

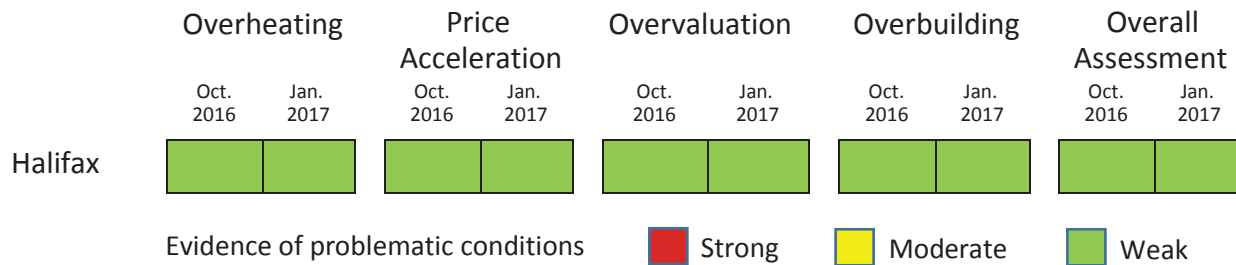
HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT Halifax CMA

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Highlights



- Overall, we detect weak evidence of problematic conditions in the Halifax CMA.¹
- Despite modest employment growth, strong international migration gains continue to mitigate the signs of overvaluation.
- Average prices recorded strong growth in the third quarter but remain modest year-to-date.
- The overbuilding factor continues to remain below its problematic threshold due to strong rental demand and a decline in homeownership inventories.
- The Housing Market Assessment (HMA) analytical framework considers four factors to assess the evidence of problematic housing market conditions: overheating; acceleration in the growth of house prices; overvaluation; and, overbuilding. A brief summary of the framework is presented on page 5 of this report.

HMA Overview²

As Canada's authority on housing, CMHC contributes to market stability by providing information on potential imbalances that could affect housing markets. With the Housing Market Assessment (HMA), CMHC offers information and analysis that can help Canadians make more informed decisions.

The HMA combines the results from a technical framework with insights gained through CMHC's Market Analysts' knowledge of local market conditions. These insights position CMHC to provide additional context and interpretation to the results of the HMA framework.

The HMA framework detects problematic market conditions in local housing markets by identifying imbalances. An example would be the detection of overbuilding, a situation in which the inventory of unsold new homes accumulates due to supply outpacing demand. Such an imbalance could be resolved by an adjustment in house prices. As an example, lower prices would help resolving an excess supply imbalance by supporting stronger demand and/or reducing supply. However, other unexpected development that do not originate from the housing market could accentuate or reduce an imbalance.

Colour codes indicate the level of evidence of problematic conditions. The HMA is a comprehensive

framework that considers the intensity of signals of imbalances (that is, how far the indicator is from its historical average), and the persistence over time. Generally, low intensity and persistence are associated with potential weaker evidence of problematic conditions. As the number of intense and persistent signals increases, the associated evidence of problematic conditions becomes stronger.

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¹ Results are based on data as of the end of September 2016 and local market intelligence up to end of December 2016. CMHC continuously monitors market developments and will issue HMA updates on a quarterly basis.

² A detailed description of the framework is available in the appendix of the [National edition](#).

In Detail

Overheating

Weak evidence of overheating is detected in Halifax. The sales-to-new-listings ratio continued to rise, climbing to 56.9 per cent this quarter, the highest point since Q3 2012. The housing market shows balanced conditions and remains below the problematic threshold of 85 per cent. Sales volumes declined compared to the previous quarter while the average number of days on market increased by 12 per cent. Both new listings and total active listings recorded declines this quarter with active listings dropping to 3,621 in September.

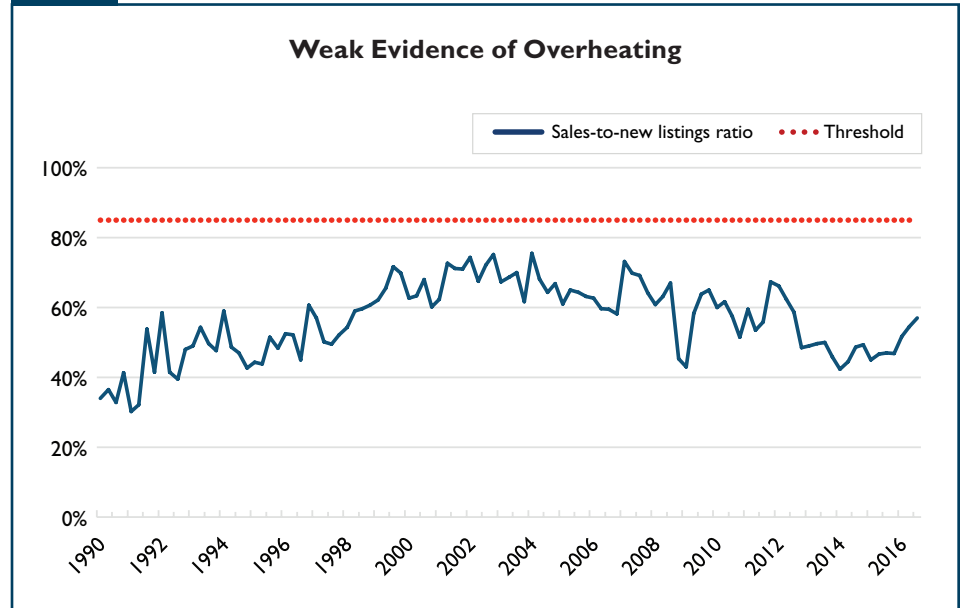
Although sales declined compared to the previous quarter, year-to-date sales as of the end of September are up 13 per cent in a year-over-year comparison, with growth recorded in all of the Halifax CMA's submarkets.

"International migration gains combined with strong rental demand and a decline in homeownership inventories continue to indicate weak evidence of problematic conditions in the Halifax CMA."



Guillaume Neault
Principal, Market Analysis (Halifax)

Figure 1



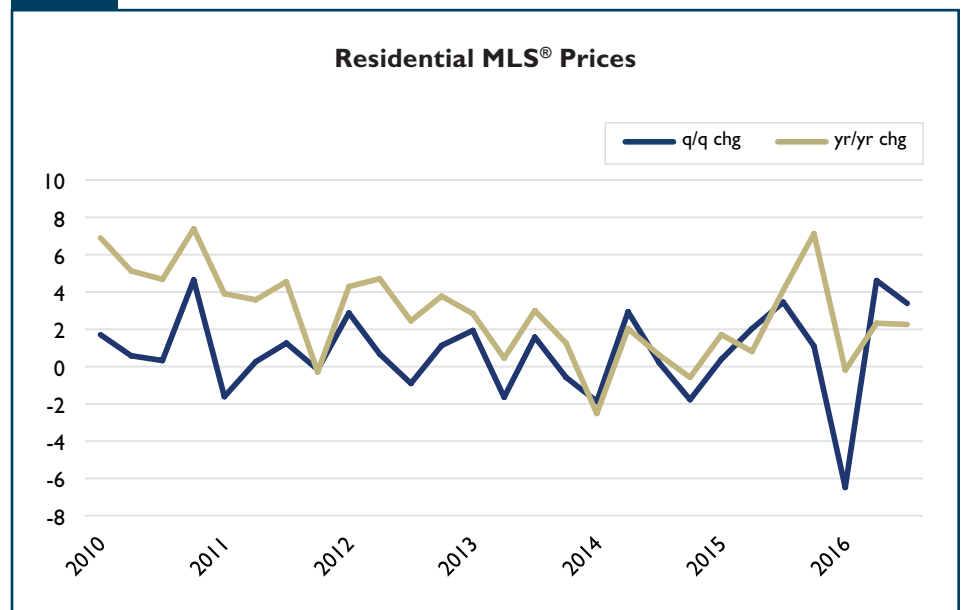
Source: CREA and calculations (threshold) by CMHC. Last data point: 2016 Q3.

Price Acceleration

Despite strong price growth in the final two quarters of 2015, average MLS® prices decreased in the first half of 2016, remaining fairly flat year-over-year. In the third quarter

of 2016, however, seasonally adjusted prices increased by 3.4 per cent to \$293,365, surpassing the highs recorded by year-end 2015. Despite the recent rise in average prices, year-to-date prices have recorded marginal growth compared to

Figure 2



Source: CREA.

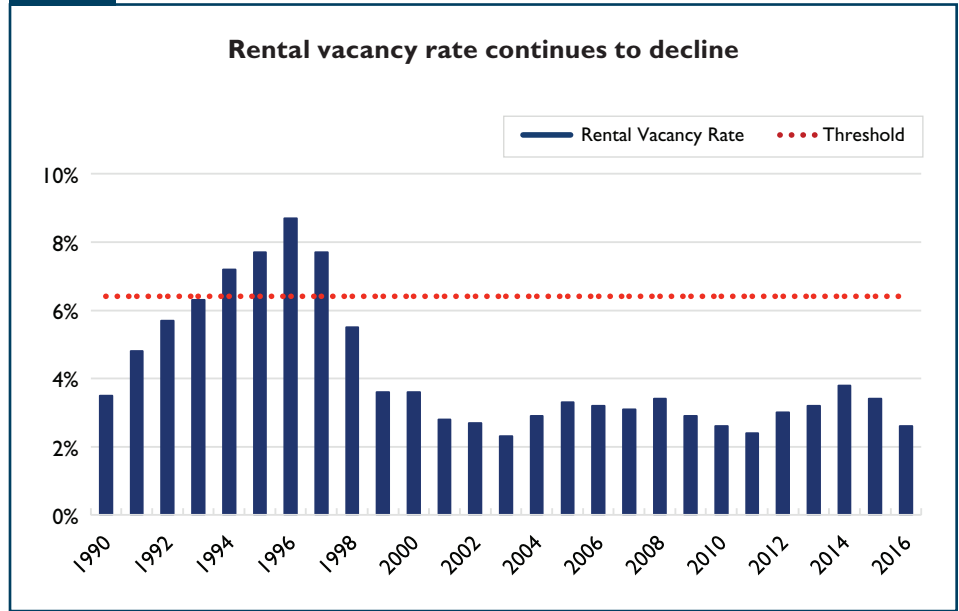
³ Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA)

last year's figures, indicating weak evidence of price acceleration in the Halifax CMA. Average MLS® prices remain quite varied among the Halifax CMA submarkets. Although Halifax City was the driver of rising prices in 2015, price growth so far in 2016 can be attributed to the markets of Bedford-Hammonds Plains and Fall River-Beaverbank, while prices in the city have declined due to a change in the composition of sales.

Overvaluation

We continue to detect weak evidence of overvaluation in the Halifax CMA, driven by strong demand factors. As of the end of the third quarter, the Halifax CMA welcomed more than 3,800 international migrants, largely surpassing last year's total. With the help of strong migration gains, seasonally adjusted population levels in the Halifax CMA have steadily climbed throughout 2016. Seasonally adjusted employment levels followed the same growing trend in the first half of 2016, reaching a high of 228,300 by July. Since then, however, employment levels declined, although still up 0.9 per cent year-over-year as of the end of November. The expanding population combined with moderate employment growth have helped to spur housing market demand, keeping the overvaluation models below the problematic threshold.

Figure 3



Source: CMHC. Last data point: 2016.

Overbuilding

Despite continued construction in the multiples market, weak evidence of overbuilding is detected in the Halifax CMA. With 563 rental apartment completions occurring as of the end of September compared to 319 singles completions during the same time frame, the apartment segment is a strong driver of activity in the Halifax CMA. The bulk of completions, however, is not expected to impact the vacancy rate until 2018. At the end of the third quarter of 2016, there were 2,953 rental apartments under construction in Halifax, 46 per cent of which are

located on the Halifax Peninsula. In contrast, there are 469 ground-based homeowner units under construction as of the end of the third quarter, the majority of which are located in the Remainder of the CMA regions. Continued demand from downsizing baby boomers coupled with strong international migration gains have caused the rental apartment vacancy rate to decline for the second year in a row, falling to 2.6 per cent in Fall 2016 from a rate of 3.4 per cent in Fall 2015. This is well below the problematic threshold level of 6.5 per cent, highlighting evidence of sustained demand for rental units.

Overview of the Housing Market Assessment analytical framework

To obtain an accurate picture of the overall state of the housing market, it is important to consider multiple data points and lines of evidence rather than relying on just one measure or indicator.

The Housing Market Assessment (HMA) analytical framework provides a comprehensive and integrated view that relies on a combination of signals from several indicators to assess housing market conditions.

Specifically, the framework considers four main factors that may provide an early indication of potentially problematic housing market conditions: (1) overheating when demand outpaces supply; (2) sustained acceleration in house prices; (3) overvaluation of house prices in comparison to levels that can be supported by housing market fundamentals (listed below);

and, (4) overbuilding when the inventory of available housing units is elevated.

For each factor, the framework tests for: (1) the presence or incidence of signals of potentially problematic conditions, but also considers; (2) the intensity of the signals, i.e. how their magnitude compares with their historical average or how consistent they are with known or suspected house price bubbles, such as for Toronto in the late 1980s and early 1990s; and, (3) the persistence of signals over time.

Generally, a situation in which we detect few signals with low intensity or lack of persistence is associated with weak evidence of problematic conditions. Conversely, as the intensity, number, and/or persistence of the signals increases, the likelihood of a factor becoming problematic increases.

The framework takes into account demographic, economic, and financial determinants of the housing market such as population, personal disposable income, and interest rates to detect potentially problematic housing market conditions. The framework also takes into account developments in both resale and residential construction markets.

The framework was developed on the basis of its ability to detect problematic housing market conditions in historical data, such as the house price bubble Toronto experienced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The ability of the HMA to detect current problematic conditions relies on the assumption that historical relationships between prices and fundamental drivers of housing markets have not changed.

Housing Market Assessment Factors

Overheating

Overheating is caused by demand significantly and persistently outpacing the supply of housing. The sales-to-new listings ratio is used as an indicator to assess possible overheating conditions in the existing home market. To identify problematic overheating conditions, the framework compares the sales-to-new listings ratio to thresholds. When demand is strong relative to supply, house prices typically grow at a faster rate. Sustained overheating conditions on the existing home market may lead to acceleration in house prices for existing and new homes. However, as supply and demand begin to balance out, indicators of overheating (and acceleration) would begin to soften and house prices would gradually moderate.

Acceleration in House Prices

Under balanced market conditions, house prices are expected to increase over time, in line with increases in households' cost of

living. House price acceleration occurs when the growth in house prices strengthens over time on a persistent basis. Acceleration in house prices over an extended period can cause their pace of increase to depart from the overall price inflation and eventually lead to overvaluation.

To assess acceleration in house prices, the HMA framework uses a statistical test* that was developed to identify periods of accelerating asset prices.

Overvaluation

Overvaluation is detected when house prices remain significantly above the levels warranted by fundamental drivers of housing markets such as income, population, and actual and expected financing costs.

The HMA framework uses combinations of different house price measures and models to estimate house price levels warranted by fundamental drivers.

The difference between observed house prices and their estimated levels consistent with housing market fundamentals allows for an estimation of the degree of over- and undervaluation. The use of different price measures and models improves the reliability of results.

Overbuilding

Overbuilding is detected when the supply of readily available housing units significantly exceeds demand. In such a context, downward pressure on house prices would occur until the excess supply is eventually absorbed.

To assess overbuilding conditions in the housing market, the HMA framework uses two indicators that relate to the supply of readily available housing units: the rental vacancy rate, and the inventory of completed and unsold housing units per 10,000 population. The HMA framework compares the current level and recent trends in these indicators with thresholds.

Note 1: Colour codes indicate the level of evidence of problematic conditions. The HMA reflects a comprehensive framework that not only tests for the presence or incidence of signals of potentially problematic conditions, but also considers the intensity of signals (that is, how far the indicator is from its historical average) and the persistence of signals over time. Generally, low intensity and persistence are associated with a lower potential of upcoming problematic conditions. As the number of persistent signals increases, the evidence of a problematic condition developing increases.

Note 2: Results at the CMA level are not segmented by housing type or neighbourhood. They represent an assessment of the entire CMA. However, specific CMA reports provide further detailed analysis of these markets.

Note 3: The colour scale extends to red only for those factors that have multiple indicators signaling significant incidence, intensity and persistence of potentially problematic conditions. As a result, only overvaluation and overbuilding can receive a red rating, since they are assessed using more than one indicator.

Note 4: To ensure the framework is as current as possible, on a regular basis, we undertake a model selection process whereby our house price models for overvaluation are tested for statistical significance at the national and CMA level. The result of this process may change the number of indicators of a problematic condition from the previous assessment.

* See Phillips, Wu and Yu (2008) "Explosive Behaviour in the 1990s NASDAQ When Did Exuberance Escalate Asset Values?" for further details on the methodology.

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