BUSINESS

National home sales climb

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Home sales in November and the preceding months give the appearance of a true, firm recovery, according to the chief economist of the national realtors group.

Closed transactions on pre-owned residences increased 4 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.42 million in November, the National Association of Realtors (NAR) said. That's up from 4.25 million in October and is a 12.2 percent rise above the 3.94 million-unit pace in November 2010, the association said..

Lawrence Yun, NAR chief economist, said sales are at their highest level in 10 months and are 34 percent above the cyclical low point in mid-2010.

"A genuine sustained sales recovery appears to be developing," he said.

Leaders of the state and local groups have recently expressed similar sentiments.

Statewide sales of the existing homes were up 12.9 percent last month from a year ago. Home sales in Greater Greenville - which includes Pickens and Lauren counties - were up 12.8 percent during that same period.

Eleven of the 14 markets across the state also reported higher home sales in November, with increases ranging from a high of 33.3 percent in Greenwood to 3.8 percent in Spartanburg.

The year-over-year declines last month varied from the high of 25.9 percent in the Pee Dee Region to the low of 5.5 percent in Beaufort.

The only markets with year-to-date gains were Beaufort (0.4 percent), Charleston Trident (4.4 percent), Coastal Carolinas (4.0 percent), Hilton Head (8.8 percent) and Sumter/Clarendon County (4.0 percent). Statewide year-to-date sales were down 2.0 percent.



Sales of existing-homes, like this one in Hialeah Gardens, Fla., rose again in November and remain above a year ago, according to the National Association of Realtors.
ALAN DIAZ/AP

Wells Fargo economists said the recent months of increases in housing activity, including builder confidence, starts, permits and sales, are promising but "we do not believe a genuine recovery has begun.

They said the major obstacles that have troubled the housing market remain intact, including the oversupply of single-family homes and mounting distressed transactions.

Thus, they credit the recent upward trend in activity to "actual strength in a select few markets and unseasonably warm weather during a normally slow time of year."

Robert Denk, a senior economist for the National Association of Home Builders, said the markets that have the least damage from the housing excesses are the ones recovering the most rapidly.

One of the problems, he said, is that local markets tend to get overwhelmed with national news on housing statistics.

"Since some of the hardest hit states are also some of the biggest states, the national numbers tend to be more gloom and doom than what most markets are really experiencing," he said. "A handful of large states are dragging the average down."