

Seattle-area housing market thaws with surge of new home listings

Marc Stiles | Staff Writer, Puget Sound Business Journal

The Puget Sound region's residential market has delivered some good news to buyers for the first time in years, with the long-constrained supply of for-sale houses and condominiums expanding in a big way.

The Northwest Multiple Listing Service on Tuesday reported the four-county metro area had nearly 10,500 new listings in May, 1,000 more than the same month in 2017.

All of the gain was in pricey King County, signaling that prices are finally high enough to compel owners to sell.

A May surge is typical, but this year's was noteworthy with NWMLS brokers adding 14,524 listings across the 23-county region. It was the first time in 10 years that volume topped 14,000.

A one-month inventory surge is not enough to quell years of shortages, and prices continued their seemingly inexorable climb, which is now compounded by the new challenge of rising interest rates.

The year-over-year median sales price of houses in May increased between 11.1 percent in Snohomish County to 16.1 percent in Kitsap County, with King and Pierce counties in the 14 percent range.

Prices hit \$726,275 in King County, \$500,000 in Snohomish County, \$360,000 in Kitsap and \$355,000 in Pierce.

Condo prices increased most in Snohomish to \$367,475, up 33.6 percent. Median condo prices climbed 14.2 percent to \$427,000 in King and 8.5 percent to \$227,500 in Pierce.

Prices skyrocketed nearly 161 percent to \$425,000 in Kitsap, though that's statistically irrelevant since it's based on just 29 sales last month and 17 in May 2017. The inventory surge is welcome relief for buyers, but it's not a market changer. Coldwell Banker Bain President and Chief Operating Officer Mike Grady said the big inventory increase means only a slightly easier time for buyers, and just for the time being.

“While there is slightly more inventory available, the market time for most listings is less than a month, and multiple-offer situations occur daily even though there may only be five offers instead of 10 or more,” he said.

John L. Scott Chairman Lennox Scott agreed. He said even with the improving inventory, today's market "still takes instant response as sales activity remains at a frenzy level for these new listings."