

Murray to help residents make house down payments

By Katie Drake
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First-time home buyers might want to consider what Murray has to offer -- a new down payment-assistance program.

Own in Murray is a joint effort between the municipality and the Community Development Corporation of Utah (CDC). The program launched in September, and just closed on its first home.

Under the plan, prospective buyers apply for a down payment grant. They can qualify for up to \$7,500, depending on family size and income, said Tim Tingey, Murray's director of community and economic development.

In June, Murray completed a housing market study that revealed a large need for affordable housing for first-time buyers, Tingey said.

The grants come with some stipulations. Buyers must be purchasing a home for the first time, use the home as a primary residence and make less than 80 percent of the city's median household income -- about \$54,000 a year for a family of four, Tingey said.

Buyers must also complete a class on homeowner responsibilities, said John Farmer, the CDC's chief financial officer. The goal is to ensure residents not only qualify to purchase a home, but can successfully make payments.

That counseling persuaded Liz LeFevre to apply. Initially, the office manager and nanny did not believe she would qualify for a loan. But she just purchased a condo with the help of a grant.

LeFevre was impressed by the help she received. The CDC even rushed LeFevre's paperwork through so she could qualify for the federal first-time home-buyer tax credit, which was scheduled to end Nov. 30.

LeFevre even had some grant money left over, which she used to make her first mortgage payment.

The Murray City Council funded the grants and set aside about \$25,000 this year, Tingey said. The money must be renewed each year, but with about 30 families already interested, Tingey hopes the council will again find money for the grants.

Buyers must eventually pay back the grant -- which is built into their mortgage -- but half the cost will be forgiven if they live in the home for 15 years, Farmer said.

Increased restrictions on lending, including larger down payments, have made it more difficult to purchase homes, especially for first-time buyers, Farmer said. The CDC administers similar programs in Magna, Kearns, Sandy and Salt Lake City.

"[Owning a home] is the dream of many, many people, and we're trying to help them achieve that," Farmer said.

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Own in Murray

For more information on Murray's down payment-assistance program, visit the Community Development Corporation of Utah's Web site at www.cdcutah.org.

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