

Did you know? Coyotes are apparently returning to Vashon, and two people have spotted mink recently.

The Real Property Report

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Real Vashon Information From Real Sisters

Inside This Issue



Highs and Lows From the First Quarter

A snapshot of activity from
the first quarter

Page 2

Listing Agents do not Sell Homes...

...but they bring tremendous
value to the seller.

Page 3

May We Present

Our recent listings.

Page 4

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A Very Good Spring

The first quarter had two out of three ingredients needed for a big housing recovery: affordability and buyers. The only thing missing was inventory. Buyers were busy, but the choices were slim. Only 37 homes came to market in the first quarter, about 65 percent of the three previous first quarters.

As a result, there was a huge spread in days on market: some house sold in days, and others, that had been on the market hundreds of days, finally sold. One house waited 823 days for a buyer. Twenty percent of all the closings had been on the market more than 200 days.

Activity was remarkable during the quarter. Twenty-five sales closed, as compared to an average of 14 over the last four years. We saw multiple offers for the first time in a long time, and back-up offers too. More homes went under contract: 38 over the three months, as compared to the average of 26 over the last four years.

Affordability is playing a big part in the activity. Freddie Mac's chief economist said, "the typical family had more than double the income needed to purchase a median-priced home in January." Those low interest rates and hints of a better job market tell many that prices are about to rise. The National

Continued on next page



Continued from page one

Association of Realtors reports that affordability has not been so high for 42 years. With rising rents, higher gas prices, and low interest rates, buying is an attractive option for many.

The price niche remains steady: in 2011, 48 percent of all sales were under \$350,000. In the first quarter of 2012, it was 78 percent. There were only three sales in the middle of the market, and only two in the upper end.

The same news came from all over our region. The owner of John L Scott, Lennox Scott, described it this way: "Close to the job centers, 45 percent of new listings are selling within a single month. We are seeing a frenzied market in the Puget Sound region, especially in the more affordable and mid-price ranges, with an increase in sales activity in the high end."

Even with high demand, houses must be priced right. When viewing a house that is priced too high, buyers and agents are more critical of the homes and yards. Or, even worse, they don't even come to look.



Highs and Lows from the First Quarter

Cutest Fixer



Excellent north end location, spacious lot, and still charming—it all meant a quick sale even though this one needs plenty of plenty. It sold for \$85,000.

Waterfront Cabin



Irresistibly private and very livable: it sold for \$185,000.

Holding the Center



Vashon's median price for the quarter was \$300,000, and that is just what this lovely place at Vashon Cohousing brought. When you consider the beautiful common house, community gardens, close-in location, and striking neighborhood, I think the buyers did very well.

The Top



Now this listing had a long history. It started life in 2004 with an off-island agent, priced at \$1,500,500. In 2005 the price went up to \$1,795,000, but the house found no buyer, and a long series of price reductions brought it to a January sale price of \$925,000.

Did You Know?

A new law requires carbon monoxide alarms when any house is sold.

Contact us for particulars.

Jean's neighbor on Bates Walk has a Vashon blog: check it out at

<http://vashonblog.com/>



Listing Agents do not Sell Houses

Sellers often ask, “How are you going to sell my house?” Or even, “If I find a buyer, why do I need an listing agent?”

Buyers have their own brokers, and those are the wonderful people who sell listings. In our practice, neither of us will represent both “sides” in a transaction. We are working either for the buyer or the seller, and if we are listing a property, we automatically represent the seller.

We don’t find buyers when listing a house, but we bring tremendous value to the seller. Here is what you should expect from a good listing agent:

- Advice about how to present your property so, when a buyer comes in with an agent, that buyer wants to buy your house. Your house is special, but it’s the job of listing agent to bring that out.
- Experience to know when a septic pre-inspection or feasibility needs to be done, or if you should test your well, or put a road maintenance agreement in place prior to listing
- Staging experience and furnishings: a vacant house is at a disadvantage. Your agent should have staging supplies that show the house’s spaces in the best possible light.
- Names of vendors who can repair, clean, replace, and paint as needed. Your agent should have relationships with good vendors so they will give you priority and get your work done in a timely manner.
- Right price, right price, right price. Your agent should do a written pricing analysis which contains comparable sales and competing properties. You should be able to follow the logic and understand the basis for price recommendations. Your agent’s job is to get you the quickest sale without leaving money behind, and that result is built on the correct asking price.
- Photographs and text in the agent’s listings should be alluring, honest, free of errors, and consistent. Ninety percent of buyers look online for houses, and what they see is what your agent puts on the multiple listing service. Poor photos, or great shots of toilets, will not sell your home.
- Wide exposure to agents and buyers: mandatory. Your broker should do an open house for agents as soon as the listing is active, and there should be very good food. It’s poor form for agents to show a house they have not visited, and this is the best way to get the house seen.
- Public open houses occasionally result in a sale, and you never know who will tell whom about your house. Even when the simply-curious neighbors drop by, it’s a good thing. They have friends and will talk about the house.
- Knowing what to expect means less stress through the selling process. Your agent should outline the process and make sure you know what is coming.
- Washington State and King County have regs and laws that mandate certain procedures and documents during a real estate transaction. Your agent must keep you legal, both to keep the transaction going and to protect you from problems in the future.
- An offer on the table is just the beginning of the transaction negotiation. Your agent should advise you on your negotiating strategies, suggest ways to approach buyer requests, tell you how the various addenda work together, and keep the big picture always in mind. Agents see a lot of transactions and have worked through many ploys.
- Professional relationships with other agents are crucial. If your agent is known to ignore phone calls, get into temper tantrums, miss deadlines, or has poor boundaries, other agents will not want to bring you an offer. There are other houses to look at, for sure, and why buy trouble?
- Support from a great team may be invisible but the results show. Your agent should have a very good transaction coordinator in the office, good relationships with title and escrow officers and loan officers, and an accessible, smart broker. A listing agent spends a lot of time on the telephone with these people, working out kinks in the transaction, and people skills can save your sale.

We pride ourselves on doing all this and more, and we look forward to proving it to you!

May We Present... *Our listings since the last newsletter*



Jean's listing, at \$89,000, and it brought inquiries from far and wide. However, only one person, in the end, had the courage to take it on. It sold for \$85,000 the same month it was listed.



Almost nine acres in a secluded setting, with a well and recently-expired septic design. Part of the land is in a gorgeous ravine, and nearby you will find horse trails and a beach park. A lot of value for the price of \$139,000

<http://vashonhomes.com/propertypage.aspx?MLSNum=325224>



The last two owners have been artists, and their design sensibilities made this rambler a gem. There are wonderful floors and ceramic tile walls, a professionally-designed kitchen, and the kind of north-facing studio that makes you reach for your canvas and brushes. The house is about a mile from town and the yard is picture-perfect without being intimidating. We think it's a deal at \$299,000.

<http://vashonhomes.com/propertypage.aspx?MLSNum=343835>

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REAL ESTATE

Disclaimer: 1. All information contained in *The Real Property Report* is deemed reliable but not guaranteed.
2. This newsletter is not intended as a solicitation of those already working with a real estate agent.

Graphic design provided by Marian Wachter

Region Still in the Red

Prices in Seattle are still dropping. The good news is that the rate of fall is so much slower it almost feels like recovery.

The Case Schiller Home Price Index from February tells this tale:

<http://bit.ly/6lvqgg>

Seattle prices this spring were

- Down 0.8% January to February
- Down 2.9% Year-over-Year.

The good news is that last year, Seattle prices were

- Down 1.9% from January to February
- Down 7.5% Year-over-Year

With interest rates around 3.75%, it looks like our regional prices will soon stabilize. Overall, prices have dropped 32.9% from the July 2007 peak.

On the Home Front



Leslie sent this shot from New Orleans: the house is owned by a woman Leslie met, and the woman rebuilt the house between a river and lake after the cataclysm.