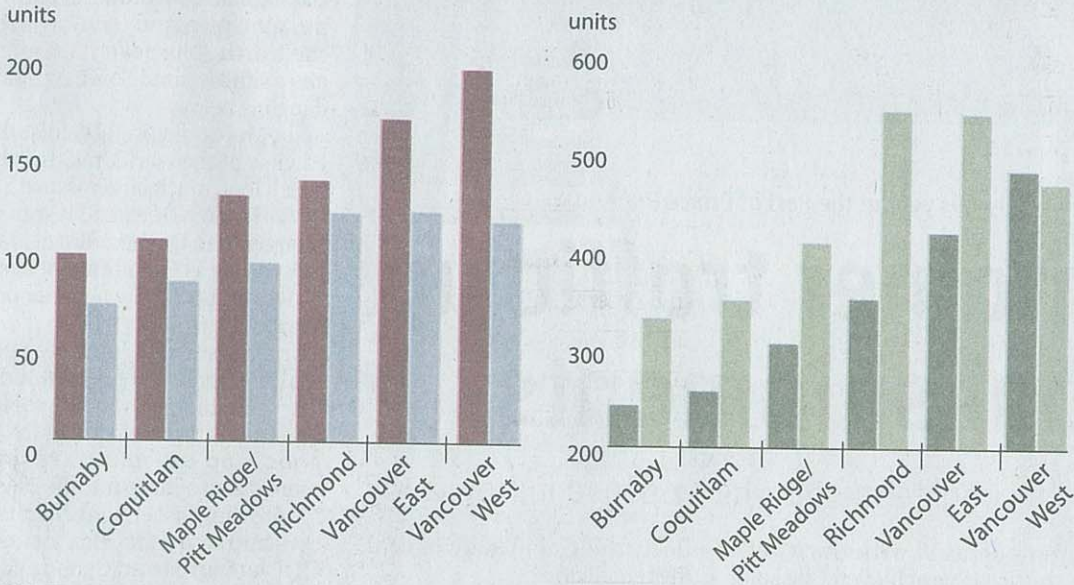


## See-saw sales

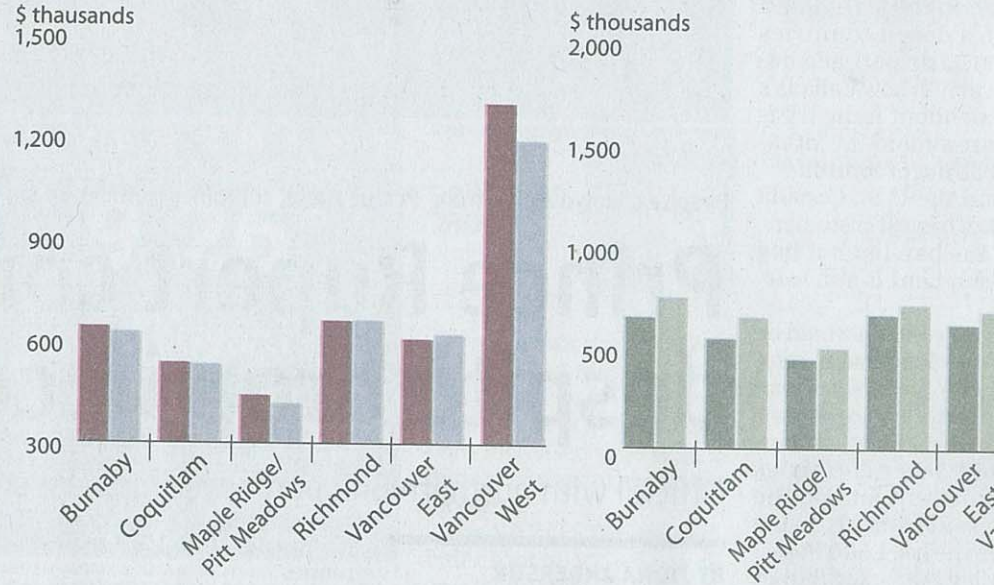
The number of homes sold in Metro Vancouver in April is still way down from a year ago, but up from the month of March. A similar pattern emerges throughout the region with prices still well down from last year, but inching their way up this spring.

## Detached homes

### Number of Sales



### Median selling price



# Greater Vancouver home sales climb

Metro house prices rise slightly, but are still well below the peaks seen in 2008

BY BRIAN MORTON  
VANCOUVER SUN

The Greater Vancouver housing market "has entered a more moderate and balanced state," with sales and benchmark prices both up in April compared to March, says the Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver.

The figures released Monday showed residential property sales in the region covered by the board totalled 2,963 in April, a 31-per-cent increase over March.

As well, the average benchmark price in the same area was \$499,021 in April — up 2.7 per cent from the benchmark price of \$485,845 in March.

The board says that's the first significant month-over-month increase in the benchmark price so far this year. And the April increase in sales is notable because historically, March sales are greater than April's.

The Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver covers Vancouver, West and North Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, Coquitlam, South Delta, Maple Ridge, New Westminster, Pitt Meadows, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Squamish and the Sunshine Coast. Among the areas not included are Surrey and the Fraser Valley.

The Fraser Valley Real Estate Board's figures were not released Monday.

The latest figures show people are "taking advantage of low interest rates and the lower pricing of product," said REBGV president Scott Russell.

"It's encouraging. In the overall picture, we're seeing more stability coming into the market. The number of new listings has been decreasing over the past six months and the number of sales has been increasing since January."

The result, he said, is a "relatively stable market in which homes are being realistically priced."

***I think there's a difference between we're not dropping anymore versus we're on a comeback. . . And I think it's pretty hard to see how you get a comeback without an improvement in the economy.***

**TSUR SOMERVILLE,**  
SAUDER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS  
PROFESSOR,  
UNIVERSITY OF B.C.

He said the trends over the last couple of months "offer a much more comfortable, historically normal set of conditions."

According to the release, for the sixth consecutive month, new listings for detached, attached and apartment properties declined in Greater Vancouver, down 33.7 per cent to 4,649 in April 2009 compared to April 2008, when 7,010 new units were listed.

And while sales were up this April over the preceding month, they're still down by eight per cent from the 3,218 sales recorded in April 2008.

Meanwhile, Tsur Somerville, director of the centre for urban economics and real estate at the Sauder School of Business at the

University of B.C., said lower interest rates have brought people back into the market.

"But you still have the fundamentals of the economy that haven't magically got 100-per-cent better," Somerville said.

So people shouldn't be counting on a return to the boom days any time soon, he said.

"I think there's a difference between we're not dropping anymore versus we're on a comeback," he said. "And I think it's pretty hard to see how you get a comeback without an improvement in the economy."

With respect to the benchmark price, Somerville said other statistics show prices are continuing to fall in some areas of Greater Vancouver.

"Their [REBGV] numbers are not the same as what we're seeing from some other places, so I think it is hard to make sense of what's going on there," Somerville said.

According to the report, sales of detached properties declined eight per cent in April to 1,190 from the 1,293 detached sales recorded during the same period in 2008. The benchmark price for detached properties declined 12.2 per cent from April 2008 to \$675,268.

Sales of apartment properties in April 2009 declined 10.5 per cent to 1,179, compared to 1,317 sales in April 2008, with the benchmark price of an apartment property declining 12.6 per cent from April 2008 to \$340,203.

Attached property sales in April 2009 are down 2.3 per cent to 594, compared with the 608 sales in April 2008. The benchmark price decreased 9.7 per cent between April 2008 and April 2009 to \$431,759.

The report also noted that bright sales spots in April were Vancouver West (detached), Port Coquitlam, Richmond and Vancouver West (attached), and North Vancouver (apartments).

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With a file from Fiona Anderson

## Vancouver residents cite affordability as top reason for buying condos

BY BRIAN MORTON  
VANCOUVER SUN

More people are seeing condominiums as an attractive investment opportunity than was the case a year ago, according to a survey released Monday.

TD Canada Trust said 44 per cent of respondents in a survey of urban Canadians said conditions had improved over the last year with regard to the prospects of buying a condo for investment purposes. That was up from 21 per cent in a similar survey done last year.

When it comes to the top reasons for buying a condo, Vancouverites' responses differed from those of residents elsewhere in Canada.

The top reason most Canadians would consider buying a condo is that condos require less maintenance than houses (39 per cent), followed by the fact that condos are more affordable than houses (21 per cent).

But in Vancouver, where housing costs have traditionally been high, 35 per cent of respondents cited affordability as the top reason for a condo purchase.

Less maintenance (27 per cent) and approaching retirement (19 per cent) rounded out the top three reasons Vancouver residents gave for purchasing a condo.

"In Vancouver, it's mostly around affordability and that's the primary reason they buy a condo," Joan Dal Bianco, the bank's vice-president of real estate secured lending, said in an interview. "Vancouverites are also the most optimistic about the market."

On the investment issue, the

***This is a good time to explore a condo purchase given that mortgage rates are very attractive right now and many condos have dropped significantly in price.***

**JOAN DAL BIANCO**  
VICE-PRESIDENT OF REAL ESTATE SECURED LENDING,  
TD CANADA TRUST

bank said lower prices and mortgage rates are the main reason people are being drawn to condos as a way to make money over the longer term.

"This is a good time to explore a condo purchase given that mortgage rates are very attractive right now and many condos have dropped significantly in price," Dal Bianco said in a statement.

The TD Canada Trust Condo Poll also revealed that 43 per cent of Canadians (44 per cent in Vancouver) are willing to consider a joint purchase with a friend or relative to make the condo purchase possible.

Dal Bianco noted that buying a condo with a friend or relative is increasingly an option, although there are potential pitfalls.

"It's a way to get into the market [and] we found that in Vancouver, more than the average, two people are willing to buy together."

Dal Bianco recommended dual purchasers draw up an agreement in advance. "It's the lender who defines whether two people can buy together. And if you go in together, the lender will look at both credit ratings."

The survey also found that Vancouver residents are more willing to raise a family in a condo, while residents of Montreal and Halifax are least likely to raise a family in a condo.

The top reasons why Vancouverites would not consider buying a condominium: Lack of parking (76 per cent), insufficient security (71 per cent), lack of energy-efficient features (53 per cent) and restrictions on pets (53 per cent).

When it comes to costs, most of those living in Vancouver (56 per cent) would spend from \$200,000 up to \$400,000 for a two-bedroom condo, while 20 per cent of those polled in Vancouver would consider paying \$400,000 up to \$600,000 for a two-bedroom condo. As well, 51 per cent of Vancouverites polled would pay from \$200 up to \$400 in monthly condominium fees.

Vancouverites are also the most optimistic that the current market conditions are better than a year ago for buying a condo for investment purposes (54 per cent versus 44 per cent nationally).

The survey, done by Angus Reid Strategies, involved 200 respondents in each of the cities or surrounding areas of Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax between March 30 and April 7.

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With Financial Post