agreements, the Financing Addendum, the Inspection Addendum, and the Escalation Addendum.

[Legal Bulletin 219](#) summarizes the forms revisions. Links to sample versions of the revised forms (in both clean and redline formats) are available online for review purposes. The forms were published for use on Transaction Desk and Xpress Forms on March 3. Many forms are also available to order as hard copies. Brokers should allow extra time for printing and shipping.

NWMLS is holding several virtual 2021 Forms Update classes focusing on the March 3rd changes. Instructors will also discuss several current industry issues.

Walla Walla Realtors join Northwest MLS to further enhance tools and services

The Walla Walla Association of Realtors® voted to merge its multiple listing service with Northwest Multiple Listing Service (NWMLS), based in Kirkland. With the addition of Walla Walla and Columbia counties, NWMLS expands its service area to 26 counties across Washington and adds a service center within the Realtor office in downtown Walla Walla.

As a result of the merger, 24 companies with around 150 sales associates are now part of the member-owned Northwest MLS, which facilitates cooperation among member real estate firms. Prior to becoming part of NWMLS, brokers in Walla Walla county shared information via a REALTOR®-association owned multiple listing service. Its members work primarily in Walla Walla, Columbia, and Umatilla (Ore.) counties.

Scooter Johnston, the 2020 president of the Walla Walla Association of REALTORS® and a broker at Coldwell Banker Walla Walla, said a clear majority of members favored the merger, citing several advantages. “In addition to offering sellers much broader exposure of their properties, NWMLS provides an array of innovative products and services, including customizable reports to assist member brokers in serving their clients. We believe our decision will be beneficial to buyers, sellers, and brokers.”

This year’s Walla Walla Association of Realtors president, Phillip Provost, also with Coldwell Banker Walla Walla, said he is particularly impressed with the sophisticated property listing system Northwest MLS provides to brokers, along with the variety of mobile applications. “Its state-of-the-art showing appointment scheduling service, online forms, virtual showing options/settings, and continuously updated COVID-19 resources have been particularly helpful during the coronavirus pandemic,” he remarked.

As part of Northwest MLS, Walla Walla Association of Realtors members will have access to a robust, fully searchable database system, along with the ability to publish multiple virtual tour links and live stream open house options on their listings. The ability to access customer support, technical support, and key/keybox support all seven days a week are other benefits Johnston and Provost noted.

During 2020, the NWMLS Call Center handled nearly 146,000 calls and presented more than 100 individualized training workshops and 569 instructor-led classes for real estate firms. MLS staff also created 13 new user guides and edited 35 existing guides in its library of resources. Members can also access online self-paced classes and webinars.

“By becoming part of the Northwest MLS network, we anticipate increased exposure for our listings and the opportunity for more referrals,” stated Provost, noting they registered more than 9 million logins (an average of 15,469 per day) during 2020. Member brokerages tallied 95,760 closed sales last year valued at more than \$56 billion.

The move by Walla Walla County Realtors reflects a trend toward regionalization and consolidation of MLS functions that is occurring nationally, according to Tom Hurdelbrink, president and CEO of Northwest MLS. “Providing real estate professionals with streamlined technology services and standardized forms and data feeds facilitates more exposure for sellers, more options for buyers, and enhanced productivity in a constantly evolving industry.”

The 26 counties now served by NWMLS encompass nearly 84% of the state’s population, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

Walla Walla County, located in the southeast part of Washington, comprises 1,270 square miles and serves as home to approximately 61,000 residents. The county shares a border with Umatilla County in Oregon so brokers who are licensed in both states can list properties and conduct business across the boundaries.

Walla Walla County is known as one of the most fertile agricultural areas in the U.S., notably for sweet onions, wine grapes, wheat, and potatoes. According to Walla Walla Valley Wine, a nonprofit wine industry organization, it is home to more than 120 wineries and nearly 3,000 acres of vineyards. Walla Walla Valley was named America’s Best Wine Region in the 2020 USA Today “10 Best” Reader’s Choice awards.

Northwest Multiple Listing Service is a not-for-profit, member-owned organization that facilitates cooperation among its member real estate firms. With more than 2,500 member firm offices and 32,000 brokers across Washington state, NWMLS (www.nwmls.com) is the largest full-service MLS in the Northwest. Based in Kirkland, Washington, its service area spans 26 counties and it operates 21 local service centers.

News In Brief

- A new study ranks Seattle as the second-healthiest city in the nation. The study, by [personal finance website WalletHub](#), compared more than 180 of the largest U.S. cities across 44 key metrics, from the cost of medical visits to fruit and vegetable consumption to fitness clubs per capita. San Francisco ranked as the nation's healthiest city, with Seattle as a close second. Portland, Ore., was ranked as third-healthiest. Seattle posted some impressive scores in individual areas as well - ranking first in the nation for its share of physically active adults and fourth for most running and walking trails per capita. The nation's least healthy city, according to the study, is Brownsville, Texas. Other cities ranking in the bottom five: Laredo, Texas; Gulfport, Miss.; Shreveport, La.; and Memphis, Tenn.
- The **Department of Justice** in February withdrew HUD’s appeal of the case postponing the agency’s 2020 Disparate Impact Rule that would have made it harder to bring discrimination claims under the Fair Housing Act. By withdrawing the appeal, the preliminary injunction under the case **Massachusetts Fair Housing Center v. HUD** will continue to delay implementation on the rule. According to DOJ court documents, HUD, along with HUD Acting Secretary Matt Ammon

voluntarily moved to dismiss the appeal. The rule, initially enacted in 2013 under the Obama administration, drew significant backlash from the housing industry after changes to the rule were made under former President Trump last year. Criticism was especially apparent after then-HUD Secretary Ben Carson issued [updated guidelines](#) that imposed a specific, five-step approach that required regulators to prove intentional discrimination on the lender's behalf. Under HUD's previous rule, lenders, landlords and other housing providers could be held liable for discrimination against protected classes even if it was not their intent to discriminate. The use of disparate impact was challenged all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the rule in 2015. However, under Trump, HUD [began signaling](#) that changes could be coming. By 2017, the Trump administration, via the **Department of the Treasury**, [called on HUD](#) to reconsider how it used the disparate impact rule. However, after the controversial changes were issued in 2020, a federal judge delivered a preliminary injunction in October to stop HUD from implementing the rule until the legal challenge was resolved. One week after being sworn in, President Biden signed a number of executive orders alongside a memorandum calling for HUD to [reexamine the changes](#) made to the Disparate Impact Standard. And HUD has shown signs it plans to work with the new administration in expanding racial equity past its current policies.

- The [U.S. Census Bureau](#) in mid-February said it won't be delivering data used for redrawing state and local legislative districts until the end of September, causing headaches for state lawmakers and redistricting commissions facing deadlines to redraw state legislative districts this year. Officials at the statistical agency blamed operational delays during the 2020 census caused by the pandemic. The redistricting data includes counts of population by race, Hispanic origin, voting age and housing occupancy status at geographic levels as small as neighborhoods. Unlike in previous decades when the data were released to states on a flow basis, the 2020 redistricting data will be made available to the states all at once, according to the Census Bureau. The delayed release creates a chain reaction in the political world. Several states will not get the data until after their legal deadlines for drawing new districts, requiring them to either rewrite laws or ask courts to allow them a free pass due to the delay. Candidates may not know yet whether they will live in the district they want to run in by the filing deadline. In some cases, if fights over new maps drag into the New Year, primaries may have to be delayed. In the end, though, experts said the elections will proceed as normal in November 2022. The biggest impact will be to compress the window during which lawyers can challenge bad maps in court. The once-a-decade census is used to determine how many congressional seats and Electoral College votes each state gets. It also is used for redrawing state and local political districts and determining the distribution of \$1.5 trillion in federal spending each year.
- After years of development, a West Coast earthquake early warning system will be ready to send alerts to your phone in a matter of weeks. The much-anticipated system rolls out in May in our state. Experts said it will be critical to saving lives and property in an earthquake. When an earthquake hits, every second counts. The ShakeAlert Earthquake Early Warning System is a network of sensors that can detect an earthquake in real-time. It sends a warning message—then alerts go out to your cell phone—before the shaking gets to you. The system will finally be going live in Washington this May—completing the rollout for the entire West Coast. It goes live in Oregon March 11 and it was rolled out in California in October 2019. You need to 'opt in' to

receive the test. Learn how [here](#).

- Sound Transit announced it will transfer 10 parcels of property it owns in the Rainier Valley to the city of Seattle at no cost for the development of affordable housing. The deal is part of a partnership that includes a \$10 million commitment from the city of Seattle to create affordable homeownership opportunities. Under the terms of the agreement, approved by the Sound Transit board, at least 100 to 150 homes will be created across the sites, all of which are within a half-mile of Sound Transit light rail stations. The housing units will be sold or rented to households whose adjusted income is at or below 80 percent of the average median income. Sound Transit originally bought the 10 parcels of property for construction purposes as it was building the light rail line through the Rainier Valley, but no longer needs the land. The Federal Transit Administration, which provided funding to help Sound Transit purchase the properties, has agreed to their transfer to the city of Seattle without repaying the federal interest. The first three sites will be made available for development within 180 days of the property transfer and all 10 will be made available by 2031, under the agreement.

Calendar of Events

DATES	EVENT	TIME	LOCATION	CONTACT
3/10	Board of Directors	9:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.	Zoom	425-974-1011
3/10	RPAC Auction	4:30 p.m. - 6 p.m.	Zoom	425-974-1011
3/11	Affiliate Council	9 a.m. - 10 a.m.	Zoom	425-974-1011
4/6	Gov't. Affairs Committee	10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Zoom	425-974-1011
4/8	Affiliate Council	9 a.m. - 10 a.m.	Zoom	425-974-1011

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