

Answers to questions from our Data Accuracy webinar

These were questions asked during our Data Accuracy webinar on July 10th, 2013. The goal of the webinar was to go beyond the rules, and to give tips and advice about how to better represent properties. Unless otherwise specified, the answers below do not reflect MLS rules or policies, but are recommendations for how to create better listings.

Measuring Square Footage

How do you handle stairs? What about in multi-family buildings?

Officially, the stairs should only be included in the square footage for one level.

However, most people simply measure each floor and ignore the stairs. The additional footage is not enough to make a significant difference.

Is the basement square footage the same as the foundation size?

Not always. In a split level home, or if a property has an attached garage, then the foundation size is typically larger than the size of the basement.

In the MLS, we only list Below Ground Finished Square Footage. This is different than the square footage of the entire basement, correct?

This is typically true. Even in a house with a “fully finished” basement, there are usually some areas left unfinished for laundry or mechanicals.

Is a painted basement floor, cement walls, or an unfinished ceiling acceptable to call the space “finished”?

No. The ceiling, floor and walls must be actually finished to include the space in finished square footage.

Can you include the porch in finished square footage if it has heat piping, but it is not connected?

No. The space must have permanent heat in order to be considered finished.

Many agents add, “Buyer’s agent to verify all measurements” in Agent Remarks. Does this mean the agent did not measure the home, or is not liable for the data entered into the MLS?

Both agents are responsible for measuring the property. Listings agents should have accurate square footage on their listings, and they cannot eliminate their liability simply by adding a remark on the listing. We have also heard of lawsuits against buyer’s agents for not verifying the square footage of a house. We don’t know the resolution of any of the cases, but the more you can do to protect your buyers, the better.

Can you include the square footage for an office that is fully finished, but is part of a detached structure?

On the MLS, you can include fully finished outbuildings in your square footage. However, appraisers cannot include it as Above Ground Finished Square Footage if you have to go through an unfinished space, or go outside, to get to it. They would include this as a separate line item. Mention how large this office is in the remarks, as well as how much the square footage of the house would be without the office included.

Valuation?

An appraiser doesn't know the reason for a sale. A very low sales price might be because the sellers were desperate to sell. How can you use that sales price as a comp?

Any agent or appraiser doing a price opinion will find outliers in the MLS data. They may choose to exclude it if they can't find a reason to adjust the price. It's always best to add a note to the remarks before closing the listing, where appropriate, to explain why the price of a particular listing may be above or below the properties in the area.

In multi-family listings, do I include rent amounts that have been collected by owners, or should I include the rental rates in the area? What if they're giving the tenant a discount?

Per the MLS rules, you should report the actual rent being collected. However, any discounts are important information for appraisal purposes. Include a comment in remarks if the tenant is being given a break for any reason.

Do appraisers report a value range instead of a specific value for a property?

On mortgage appraisals, they report an exact value. For other appraisal types, they may sometimes report a range.

Rules and Definitions

If I submit a withhold from MLS, do I also need to include a copy of the listing contract?

No, we only need the withhold form. If we need to see the listing agreement for any reason, we'll request it from you.

Where can I find the description of multi-family homes?

By definition, a multi-family home on the MLS is a building with 2-4 units.

Where can I find bathroom descriptions? For example, what constitutes a 1/4 bath?

- **Full Baths:** Total number of full bathrooms containing a toilet, sink, bathtub and shower.
- **Three-Quarters Baths:** Total number of rooms containing a toilet, sink, and either a shower or bathtub.
- **Half Baths:** Total number of rooms containing a toilet and either a sink, shower or bathtub.
- **Quarter Baths:** Total number of rooms containing only a toilet or shower.

*Note that appraisers cannot include ¼ baths in their valuations.

What is a legal bedroom? Are a closet and egress window required?

Per the MLS rules, a bedroom must meet code requirements to be included in the MLS. Some municipalities do not require a closet. Others do require a closet, but have grandfathered in bedrooms in old houses that do not have closets. Those can all be listed on the MLS.

Note that most buyers and buyer's agents expect a bedroom to have a door, a closet, and a window, even if they meet code without those elements. Also, appraisers cannot count bedrooms that don't meet the higher standard. If you include a bedroom that has been grandfathered in, at the least it is courteous to describe the bedroom in the remarks.

Egress windows are always required for basement bedrooms.

Can you count the garage stall if the ceiling is too low for a garage door opener?

Yes, there is no requirement that a garage have an automatic opener in order to be counted on the MLS. It does need to be large enough to fit a car in order to call it a garage.

Where are the definitions of the styles of the homes?

A list of all the Single Family styles and their definitions [can be found here](#).

What differentiates a seasonal cabin from a year-round cabin?

A year-round cabin has heat.

Are photos required for comp solds?

Photos are not required for comp solds. However, we encourage you to add a photo, so that it can be used as a comp. Attach it to an email and send it to help@northstarmls.com. The help desk will load it for you.

If the external condenser unit for the air conditioner is missing, but the ductwork and coil in furnace is there, does the house have central air or should it be listed with "none"?

The air conditioner must be operable in order to list it on the MLS. However, you can comment that most of the work has been done to add central air.

Can an IKEA-style closet system turn a room with no closet into a bedroom?

The bedroom must meet code requirements. Generally, a freestanding closet system does not meet code, but that depends on the municipality where the property is located.

In New Construction, when is it OK to use the name of the builder in the public remarks?

Only to describe the home, and if you do not embellish the builder. For example, "Built by ABC Construction." Do not include any other description or information about the builder, other than the name.

Do we ever need to include the builder's license number?

It is allowed, but not required.

Where can we find a reference for the MLS rules?

We have several documents available on www.northstarmls.com, under the Rules and Regulations section. In particular, the [Quick Guide](#), and the [Guide for Easy Compliance](#) are good references. If you have any questions, contact our Rules and Regulations Department at 651-251-3210 or help@northstarmls.com.