

THE VANCOUVER SUN

Real estate sales dip slightly; But with prices still rising in Greater Vancouver, home sellers still have advantage

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Lower Mainland real estate sales dropped in March and the inventory of homes for sale rose, but not enough to push markets out of favour for sellers, statistics released Tuesday show. And prices continue to rise.

"The sales-to-active-listings ratio -- the percentage sold each month -- is certainly moving to more of a balanced market," Robyn Adamache, a Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. analyst, said in an interview.

"But we're also still seeing very strong price growth, most still in double digits."

In Greater Vancouver, the so-called benchmark price for a single family home rose almost 12 per cent, year-over-year, to hit \$682,173. The price of a detached home in the Fraser Valley reached \$509,197.

However, Adamache said sales are slowing and listings are rising at a pace consistent with Canada Mortgage and Housing forecasts.

Greater Vancouver recorded 3,582 sales through the Multiple Listings Service, an 11-per-cent decline from the same month in 2006. Total listings as of March were up 19.5 per cent to 10,356.

In the Fraser Valley, March MLS sales were down 16 per cent to 1,743 compared with March 2006. The region's active inventory was 7,351 units in March, 46 per cent above the same month a year ago.

Adamache said a seasonal effect could be at work with buyers jumping into "an active spring market" to push prices up, but she believes the slowing in sales will moderate prices through the rest of the year.

"If we keep seeing the market getting hotter and hotter, and price growth in the double digits, we would get concerned [about] a correction on the horizon," Adamache added.

"But the fact we are seeing the spring market ramp down is good news in terms of the pace of price growth, as we've been predicting, should slow."

Brian Naphtali, newly elected president of the Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver, said an increase in listings has been welcome after two years of a lot of potential buyers and few sellers, but the rise has been "marginal."

"I wouldn't say the pressure is really off," Naphtali said, adding desirable listings are still selling with multiple offers.

In the Fraser Valley, while prices were up year over year, March sale prices in Surrey, Langley and Abbotsford were slightly lower than February's average sale prices.

In Surrey, for example, March's average price was \$497,827 compared with \$507,168 in February, but Jim McCaughan, president of the Fraser Valley Real Estate Board doesn't believe there is any trend in the making.

"The entire picture, to me, reflects a market that is very balanced for buyers and sellers," he said, explaining buyers having more selection and more time to make decisions.

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STILL A SELLER'S MARKET

March real estate sales slowed compared with the same month last year, but prices are still on the rise. Comparisons are below:

Greater Vancouver

Sales 3,582 -11.2%

Inventory 10,356 +19.5%

Vancouver East \$622,714 +10.7%

Burnaby \$675,677 +11%

Maple Ridge \$424,848 +11.2%*

Fraser Valley

Sales 1,743 -16%

Inventory 7,351 +46%

Surrey \$497,827 +9.5%

Langley \$509,872 +20.7%

Abbotsford \$421,289 +14.1%**

* Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver benchmark price of a so-called typical sale.

** Fraser Valley Real Estate Board average sale price.