HOUSING MARKET REBUILDS ON FIRM FOUNDATION

Realtors say job announcements, growing confidence fueling buying again

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The head of the state Realtors association says there is strong evidence that the residential real estate market has firmed up in recent months, with the likelihood increasing of a recovery in most markets in 2012.

"I won't throw a party yet, but we're beginning to see the potential for a new growth trend," Nick Kremydas, the association's chief executive officer, told GreenvilleOnline.com.

"From a sales perspective, price-wise, inventory levels, and new permits, things are starting to trend in a positive direction."

At the start of 2011, year-to-date statewide homes sales were 20 percent below those of 2010.

In October, the percentage decline was 3 percent, with 40,719 total homes sold in 2010, compared to 39,486 sold between January and October 2011. And existing home sales for the year's third quarter were 11 percent higher than in the third quarter of 2010.

"We've made up some ground throughout the course of the year, and we've had three straight months of month-to-month gains, so the numbers are encouraging," Kremydas said.

Also encouraging, he said, is the stream of "strong and steady" job announcements that have flowed throughout the state in the last year, better unemployment numbers, and demographics that show South Carolina is still one of the highest ranked states in terms of migration.

"What I'm hoping and what I think, based upon the numbers we're seeing, is that we're going to look back at 2011 and say this is the year that the market finally bottomed out, stabilized and we're going to start seeing some growth," Kremydas said.

The signs are there, he said, and others are seeing them, too.

Online Builder magazine said new homes sales in the Greenville market jumped 41.6 percent in August from a year earlier and sales in July were up 32.3 percent from the year before, "suggesting the market may be gaining momentum."

New homes sales compared to all home sales are still lower here than in most markets, said Michael Dey, executive vice president of the Home Builders Association of Greenville. It should be around 20 percent but it has hovered closer to 10 percent, he said.

According to the Home Builders' report, that percentage is now up to 15 and "that's a good sign," Dey said.

See HOUSING, Page 2E