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Alaska REAL ESTATE BY DAVE WINDSOR

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THE MEASURE OF A HOME

People often wonder, when an Appraisal is done, why the square footage is different to their Tax Records per the Municipality. How big is your home? Really?

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 spilt-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 prop-

erties 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 and many other patches of territory on the map. This explains many of the anomalies.

The Nature of a Home:

Once size is clear in your head, you may want to graduate to a clearer understanding of the Nature of a Home. Many of you live in a Single Family Residence, or SFR.

On the other hand, confusion often reigns when you are looking at buildings from the Street. When is a Duplex not a Duplex? Good question for your next campfire debate. What is a Condominium? What is a Zero Lotline?

It's easy to be confused by real estate words. What matters with all real estate is (1) How is the building constructed? and - - -

(2) How is the property legally established?

Many real estate terms can describe the kind of structure you are looking at. A building with 2 separate living quarters may be correctly described as a duplex, whether they be one on top of the other (up and down), or side by side.

A 'Townhome' or 'Townhouse' describes a structure where nobody lives above or below you. Townhomes may also appear to be a 'duplex' if two units are constructed side by side. An 'Apartment' is generally a single living unit in a block of similar units with those living quarters stacked one over another and side by side.

The legal status of structures is an entirely different question. A condominium is a residential (or commercial) unit established under the Uniform Common Interest Ownership Act where each unit owner may control his individual space but is an owner-in-common, with every other unit owner, of the land and buildings that comprise the total.

A 'Zero Lotline' home will also appear to be a duplex. A 'zero lotline' is a single family residence on an individual lot but is built right up to the neighboring structure with a 'zero' setback from the property line.

In other words, any development comprising multiple units, be it a string of detached homes, a duplex, or a block of apartments, or any combination thereof, may be

'Condominiums' if a common interest community exists where individual unit owners share common ownership of land and buildings.

Confused? What words mean is called the science of "Hermeneutics". Always ask your Real Estate Professional to define the real estate you are interested in, or looking at. Alternatively, consult Muni records for the address concerned since zoning determines the use of all land, and the nature of the structure will be described in the Tax Records. In particular, the MOA is very strict about 'Single Family Residence' or 'Condominium' because they are assessed differently.

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