

Record year for area home sales

December's gain shows Central Texas' housing market is continuing to buck U.S. trend.

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Central Texas had a record year for real estate sales in 2006 but had the second-smallest year-over-year increase in December.

Sales of existing homes rose 3 percent in December, totaling 1,996, the smallest increase since September. Still, the increase indicates that the Central Texas region has continued to buck national trends of a cooling housing market.

"We saw a pretty strong December," said Roselind Hejl, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker United, Realtors. "It's no surprise that it was an increase over last year."

The median price for a single-family home rose 4 percent to \$177,500 in December.

Homes stayed on the market slightly longer in December, 70 days on average, but it's still a seller's market. The greatest number of sales in December were for homes priced from \$200,000 to \$400,000.

Charles Porter, chairman of the Austin Board of Realtors, said he is optimistic that home sales will remain strong, thanks largely to stable job growth.

Pending sales were up 16 percent to 1,852, which indicates that 2007 likely will be another strong year for home sales.

The housing market in the Austin area ended the year with record sales of 26,958, a 10 percent increase from 2005. The year's median home price increased 6 percent to \$174,500.

Single-family homes were on the market for an average of 63 days for the year, the shortest length in four years, according to the Austin Board of Realtors. The number of active listings shrank 4 percent to 7,830, the smallest number since 2001.

Hejl said the scarcity of inventory in Central Austin and close-in suburban areas, such as the Great Hills area, Lakeway and Steiner Ranch, may continue to drive up prices.

"During this past year, I have been shocked at times by how much prices have come up," she said. "The scarcity of inventory will be a driving factor of price increase in the next year."

Certain areas were especially hot last year, including some that border Hays and Williamson counties.

Last year, sales of single-family homes pumped \$6.36 billion into the local economy, a 20 percent increase from the previous year, according to the Austin Board of Realtors.