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## **Area's Single Family Home and Condo Sales Still Sluggish During First Quarter March Single Family Sales Activity Up Versus Last Year; Multi-family Properties Selling Quickly**

(CHELMSFORD) — The number of single family homes sold in the Merrimack and Nashoba valleys during the first quarter was down 7.4 percent compared to the same period a year ago — 402 sales versus 434 — according to the Northeast Association of Realtors (NEAR) based on statistics from MLS Property Information Network. The median price of single family homes sold in the region during the period also dropped by 7.7 percent compared to the same period last year — to \$286,500 from \$310,530 last year.

NEAR also announced that the number of condominiums sold locally during the quarter had dipped 14.8 percent compared to last year's figures — to 179 from 210 a year ago. The report was issued at a press briefing at NEAR headquarters, and also showed that the median price of condos sold locally during the quarter ending March 31 had also dropped versus the same period last year by 25.9 percent, reflecting a median of \$151,900 compared with \$204,950 during the first three months of 2008.

The volume of multi-family property sales was the bright spot in the area home sales report, with multi-unit sales recording a gain of a whopping 61 percent during the quarter versus last year, to 198 multi-family property sales versus last year's figure of 123 sales during the first quarter. The volume of multi-family sales correlates to a sharp drop in the median price of that property type sold during the quarter — an 18.8 percent drop to \$154,200, versus the \$190,000 median price posted a year ago.

The Realtors trade group also released figures regarding the inventory of property for sale as of April 15, which show that the number of single family homes for sale has dropped substantially over the past two years and, at 1,358 homes for sale, inventory is now nearly as low as during the so-called boom market of 2005, when 1,266 single family homes were on the market locally. In 2006, the single family inventory figure was 2,075. Condominium inventory has also dropped significantly during the past two years, and at 676 is just above the 585 condo units on the market in April of 2005. The number of multi-family properties for sale has also dropped sharply, and at 288, the number of properties currently for sale is well below the 445 properties that were up for sale in April 2005.

Commenting on the home sales data, NEAR Past President Dennis Page said the local market has shown signs of increased strength this spring, with significant buyer demand being demonstrated after more than a year of lackluster homebuyer activity. Analyzing the property inventory numbers, Page said that current property inventory

figures reflect a substantial decline from a year ago for all three property types tracked – single family, condominium, and multi-family. He added that new listings coming onto the market right now that are well-priced and in good condition are seeing a great deal of buyer interest, and even multiple offers.

Looking forward, Page noted that single family homes that have gone under agreement in the last month but for which the sales had not yet closed indicate that the trend is encouraging for potential sellers, with the number of agreements reached in March of this year ahead of March 2008 by 2.4 percent — to 260 agreements reached, versus 254 last March. For condominiums, there were 7.1 percent fewer sales agreements reached this March — 78 versus the prior March's 84. Multi-family property sales agreements in the region were basically unchanged, rising by .9 percent in March of this year versus last March — 110 compared with 109 last March.

Page noted that the traditional uncertainty of consumers seen during the Presidential election cycle last fall has now been replaced with a great deal of interest on the part of homebuyers, especially at lower price levels. Additionally, he cited the appeal of the federal stimulus package's \$8,000 First Time Home Buyer tax credit that is just now being felt in the marketplace. "First-time buyers are waking up to the significance of this \$8,000 tax credit, and our members are seeing a great deal more buyer traffic at open houses and on well-priced listings versus than what we saw last year at this time." He cautioned first-time buyers to realize that the home purchase process can involve unforeseen delays, and that they should focus on getting a property under agreement quickly in order to meet the tax credit deadline of purchasing by November 30. He also noted that for new construction, first-time buyers have to move into their new home by November 30 in order to obtain the tax credit, and since construction delays are somewhat common, first-time buyers seeking to purchase new construction should plan to be "wrapped up" by the end of summer in order to avoid missing out.

The Northeast Association of Realtors represents more than 1,300 Realtors and 170 affiliate members in the Merrimack and Nashoba valleys. NEAR is one of 1,500 local chapters of the National Association of Realtors. Officially, NEAR covers 15 cities and towns from Boxford to Littleton, though it has members from more than 50 cities and towns in the Merrimack and Nashoba valleys as well as southern New Hampshire. The term, Realtor, is a trademark for use exclusively by members of the National Association of Realtors, whose members subscribe to a strict Code of Ethics.

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*Editors and reporters:* Please note that the term Realtor is properly spelled with an initial capital R, per the Associated Press Stylebook.