An MLS is making it easier to find ADA-compliant properties

A multiple listing service in the Pacific Northwest has rolled out a new system that makes it easier to list and search for properties that have features catering to disabled homebuyers.

The new accessibility system will be part of the broker-owned Northwest Multiple Listing Service, which operates primarily in western and central Washington. It'll work by presenting agents and brokers with 12 different checkboxes when they go to list a property. The checkboxes cover categories such as "accessible approach," "accessible entrance," "modification for hearing/vision" and "accessible elevator or lift installed."

Brokers on the other end who are trying to find properties for their clients can then filter their search results according to those categories.

Tom Minty | Credit: Northwest MLS

Tom Minty, a broker with John L. Scott Real Estate in Issaquah, Washington, told Inman that the system also provides information for listing agents to help them understand what the various categories include.

"It just rolled out last Thursday, and we've had feedback and it's been extremely positive," Minty added.

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Northwest MLS said in a statement that the system is believed to be the first of its kind in the U.S.

Previously, Minty said, Northwest MLS users were limited to checking boxes noting disablity access either inside or outside a property. The categories were vague, and there was also “no definition of that and no knowledge in the real estate community about what that meant,” Minty explained.

He also said there has historically been “a hesitancy on Realtors’ part to talk about accessibility features because they have the stigma of a handicap house.” The new system is meant to eliminate that stigma and show that accessibility features can be assets that add value to a property.

“We want to show them that a home without barriers doesn’t have to be ugly or clinical,” Minty added. “And we wanted to change it so there were actually searchable fields.”

Barry Long | Credit: Northwest MLS

Minty collaborated with Barry Long — a broker with Marketplace Sotheby's International Realty in Woodinville, Washington — to create the system. The two men hit it off about two years ago, Minty said, after they connected over their shared belief in the need for more accessible housing. Minty's interest in the subject was first piqued years ago by a friend with multiple sclerosis, and Long became a paraplegic after a motorcycle accident in 1992.

After meeting, Long and Minty began discussing the accessibility features they wanted to see highlighted. Minty said they figured out what to include and what the system should look like, then took it to Northwest MLS, which built the tech side.

Jason Wall, chairman of Northwest MLS, praised the new accessibility system in a statement, saying it provides a "more robust way of showcasing accessible properties."

This month, the new system also won a "best in practices" award from the Northwest Access Fund, a nonprofit that serves people with disabilities.

Minty said that though the system is the first of its kind, he'd "like to be able to replicate it across the country." There are tens of millions of people with disabilities in the U.S., he said, as well as a growing group of people reaching old age. And all of them will need housing.

"We really feel like this is just the start, that this has been an underserved community," Minty continued. "We're hoping to correct that."

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