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LACK OF HOUSING



BENJAMIN LEUNG / ANACORTES AMERICAN

The City of Anacortes has seen more permits for multi-family housing, but affordability remains an issue.



Prices are high, options limited in sellers' market

Housing costs continue to rise in Skagit County and the city of Anacortes, and fewer homes are being put up for sale. The result is that homeownership is moving farther out of reach for many, and the cost of living is getting higher for virtually everyone.

As of this February, the median closed sale price of homes and condos in the Anacortes listing region was \$652,000

compared to \$619,350 a year ago, which was a dip from the previous month, but still significantly higher than most of the county, according to the Northwest Multiple Listing Service. That's a trend that has only increased with the close of 2021, which saw large price increases over the prior year.

In the fourth quarter of 2021, the Skagit County housing affordability index reported that only 14 homes listed for sale in Skagit County were affordable to first-time buyers.

Comparing 2021 to

2020, median residential home closed sale prices in Skagit County increased 18.2%, according to Northwest MLS reports.

In that same period, Skagit County closed sales of residential homes dropped 7.5%. And the pressure is even higher in Anacortes.

"It's becoming increasingly ... unaffordable here in Anacortes, specifically very difficult for first-time homebuyers or entry-level homebuyers," said Nate Scott, co-owner of four Windermere Real Estate offices and who runs Windermere's Anacortes office.

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— Nate Scott, Windermere

"There's almost nothing here for them. They're being priced out of the market."

Comparing 2021 to 2020, there was less than

a month's worth of inventory in Skagit County in 2021, a nearly 35% decrease from 2020.

That has continued into 2022. January had

only 24 new house or condo listings, and February had just 31. Both were lower than the listings of the prior year. March figures will be available in April, but the tight market trend of recent years has not really changed.

"Houses with bad siding, bad roofs and bad neighborhoods are going because there's such a lack of inventory," said Kristine Stultz, a real estate agent in Anacortes.

Pre-pandemic inventory levels were already low, but the COVID-19

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BRIANA ALZOLA / ANACORTES AMERICAN

Dozens of volunteers planted a new rain garden on March 26 at Mount Erie Elementary School.

School, city, community groups come together for rain garden

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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A new garden at Mount Erie Elementary School means a nicer-looking parking lot and cleaner waters for the Salish Sea, thanks to months of planning and contributions from multiple organizations.

Dozens of the school's students volunteered Saturday to plant a new rain

garden, assisted by members of the Anacortes High School Green Club and representatives, the City of Anacortes and the Northwest Straits Foundation.

The young volunteers enjoyed getting their hands dirty and took ownership in the project, Mount Erie Principal Kevin Schwartz said. They named their plants and promised to visit each year on the

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Bill changes rules for school shooter drills

BY BROOKLYNN HILLEMANN
Washington State Journal

K-12 schools have more guidance on how to conduct active-shooter lockdown drills with a new bill signed into law by Gov. Jay Inslee.

The law prohibits schools from conducting drills involving life-like simulations or reenactments of active shooter scenarios that are not "trauma-informed and age and developmentally appropriate." Additionally, students, teachers and staff will be alerted before carrying out a shooting-safety lockdown drill.

In Anacortes, that's not going to change much, according to Anacortes Middle School Principal Patrick Harrington, who

also serves as a safety director for the School District, said any life-like simulations of active shooters have been done in coordination with area law enforcement on the weekends when students are not present. The district does hold both lockdown and lockout drills.

Lockdown drills are to simulate what would happen if a dangerous person was inside the school and posing a threat. A lockout drill practices what would happen if a threatening person was outside the locked school. In both cases, families are notified ahead of time to make sure they know that a practice drill is going on.

Up next, the Anacortes district is looking to hone and practice its reunification policies on how to get kids, their

classes and their families reunited after an emergency situation, Harrington said.

Prime sponsor of the legislation, Rep. Amy Walen, D-Kirkland, said it is needed to protect staff and students from unintended side-effects of simulation-style drills.

Walen said the bill was created in response to hearing from parents about how their children were consistently upset after active shooter drills.

"Active shooter drills are associated with increases in depression, anxiety and fears about death among children as

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