

Whistler bucks B.C. trend of rising house, condo values

Average house values in province rose 18.8 per cent, analysis shows

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Whistler homeowners saw the average value of their homes drop last year -- making it one of the few places in the province to see property values decline in 2005, according to figures released by BC Assessment Tuesday.

An analysis of assessment figures by Landcor Data Corp. indicates the average single-family home in B.C. increased in value by 18.8 per cent over the past year, while condominiums jumped in value by 14.8 per cent.

But in Whistler, the assessed value of an average single-family home has dropped 2.4 per cent, from just under \$1.02 million to \$995,517.

And Whistler condo owners have fared even worse -- with the average value dropping 4.7 per cent from \$542,649 to \$516,915.

Nearby Pemberton also saw a drop in land values last year.

Pat Kelly, president of the Whistler Real Estate Company, said there's been a noticeable cooling of the housing market in the resort area.

"I've been selling real estate for 25 years and one thing I know is markets don't go up forever," he said. "It's just part of a cycle -- markets go up and markets go down."

Tsur Somerville, a housing expert with the University of B.C.'s Sauder School of Business, has done some analysis of house prices in Whistler.

Somerville said it's not surprising that Whistler's market has cooled since it outpaced the rest of the province for most of the late 1990s.

"When everyone else was going through a downturn from 1994 to 2000, Whistler was rising," he said.

Somerville also cautioned against concluding that Whistler's downturn is a sign of things to come for the rest of the province.

"Most of the people who buy in Whistler are from B.C. But there's a lot of money that flows into Whistler that's not B.C. money," he said. "Whistler is a resort community with international capital flows. It's moving on a different schedule than the rest of us."

While Whistler lagged behind, other regions did better than the provincial average.

Single-family homes were up 20 per cent in Penticton, 21.6 per cent in Nanaimo, 21.8 per cent in Kamloops and 25 per cent in Courtenay.

The hottest region of the province was Prince Rupert. There, the average single-family home jumped 25.8 per cent from \$97,485 to \$122,602. And Prince Rupert condos skyrocketed 55.7 per cent, from \$65,360 to \$101,764.

Gordon Kobza, a realtor with Realty Executives Prince Rupert, says the planned expansion of the city's port is driving the real estate gains. And Kobza said he expects prices to continue rising in 2006 as construction begins on the port.

"Over the last year, it was mainly speculation. But I believe this year, it will actually be people who are motivated to move here for work," he said. "Over the next 18 months, it should be very exciting."

The most expensive single-family homes in the province, according to the assessment figures, are in West Vancouver, where average values broke through the million-dollar mark for the first time -- to \$1.1 million, from \$980,864 the year before.