

Real Estate Monthly

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Ottawa Housing Prices Start 2007 as Hottest in the East

Ottawa housing prices rose in the 6 percent range in the first quarter of this year, leading most cities east of the Manitoba border, but well behind the hot market in Western Canada.

Royal LePage Real Estate Services said that the average selling price of bungalows across Ottawa rose by 6 percent to \$298,083, compared to the first quarter of 2006. Standard two-storey houses increased by 6.2 percent to \$294,667 and condominiums rose by 6.8 percent to \$187,333.

The survey shows that some of the biggest percentage gains were in "West Ottawa", a region that includes Westboro and east Wellington. The average price of a two-storey house jumped by 10.2 percent to \$325,000.

The lowest percentage increase, just 4 percent, was in central Ottawa, where the price for a two-storey typical of the Glebe and surrounding neighbourhoods climbed to \$412,000, according to the survey.

"Ottawa's housing market experienced record activity in the first quarter, as mild weather drew buyers into the market and boosted average house prices," said Pierre de Varennes, owner of Royal LePage Performance Realty, Ottawa.

The city's healthy economy and job growth have continued to support housing sales, especially to first-time buyers who drove a large part of the first-quarter demand, he said.

Homes priced between \$125,000 and \$200,000 accounted for almost two thirds of the sales in the first three months of the year, he said.

The quarterly survey measures price changes for "typical" bungalows, two-storey and apartment style condominiums in specific markets. It tries to measure price changes on similar properties in the following quarter rather than averaging the prices of all housing types. Because housing types are



matched to what is considered typical for a certain area, the two-storey house in one area may be different from a two-storey in another area.

Prices in neighbourhoods away from downtown tended to see less

price appreciation than those in or near the core.

In Orleans, the standard two-storey house rose by 5.9 percent to \$253,000; in east Ottawa, it increased by 5.5 percent to \$250,000, and in Kanata, the two-storey price rose by 6.3 percent to \$271,000, according to Royal LePage.

Because of the blistering price gains in some western cities, Ottawa's price appreciation lags the national average of 12 percent for a two-storey house.

The cost of a typical two-storey home jumped by 36 percent in Saskatoon, 27 percent in Calgary and 54 percent in Edmonton in the first quarter, compared to a year earlier, according to the survey. Scarce Edmonton condominium units spiraled 72 percent to \$261,600.

Among other eastern cities, a standard bungalow rose by 5.7 percent in Toronto, 5.4 in Montreal and 2.1 in Charlottetown. The price was unchanged in Fredericton.

Focus on Ottawa Home Sales

According to statistics just released by the Ottawa Real Estate Board (OREB), 1,306 homes were sold in March, compared with 1,032 in February 2007. There were 1,318 sales in March 2006.

"The traditionally brisk spring market got off to a great start in March, with the number of days a property spent on the market down significantly from February, coupled with an increase in inventory in the residential property class. More people are selling, and consumers are buying those homes more quickly," said OREB's President. "Also, in the first quarter of 2007 alone there was a 5.3 per-cent increase in the total number of homes sold, putting the Ottawa housing market on track for continued growth over the course of the year."

The average price of the homes sold in March in the Ottawa area was \$273,898, an increase of 7.6% over March 2006.

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Blossoming Garden Trends: No-Mow Lawns and Native Plants

In the near future, even the most ardent ecologist will be able to guiltlessly green up the lawn and spruce up the garden.

Living plant walls, backyards that don't need to be watered and indigenous plants that will stay in bloom until the snow flies are just a few of the tools that people will soon be using to make a dramatic, eco-friendly statement about their outdoor environment.

As younger gardeners demand instant garden gratification, you will see many more choices of pre-planted containers available in the stores and in the aisles of home and garden shows. The traditional method of gardening is on its way out. Young gardeners want to do it their way – immediate but eco-conscious.

This concern for the environment is twinned with the new home gardener's desire to grow things to eat.

New townhomes have much less garden space than their predecessors. As a consequence, backyard organic vegetable gardens are seeing a surge in popularity.

Author and renewable energy expert Bill Kemp says that more and more people get it on environmental issues. "The old way (of gardening) is both wasteful and harmful," Kemp says.

"The chemicals, the constant watering and the introduction of high-maintenance flowering species around the home is uneconomical. Today's gardeners are beginning to understand that change is necessary.

"Right now, people are on a consumption rampage – the average person uses 343 litres of water a day,"

Kemp says. "We are using purified water to water lawns and clean sidewalks, but it won't always be like that."

The author of three books, including *The Renewable Energy Handbook* and *Smart Power: An Urban Guide to Renewable Energy and Efficiency*, says that people now have a choice, and many are choosing to be green about their patches of green.



"Low-maintenance white clover is now coming to market," he says. "It is a terrific replacement for a traditional lawn. It is a slow grower so it doesn't have to be mowed often; it has a long root system and, as a result, is drought-resistant and needs little, if any, watering. And instead of fertilizer, you can add your own compost to keep it healthy."

Becoming less frivolous and more eco-friendly doesn't have to mean boring. Some of the best gardeners would, in fact, argue that it's an exciting opportunity.

Living walls of plants, waterfalls and fish are not uncommon in office buildings these days.

Now, those same technologies are finding their way into people's backyards. Cultivating plants on roofs, brick walls, fences and decks has become a popular trend.

This spring promises to be just as bright as past seasons, even if the plants don't require as much water. Many gardening specialists also foresee a trend toward water collection from roofs, widespread use of never-mow artificial grass, and a dramatic reduction in the usage of fertilizers and pesticides.