

Housing starts dampened by heavy snow

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TULSA – Heavy snows left both metro Tulsa and Oklahoma City experiencing double-digit housing start declines last month.

Building permits issued last month by 18 Oklahoma City-area city and county governments dropped 24 percent in February to 238 from 313 the prior year, according to data provided by the Central Oklahoma Home Builders Association.

But that included no 2011 data from Norman, which the association reported was not available. Factoring that city out entirely, metro Oklahoma City building permits dropped 18.7 percent last month.

With its greater snowfalls, metro Tulsa starts fell 24.2 percent last month to 157 from 207, according to data gathered from 24 area communities and counties by the permit-tracking service New Orders Weekly for the Home Builders Association of Greater Tulsa. Its builders took heart with February's 35-percent rise over January activity.

"Feedback from our members is that the market is beginning to pick up," association President Rob Miles said Thursday, noting both increased buyer inquiries and home improvement business as the weather warmed.

Exhibitors reported higher sales for all products at the association's annual Greater Tulsa Home and Garden Show earlier this month, said Miles. More than 30,000 people attended that four-day event.

For the first two months of 2011, using the Norman data, metro Oklahoma City results fell 8 percent to 528 from 574. Factoring out Norman's February data, metro Oklahoma City stands just 4.6 percent behind year-ago results.

Dealing with its record February snow left metro Tulsa's year-to-date housing starts down 20.5 percent to 271 from 341.

As might be expected, the city of Oklahoma City charted the most building permits last month at 141, down 23.8 percent from the prior year. That left its year-to-date total at 310, 7.2 percent behind the 334 permits issued in the first two months of 2010.

Edmond ended in a dead heat against its year-ago performance, scoring 27 building permits both times. With 53 permits issued through the first two months of this year, it stands 17.8 percent ahead of 2010 marks.

Moore posted 21 permits in February, 32.3 percent behind its year-ago performance, while Midwest City charted a 27.3-percent rise with 14 permits.

At 28 recorded housing starts, the city of Tulsa enjoyed one more last month than did Owasso. But both cities failed to beat year-ago numbers, with Tulsa down 17.6 percent, its northern suburb down 6.9 percent.

Broken Arrow recorded 18 housing starts in February, followed by Bixby with 17 and Jenks with 16. But Broken Arrow's tally finished 35.7 percent behind its year-ago pace, while Bixby's count jumped 21.4 percent and Jenks surged 77.8 percent.

With 25 starts, only Jenks managed an increase for the first two months of 2011. The city of Tulsa led the tally with 47 housing starts, down 9.6 percent from its 2010 pace. Owasso followed with 36, 7.7 percent below its 2010 results.

While he knows many potential homebuyers remain on the fence, Miles said he expects home building to pick up this year.

"I think the consensus across the board for most builders is the phone is ringing and they are meeting with prospects," the owner of Milestone Homes said in a phone interview Thursday evening. "I think most of us have a semi-positive outlook, from the conversations I'm hearing."