

Report: Valley home price activity mixed in March

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California's housing market continued to pick up steam as existing home sales and prices increased in March, according to a new report issued today by the California Association of Realtors.

Closed escrow sales of existing, single-family detached homes in California totaled a seasonally adjusted annualized rate of 391,680 units in March, according to information collected by C.A.R. from more than 90 local Realtor associations and MLSs statewide.

Sales in March were up 6.3 percent from a revised 368,400 in February and up 7.3 percent from a revised 365,120 in March 2014.

The year-over-year sales increase was the first back-to-back sales gain since December 2012 and the largest observed since May 2012.

In Fresno County, home prices rose 1.7 percent in March and are up 5.9 percent since March 2014, with the median home price rising to \$213,960.

Fresno County's March sales were up 32.4 percent compared to February and 20.2 percent year-over-year.

In Madera County, home prices fell 8.6 percent in March and were also down 3.8 percent in the past 12 months, with the median home price now at \$198,750.

Madera County sales last month were up 89.7 percent over February, and also up 10 percent year-over-year.

In Tulare County, home prices shot up 6.1 percent last month and are up 10.4 percent since March 2014. The median home price there is now \$182,630.

Tulare County sales rose 20.5 percent month-over-month, and rose 7 percent year-over-year.

And in Kings County, home prices fell 3.1 percent in March 2015 but were up 6 percent in the past 12 months, with the median home price at \$190,000.

Kings County sales activity last month increased by 37 percent compared to February, but fell 20.3 percent year-over-year.

"The housing market is picking up momentum and continuing its upward trend as economic conditions improved throughout the state," said C.A.R. President Chris Kutzkey. "A better economy, improved job creation, and an increase in inventory in Central Valley and Southern California, in particular, are pushing sales higher, which led to the strongest February-to-March increase we've seen since 2008."

Statewide, the median price of an existing, single-family detached home jumped in March from both the previous month and year, according to the report.

The median home price was up 9.2 percent from \$428,970 in February to \$468,550 in March, the highest level in seven months.

With home sales growing at a faster rate than active listings in March, the available supply of existing, single-family detached homes for sale statewide declined, with the Unsold Inventory Index falling from the five-month's supply reported in February to 3.8 months in March.

The index, which indicates the number of months needed to sell the supply of homes on the market at the current sales rate, stood at four months in March 2014.

A six- to seven-month supply is considered typical in a normal market.

"While housing supply has been improving in real terms in recent months, the growth rate in housing demand continues to outpace that of inventory, pushing the Unsold Inventory Index lower," said C.A.R Vice President and Chief Economist Leslie Appleton-Young. "The shortage in housing units relative to demand, along with the attractive rate environment, pushed home prices higher."

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