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## Rhode Island single-family permits up 20% in 2013, but look again

March 13, 2014 - Rhode Island

While any improvement in building permit figures is welcome, the numbers from the fourth quarter of 2013 in Rhode Island should be viewed with "cautious optimism" and town-by-town. That's because, when the overall numbers are small, small changes produce big percentages. In fact, the slow housing recovery continues to be very uneven.

Statewide, Rhode Island experienced a 28% increase in the number of single-family building permits issued in the fourth quarter of last year over the same period in 2012, a far cry from the third quarter, when there was an overall 24% drop in permits over that period in 2012.

The actual numbers: 226 permits were issued statewide in the fourth quarter of last year, only 49, or 28%, more than the 177 issued in the same quarter in 2012. The numbers certainly are headed in the right direction, but it's a far cry from the 563 permits issued in the fourth quarter of the more average year 2001.

The fourth quarter figures were released in January by the Rhode Island Builders Association. For the year, statewide permits totaled 817, a 20% increase over the 682 issued in 2012. A handful of communities and projects were responsible for the improvement.

Leading the charge in percentages was Lincoln, with 21 single-family building permits issued in the October-December period, a 2,000% increase over the one permit issued in the same quarter of 2012. Lincoln also led the state for the year, with 46 permits issued in 2013, a 283% increase over 2012, when a total of 12 permits were issued.

Another big percentage leader was Jamestown, with seven permits issued in the fourth quarter, as opposed to one on the same period in 2012 (a 600% increase). Also for the fourth quarter, Scituate (three permits for the quarter in 2013/none in 2012), Warren (four/one) and Woonsocket (three/none) all experienced 300% increases.

In actual figures, Lincoln and Warwick had the highest numbers of permits issued during the fourth quarter, at 21 each. Next was Cranston at 19, then South Kingstown at 15.

On the negative side, permit numbers in West Greenwich fell by 140%, from five in the fourth quarter of 2012 to minus two in the October-December period in 2013. Permits in North Kingstown fell from 13 in the last quarter of 2012 to minus one in the same 2013 period (108%).

At the other end of the spectrum, no single-family permits at all were issued during the fourth quarter in Central Falls, Foster, Johnston or Newport. East Providence, North Providence, Pawtucket and West Warwick issued one each.

Central Falls was the only community that issued no single-family permits at all in 2013.

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