

SECOND QUARTER 2020 HOUSING MARKET DIGEST SASKATCHEWAN



Encouraging Signs?

Key economic indicators (housing and employment) were badly depressed but are now showing substantial improvement.

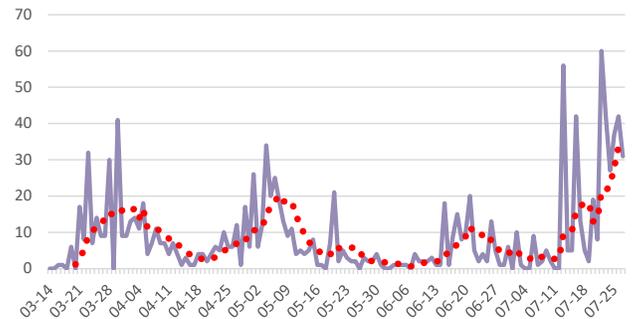
For the province of Ontario, the data on new confirmed Covid-19 cases remains low. This chart shows data up to July 27. Current data can be found here: <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/src/data/covidLive/covid19.csv>

For all of Canada, the trend has inched upwards during the past two weeks, but remains quite low. The data tells us that we can feel a lot more relaxed, but that we need to stay vigilant. There is still a great deal of uncertainty about how this emergency will unfold, and therefore, we should not be confident about our ability to predict what will happen to the economy or the housing market.

Resale Market

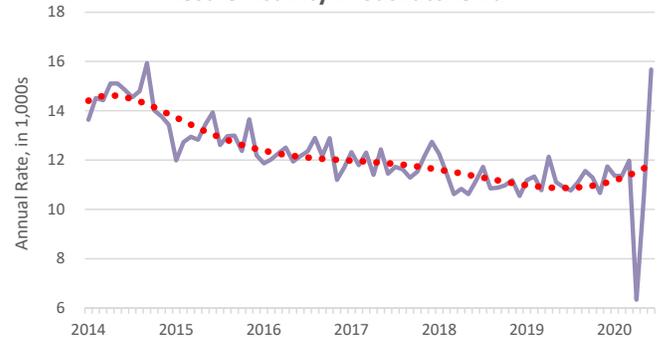
Resale activity has shown a rapid recovery, as the sales rate increased sharply in both May and June. The rate for June (15,700) is far above average. For the entire second quarter, the average rate of 10,800 was slightly lower than for the fourth quarter of last year (11,200) and the first quarter of this year (11,600). How should we interpret this data? Some people will focus on the data for June and see a robust recovery. Some will look at the entire quarter and see that the provincial housing market hasn't broken out of the weakness that has persisted for several years. I look at the data and see continued uncertainty about how this might unfold. Looking at the data in terms of sales per adult, the rate for June was very strong, at 22% above the long-term average (calculated for 2001 to the present, and shown by the flat line).

Daily New Covid-19 Cases in Saskatchewan



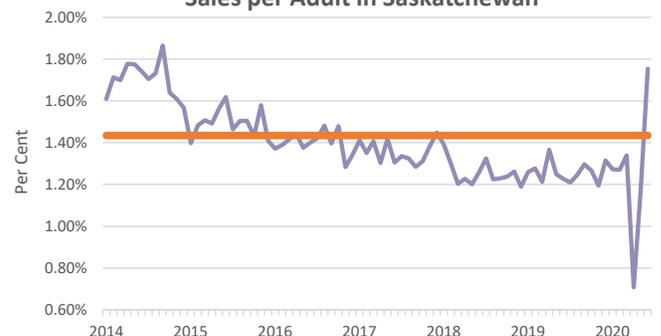
Source: Public Health Agency of Canada

Resale Activity in Saskatchewan



Source: CREA / The Author

Sales per Adult in Saskatchewan

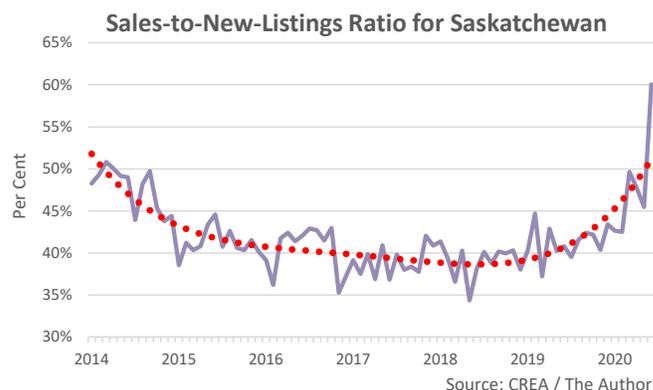
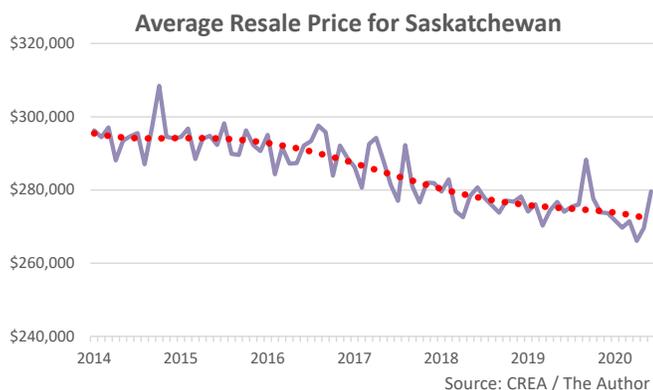


Source: The Author

Resale Market (Continued)

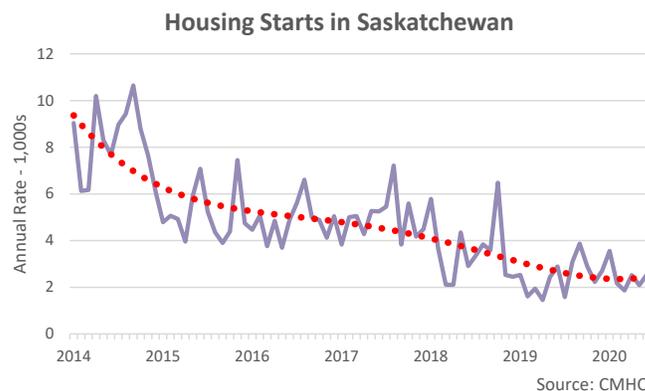
But, for the entire second quarter, the sales rate was 15% below the long-term average. This data shows that Saskatchewan has recovered more rapidly compared to all of Canada, for which the per adult sales rate was 37% below average during the second quarter.

The flow of new listings into the market has been in excess of requirements (except for the final month of data, for June). The provincial sales-to-new-listings ratio (“SNLR”) was 60% in June (but lower at just 52% for the entire second quarter). For some time, the provincial SNLR has been persistently below the 51% threshold for a “balanced market” - this is the level at which prices are expected to rise by 2% per year. But, with the sharp rise in the SNLR for June, the figure for the second quarter matches the threshold. The prolonged “buyers’ market” condition in Saskatchewan has resulted in price erosion. We now just have one month of data that hints at a shift in the state-of-balance. For the second quarter, the average price was 0.9% lower than a year ago.



Housing Starts

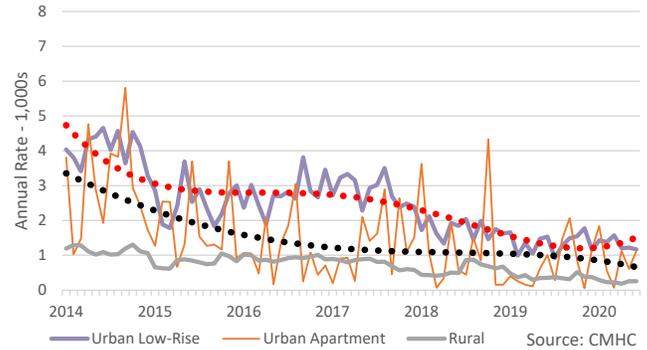
Weak conditions in the resale market have discouraged construction of new homes within Saskatchewan. For the second quarter, the starts rate (2,300) was fractionally lower than the rate for all of 2019 (2,400). Housing starts are far below the long-term average (5,100 per year during 2001 to 2019). It remains to be seen whether Covid-19 brings a further reduction, or whether the recent tightening in the resale market encourages more new starts.



Housing Starts (Continued)

Housing starts have been reduced sharply for both apartments and low-rise dwellings (single-detached, semi-detached, and town homes), and for rural areas.

Housing Starts by Type of Dwelling in Sask'n



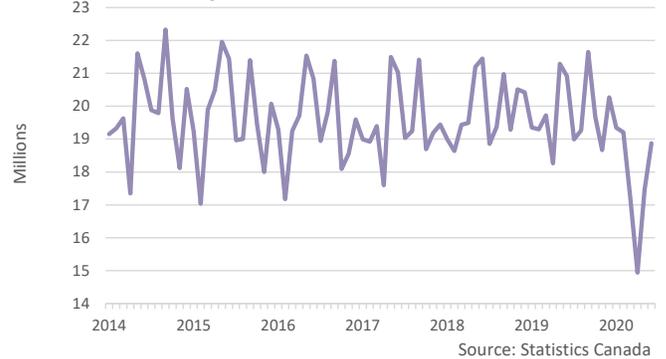
Employment Trends

Statistics Canada estimates that employment in Saskatchewan rose by about 30,000 in June, as more people have been able to return to work. But, the level of employment in June was still almost 43,000 (7.4%) lower than in February.

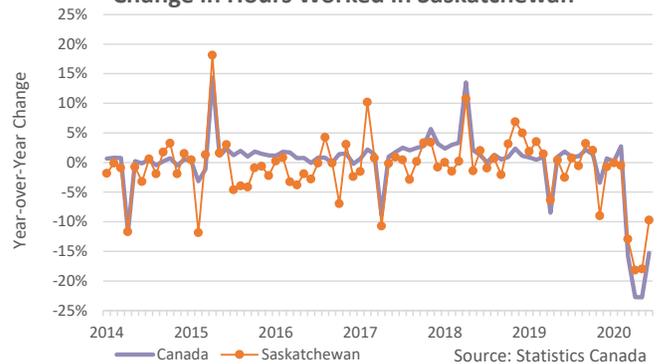
At present, I prefer to watch employment in terms of total hours worked. The first chart below shows data that is not seasonally-adjusted, and the large month-to-month gyrations make it hard to read. The second chart shows that this June, total hours worked were 10% lower than a year ago. The data indicate that the effect of Covid-19 has been less severe within Saskatchewan compared to all of Canada (for which total hours are now 15% lower than a year ago).

The worst employment impacts of Covid-19 have been seen in low wage service industries and for younger age groups. This implies that the damage within the housing market will be greater for the rental sector than for home buying.

Weekly Hours Worked in Saskatchewan



Change in Hours Worked in Saskatchewan



Interest Rates

Bond yields are currently making unusually small movements, and are at extremely low levels. So far in July, the average yield for 5-year Government of Canada bonds is just 0.35%. Mortgage interest rates have largely adjusted to the plunge in bond yields.

My opinion-estimate of a typical advertised “special offer” mortgage interest rate (5-year fixed-rate, advertised by major lenders) is now just 2.1%, by far the lowest-ever (and even lower rates can be negotiated). The spread between mortgage rates and bond yields has closed, and is similar to the long-term average of 1.8 points (although it is still higher than the average of 1.49 points for all of 2019). For variable rates, my opinion-estimate is now 2.0%.

Meanwhile, the mortgage stress tests continue to use a ridiculous test rate of 4.94%.

Yields for 5-Year GoC Bonds



Disclaimer of Liability

This report has been compiled using data and sources that are believed to be reliable. Mortgage Professionals Canada Inc. accepts no responsibility for any data or conclusions contained herein. Completed by Will Dunning, July 28, 2020. Copyright: Mortgage Professionals Canada 2020.