Home sales in state inch up in first quarter

Median sales prices drop in all of South Carolina's major markets

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South Carolina was among 49 states to see a gain in existing home sales in the year's first quarter.

Sales of single-family homes, including condos, in the state were up 1.2 percent, while sales nationwide rose 8.3 percent, according to statistics compiled by the National Association of Realtors.

Lawrence Yun, the real estate trade group's chief economist, called the rising sales trend in nearly all states "a part of the healing process to clear off inventory. Sales need to rise before prices can firm up."

The NAR's report also said 22 percent of the available metropolitan areas saw their median sales price rise.

Greenville, Charleston-North Charleston, Columbia and Spartanburg were not part of that 22 percent. The median sales price in those areas dropped 2.4, 5.7, 0.8, and 7.8 percent, respectively, the NAR said.

Nationwide, the median sales price was $158,700 in the first quarter, down 4.6 percent from $166,400 in the first quarter of 2010.

Carolyn Beggs, spokesperson for Cary, N.C.-based Local Market Monitor, which provides home price forecasts for banks, mortgage insurers, real estate investors, and homebuilders, said the Greenville market is one that will probably see between a zero to three percent increase in home values in the next 12, 24, and 36 months.

What the region has going for it, she said, is employment that's "headed in the right direction" and population that appears to be growing faster than the national average.

"Population will increase demand for housing, which will help to stabilize or slightly increase home prices," she said.

Yun said because of rising jobs nationwide and excellent affordability conditions, moderate improvements are projected into 2012. But, he said, "not every month will show a gain — primarily because some buyers are finding it too difficult to obtain a mortgage."

The Greater Greenville Association of Realtors' Multiple Listing Service statistics show a 10.3 percent year-to-date drop in home sales for April and a 19.5 decrease in sales from April 2010 to April 2011.

The median sales price as of May was down 2.2 percent, from $178,000 the previous month to $174,900.