

Home prices hold steady

Reading Advocate

By Stephen Vittorioso

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While the median price of the average single-family home in Massachusetts fell dramatically in July, home prices and sales in Reading have remained higher than the state average, according to The Warren Group and local realtors.

The Bay State price fell 12.3 percent in July, marking the sharpest decline in monthly home prices ever recorded by The Warren Group, a New England provider of real estate data, since it started tracking the housing market in 1987. The average median price in Massachusetts plummeted from \$365,000 in July 2007 to \$320,000.

Also, sales were down nearly 13 percent with 2,556 in July 2007 compared to 2,236 this year.

In Reading, the July 2008 median price was \$430,000, the same price recorded in July 2007, but sales have slightly dipped, down from 28 in July 2007 to 23.

The median price of January-to-July sales in Reading also took a hit, down \$403,750 from \$410,000 in July 2007. January-to-July sales dropped from 127 in July 2007 to 103.

Timothy Warren Jr., CEO of The Warren Group, said increased foreclosure activity, the sluggish economy and the slow pace of home sales have hurt the housing market. As a result, homeowners wishing to sell their houses are reducing their asking prices.

“My guess is that foreclosures are going to continue to be a problem along with tight credit,” Warren said Friday afternoon. “I don’t think you will see prices start to level off until sometime next year.”

But the slumping market hasn’t greatly bruised the Reading market.

“I find it to be picking up a bit,” said Mary Anastos, owner and broker of Advancian Realty, located on Haven Street. “It seems to be turning around.”

“I think it’s doing OK,” said David Hurley, owner and broker of Boardwalk Real Estate, located on Main Street. “It’s certainly not crashing.”

Currently, Hurley said, the Reading market has 75 listings, a number that has slightly decreased since two years ago, when the town had more than 100 listing on the market.

The current listings range from a \$230,000 six-room ranch to a \$1.3 million, 4,300-square-foot new home in an exclusive neighborhood, Hurley said. Most listings range between \$300,000 and \$500,000, Hurley said.

Within the past two months, 21 listings were under agreement, ranging from \$249,000 to \$609,000.

“For the first time, we’re seeing homes go under (\$300,000),” Hurley said.

Lower prices mean that it’s a good time to buy, Hurley said. The Reading realtor advises potential buyers to prepare in advance with their banks, verify that they have a good agent, home inspector and attorney and, most important, not be afraid to submit offers.

“If they see something they really like, they should move on it,” Hurley said. “There are a lot of buyers sitting on the sidelines.”

Anastos said many buyers, specifically younger families, wish to purchase properties in Reading because of its top-notch school system and its proximity to major highways, such as Interstates 93 and 95, which connect Reading to Boston in as little as 20 minutes.

“We’re very convenient,” Anastos said. “Reading is a pretty town.”

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