

The Measure Of A Home

July 21, 2013

Dear Dave: When we sold our Hillside home, the Appraiser measured the house and came up with quite a different square footage than the Municipal Tax Records were showing. How should a house be measured?

Answer: To ascertain the square footage of living space in a home, the Appraiser will typically start with the external measurements, or “footprint”, of the property. If the building is a plain two-story or split-entry, this calculation is simply multiplied by 2.

From this point, adjustments have to be made. If the home has a tuck-under garage, this must be extracted. The same applies to areas inside the home where a cathedral ceiling to the upper level exists. Further adjustments must be considered for cantilevered portions of the house, bay window areas, and other geometrical projections from the basic footprint. The complication can arise with a chalet-style property where the roof line angles down and is both roof and wall to the upper level. In this case, appraisers will only measure the space that provides at least 5 feet 6 inches of head-room.

In short, you measure a house essentially from exterior numbers, which should correspond to the as-built survey. Condominiums are measured from interior dimensions since that is the space being purchased. The exterior walls, attic and crawl-space are not acquired when you purchase a condo – only the space inside the unit. The building itself, like the land, is owned “in common” with all the other condo owners in the development.

The reason current Appraisals often differ from the Municipal Tax Record is that the source of information, and its timing, are different. When a builder applies for a permit to build, plans are lodged with the Municipality and this provides them with their basic data. However, changes are often made to buildings after the original permit is issued.

To ensure more accuracy, the Municipality usually sends someone out to all new construction to run a tape on the external measurements. The occasion for error arises from the employee often not being able to view the interior. This results in miscalculation of the extractions necessary for garage and other open areas inside.

By Statute, the Municipality is required to physically check all properties every 6 years, but budgets do not always enable this to happen. In 1988, a major effort was conducted by the MOA to confirm inventory and re-measure homes in the Anchorage bowl, but it was never completed. Although some 50,000 homes were measured, a notable exception was the Hillside area. This probably explains your specific anomaly.

Dear Dave: We’ve just put in a new fence on our property line and the neighbors’ children are already climbing on it. Since we paid for the fence we don’t think they should be touching it. What do you think?

Answer: Fences on the property line are always a tricky business. If you were worried about the neighbors, there were two things you could have done. First, put the smooth side of the fence to face the neighbor. Then the children would have nothing to climb on. Secondly, you could have placed the fence 2 inches inside your property line. Then, if your neighbors' children continued to touch it, they would be trespassing on your property.

When erecting fences it is always a good idea to consult with the neighbors first. Maybe they would have split the cost of the fence and you could have discussed your various concerns before they became a nuisance. As it is, the fence does belong to you if you paid for it, and it would be reasonable to expect your neighbors to control their kids a little better.

Dear Dave: We are selling our home in Fairbanks and have listed it with a Real Estate agent. Are we obliged to include the refrigerator, washer and dryer?

Answer: When Real Estate is listed for sale, Buyers can assume that ALL the Real Estate is included. Real Property is, by definition, land and everything attached to the land such as fences, trees and the house. In turn, everything attached to the house is Real Property. This would include such things as light fixtures, built-in shelves and cabinets, and built-in appliances.

Since the refrigerator, washer and dryer are not usually built-in like the dishwasher or range, they are not part of the Real Estate. They are more like the television or furniture which are considered 'Personal Property'. A microwave may be considered part of the Real Estate if built-in, but not if sitting loosely on a shelf or counter-top.

Your Real Estate Licensee will advise you on what automatically goes with the property, but be sure to clarify with him anything you wish to take with you. Misunderstandings over window treatments, light fixtures, appliances, garden sheds, perennials in the yard and even garage shelving have caused several sales to go sour at closing.

Dear Dave: I do not speak English very well but am fluent in the Spanish language. How can I find a Realtor in Alaska who speaks Spanish to help me in purchasing a home?

Answer: You are not alone. There are now many language groups in the American society. Unfortunately, there is no roster of Realtors in Alaska showing their language capabilities at the present time. Some individual Real Estate offices have the information available on the internet for their particular company. Your best bet is to have a friend call some of the Real Estate offices in your Alaska location and ask them individually for a Spanish speaking agent. In Anchorage there are at least 6 of these.