

Vancouver real estate prices break records

The million-dollar club isn't so exclusive in Greater Vancouver, where the average price for single-family detached houses sold has soared to a record high of more than \$1.36-million.

Prices surged as total residential sales climbed to 2,530 last month for detached homes, condos and townhouses, up 40.8 per cent from volume of 1,797 properties changing hands in February, 2013, according to data released Tuesday by the Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver.

Detached properties have soared in value, rising to an average of \$1,361,023 last month, an increase of \$139,986, or 11.4 per cent higher than \$1,221,037 a year earlier and smashing the previous high of \$1,287,213 in January of this year.

But the board cautions that average prices give a skewed

picture of the market because sales of many high-end homes boost the figures to well above other transactions that are considered more typical.

The board prefers to focus on the benchmark index price, which strips out the most expensive properties. On that measure, detached index prices reached \$932,900 last month, up 3.5 per cent from February, 2013. On Vancouver's West Side, the detached index price jumped 7.2 per cent to more than \$2.14-million.

Over all, the index price hit \$609,100 for Greater Vancouver detached houses, condos and townhomes sold on the Multiple Listing Service last month, or a hike of 3.2 per cent over the past year.

Sales volume last month was slightly lower than the 10-year average in what is shaping up to be a balanced market for sales and active listings in 2014, said board president Sandra Wyant.

The B.C. Real Estate Association noted that Ottawa's shutdown of the federal immigrant investor program last

month could reduce sales volume for the most expensive detached homes.

Dan Scarrow, vice-president of corporate strategy at Macdonald Realty Ltd., said he doesn't think prices will change dramatically over the next several months, as long as interest rates stay low. If there is any slide in the housing market, it will be slow because prices are "sticky on the downside" due to the lack of major economic setbacks such as a huge spike in unemployment to force people to sell, he said.

The attraction of Vancouver remains high, including for wealthy immigrants from China, Mr. Scarrow said.

Greater Vancouver includes the City of Vancouver, the municipalities of West Vancouver and North Vancouver, and also suburbs such as Burnaby, Richmond, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody and New Westminster.

In the Fraser Valley, which includes the sprawling and less-expensive Vancouver suburb of Surrey, residential

sales climbed to 1,102, up 20.7 per cent from February, 2013. The index price for detached homes reached \$558,100, up 3.2 per cent from year earlier. Average prices for detached properties rose 9.7 per cent to \$644,574 in the Fraser Valley.

The index price for detached houses, condos and townhouses was \$428,100 in the Fraser Valley last month, or 1.3 per cent higher than in February, 2013. The average price for those three categories reached \$519,082 last month, or a 10-per-cent hike from \$471,767 a year earlier.