

## **AVERAGE PRICE FOR HOME IN GREENWICH TOPS \$2M**

### **House Sales Begin Year at a Frenetic Pace**

February, 2005

By Susan Nova  
Special Correspondent

Modest mortgage interest rates and the continuing migration to Greenwich of the titans of Wall Street translated to high demand and a powerhouse performance by the Greenwich real estate market last year.

The average price of a house in Greenwich surpassed \$2 million, rising 26.4 percent to a record \$2,221,312, from \$1,757,020 a year ago. Even eliminating the extraordinary \$45 million 80-acre Conyers Farm sale, the average price was \$2,177,267.

The increase is particularly striking, since 1997 was the first full calendar year with an average price above \$1 million - \$1,136,714.

"It's a very powerful market," said David Ogilvy whose Greenwich agency bears his name. "Greenwich has a lot of larger houses replacing the smaller homes of the '50s and '60s, and people are responding to them. Some of these major houses are very impressive and very, very well done."

The 2004 median price of a house rose 31.9 percent to \$1.55 million, from \$1.175 million. In 1997, the median price was \$722,500.

The number of sales of single-family homes jumped 14 percent to a record-breaking 978, from 859 the year before. Only 1999, when sales totaled 952, came close.

Last year "was the year of multiple offers, tear-downs and builder's," said Nancy Healy of Shore & Country Properties in Riverside. "I had one listing that got 13 bids, of whom 11 were builders. Another had 10 bids, nine of whom were builders. A third received seven bids, all from builders, and builders bought all three houses. Last year, the builders themselves drove up the price point."

Healy attributes some of the increased activity in the market to the sheer number of agents at work.

"We had 670 agents in Greenwich 18 months ago," she said. "Now we have 1,100, more than 1.5 percent of our total population."

Greenwich continues its surge toward the costly, costlier, costliest housing in the country. Last year, just three houses sold for less than \$400,000, compared with 10 a year earlier, according to searchGreenwich.net, an Internet tracking service and supplier of many of the statistics used here. Sales under \$1 million fell to 279 or 28.5 percent of the market last year, compared with 354, representing 41.2 percent of the market, in 2003.

"The unique properties are selling, like the Conyers Farm property on 80 acres we listed and sold for \$45 million and Sabine Farm with 20 acres south of the Merritt Parkway that had not been sold since 1910 and went for \$23 million," Ogilvy said. "How often do you get something on the market that people want to hold for the next three generations?"

An earlier \$23 million record, set in 2000, was for a nine-acre waterfront estate with several homes on Byram Shore Road.

"That \$45 million sale was just \$1 million shy of doubling the previous record of \$23 million," Bill Andruss of Sotheby's International Realty in Greenwich said. "The desirability of the town is so obvious through the statistics."

In 2004, sales over \$1 million totaled 699, 71.5 percent of the total market, compared with 505, or 58.8 percent of the market the year before. Sales between \$2 million and \$4 million numbered 245, or 25 percent of the total market,

compared with 148 sales, 17.2 percent, a year ago. Topping the \$4 million mark were 119 houses, 12.1 percent of the market, compared with 69, representing 8 percent in 2003. The market above \$5 million numbered 73, 7.5 percent of all sales.

"I had quite a few buyers looking in Westchester who bought here instead, because of our lower real estate taxes and the buyer's mansion tax there," said Barbara Wells of Prudential Connecticut Realty.

The mansion tax is a 1 percent New York State tax, paid by the buyer, on homes selling for \$1 million, and more, according to Liz Boucher of Coldwell Banker Country Properties in Rye, N.Y.

"The only negative was the low inventory that was consistent across the board and throughout the year," Andruss said. "Some buyers were unable to be satisfied and others lost to someone bidding higher than they could."

The upward trend in prices is expected to continue this year.

"Toward the end of last year, a number of over-\$8 (million) and over-\$9 million houses started to move, and they will close in 2005," Wells said.

The number of condo sales remained stable, with 248 changing hands last year, compared with 249 a year earlier. The average price of a condo bounced up 17.6 percent to a record \$733,664, from \$623,948, and the median price was up 13.3 percent to \$606,250, from \$535,000.

Andruss said the condos selling from \$2.7 million to \$2.8 million, and more, at Arbor Rose on East Elm Street, and other high-end units, are giving both the condo and downtown markets a shot in the arm.

"The key to the high-end condo market is the finish work, the elevator and the proximity to shopping, the train and Greenwich Avenue," said Maxwell Wiesen of Coldwell Banker's Greenwich office. "I've had great interest in downtown condos even before the house they'll replace is demolished."

The frenetic pace continues. Healy showed a \$1.08 million home on Sundance Drive at 4 p.m. on the first day it could be shown. Healy's was the 11th showing that day of the 2,500 square-foot house listed by Miyoko Matsuo of Redac Inc. in Rye.

"We have hit the tarmac running this year," Wells said. "Buyers are out in full force. By January 20, I had four accepted offers. One house, listed under \$800,000 had been on since October. Three Sundays ago, I showed the house, and by the end of the weekend, there were four offers, and they went to sealed bids. Buyers have confidence in the overall economy, and perhaps the threat of future increases in interest rates is also pushing them into the market."

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