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# Alaska REAL ESTATE BY DAVE WINDSOR

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## SNOW LOAD ON YOUR ROOF

We've had a "snowier" winter than last year, and I think most Alaskans are thrilled, particularly those who enjoy the winter sports. From dog-mushers to skiers, we are all celebrating.

Roads can be tricky at times, but the MOA Street Maintenance crew do a terrific job. You should give them a call at 343-8277 and compliment them sometime.

On the downside, some folks start to panic when they see the depth of snow on their roof. Does it need to be shoveled? Probably not, but the following may assist you.

There is no simple 'rule of thumb' on when snow (and ice) removal is necessary for your roof system, due to the fact that roofs vary in construction, design and age, but here are some thoughts:-

First, the questions to be answered are:- How much weight can your roof trusses support, what weight is it already carrying in roofing materials, and how heavy is the snow/ice accumulation on various parts of your roof?

Anchorage Municipal Code requires that roofs be constructed to accommodate a minimum sustained load of 40 pounds per square foot. However, older homes may be weaker or, in some cases, stronger than this. Also, keep in mind that many architects design to at least 150% of code, which means that your newer home may be built to an even higher standard. One prominent Anchorage builder works on 55 pounds per square foot.

A roof system can suffer drifting snow (e.g. where an upper roof spills onto a lower roof). This requires a higher standard and builders are required to submit calculations with the Permit Application which will then be reviewed by Building Safety at the Municipality.

You could have a structural engineer calculate your particular roof's strength or, at least, inspect the attic for signs of rafter deflection, the precursor of collapse. You should also take into account that the buildup of snow or ice is not necessarily consistent across the entire roof. Valleys may have greater accumulation, and eaves may have ice buildup.

However, putting all the exceptions

aside, you can measure the weight of a particular area in the following manner. Take an old 6 pound coffee can (6 inches in diameter) and thrust it repeatedly into a vertical core in the snow until you have a full 6 inch diameter core all the way to the shingle surface. Empty the snow into a bucket and melt it. Pour the water back into the can and measure its depth in inches. Multiply the result by 5.2 and the answer equals the weight per square foot in pounds.

For example, if the entire core of snow measures out at 4 inches of water in the can, the pressure on the roof is  $4 \times 5.2$ , or 20.8 pounds per square foot. With ice, simply measure its depth, without trying to remove it, and multiply by the same 5.2 factor.

Nobody on a local newscast can tell you what your snow load totals based on snow fall year-to-date. The variables are too many. Snow varies in kind and amount across the Anchorage bowl. Light, fluffy snow that falls when temperatures are low is not 'heavy' snow. Snow also

'sublimes' over a period of time (i.e. evaporates). Your particular home may experience more snow blown off the roof than a neighboring suburb. However, the snow load on an average, pitched roof home in Anchorage, built to current codes, is probably between 10 and 15 pounds per square foot as we enter February 2017.

Of more concern than cleaning the entire roof at this time is to ensure that vents extending through the roof are not blocked by snow. Generally, stacks associated with the heating system keep themselves clear because of heat, but drain vents, bathrooms exhaust vents and attic ridge vents may become buried.

Also of particular concern would be homes with large, overhanging eaves where there is less support, and roofs of enclosed decks, sheds, carports and other lightweight structures possibly not built to any code at all.

Decks can worry some people as well but, like roofs, are also subject to a Building Permit Code at 40 p.s.f. minimum. All decks that are more than 30 inches above ground must be 'Permitted' and may also have a 'Drifting Snow' factor if below a roof where wind can add an additional burden.

Should you need authoritative guidance on roof or deck loads you can always call M.O.A. Building Safety at 907-343-8301.

The bottom line is that a city-wide panic to climb on the roof

with a shovel, risking possible injury, is not yet justified. If snow fall in your area reached 72 inches this winter, I would definitely advise you to check out your roof seriously at that time but, until then, let's go skiing!

## **MARKET UPDATE**

Employment numbers predicted by the Anchorage Economic Development Council (AEDC) for 2016 was to see a loss of 1600 jobs or a 1% decline for the economy.

In actual fact this was closer to a loss of 2500 jobs or a 1.6% decline in the local economy.

On Wednesday 1st February, AEDC published its forecast for 2017 ( You can view or print the full report at [www.aedcweb.com](http://www.aedcweb.com)) and expects a further decline in 2017 of 2200 jobs or 1.4%.

This situation is not a surprise, considering the reduction in Oil Activity. However, there are several upside surprises possible under President Trump.

Reduced regulation and taxes will most assuredly boost economic activity and you can look forward to that.

Real Estate activity in 2016 showed remarkable resilience, except in the upper price ranges above \$700,000. New Construction of upper end homes was down 40%.

2,942 Anchorage Residential Units were sold in 2016 compared to 3,000 in 2015. the median sales price was actually up from \$335,000 to \$336,000.

On balance, I do not anticipate the local real estate market falling off the cliff this year, though the Municipality Property Tax regime did, quite correctly, put a pause and, in many cases, a small re-tracement of your property value this year, which was only fair.

If you plan to sell in 2017, I strongly recommend that you call me now, not later, as inventory levels below \$600,000 show slim pickings for active homebuyers in February/March.

April traditionally kicks off the active 'selling' spree but, by then, your number of competing properties on market has increased and, with the skiddish mood in Alaska, particularly over the State finances, pressure will be on selling prices. Your home is likely worth \$10,000 more in February/March than in April/May.

Call me for an individual evaluation and strategy. As mentioned in my January newsletter, the "New America" will deal some surprises under President Trump. Keep your feet firmly on the ground and take advantage of the favorable political weather on the good days.



Dave

Windsor

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