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HOUSING MARKET INSIGHT Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo CMA



CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

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"Escalating prices leading up to the spring of 2017 led to increased investment activity and short-term sales in the three cities of the Waterloo Region."

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A Tale of Three Cities: Short-Term Sales and Investment Activity in the Waterloo Region

Between 2015 and spring 2017, MLS^{®1} prices in Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo Census Metropolitan Area (KCW CMA) grew at an unprecedented pace. For instance, across all dwelling types, the seasonally-adjusted average sale price in 2017 Q1 was 26% higher than the average sale price in 2016 Q1. Given that prices were growing at such a rapid pace, KCW CMA became an attractive region to purchase properties if one was interested in making a short-term profit. Although other regions, such as the Greater Toronto Area, also experienced double-digit price growth,² the price points offered in the KCW market were relatively more attainable,³ even when taking into account its accelerating prices. This study seeks to better understand short-term sales and long-term investment activity in the three cities of Kitchener, Cambridge, and Waterloo during the period between 2015 Q1 and 2018 Q2.

- Approximately 9.0% of all MLS[®] transactions and new builds⁴ which became available between 2015 Q1 and 2018 Q2 were involved in short-term sales. Investment activity followed the growth of MLS[®] prices closely, gaining momentum during the period of price acceleration, which became particularly prominent during the spring of 2017.
- I in 5 addresses identified as a short-term sale or long-term investment were purchased by a non-local buyer.
- The number of short-term sales near LRT stations increased when average prices grew, and declined when average prices fell. This movement suggests that proximity to transit may have contributed to investment decisions.



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Short-Term Sale vs. Long-Term Investment

Using the benchmark of 24 months, this study identified that 9.0% of all homes which became available

between January 1st, 2015 and June 30th, 2018 were acquired for the purpose of short-term gains or long-term investment.⁵ All addresses identified as such were located in the cities of Kitchener, Cambridge, and Waterloo. From Table I, we see that just over 70% of these identified addresses were involved in a shortterm sale.

| Table I: Categorization of Short-Term Sales vs. Investments, 2015 - 2018Q2 | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|---|-------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Where the Property was Bought | Data Source | What did the Buyer do with the Property after Purchase? | Category | % of Addresses Identified Acquired 2015-2018 Q2 | % of Total Transactions ⁶ 2015-2019 M2 | | |
| Resale Market | MLS® | Sold within 24 Months | Short-Term Sale | 50.5% | 6.4% | | |
| Pre-Construction Market | Permit Data, MLS® | Sold within 24 Months of the Permitted Occupancy Date | Short-Term Sale | 20.6% | 2.6% | | |
| Resale Market | MLS® | Leased Out within 24 Months ⁷ | Long-Term Investment | 17.0% | 2.5% | | |
| Pre-Construction Market | Permit Data, MLS® | Leased Out within 24 Months of the Permitted Occupancy Date | Long-Term Investment | 11.8% | ١.5% | | |

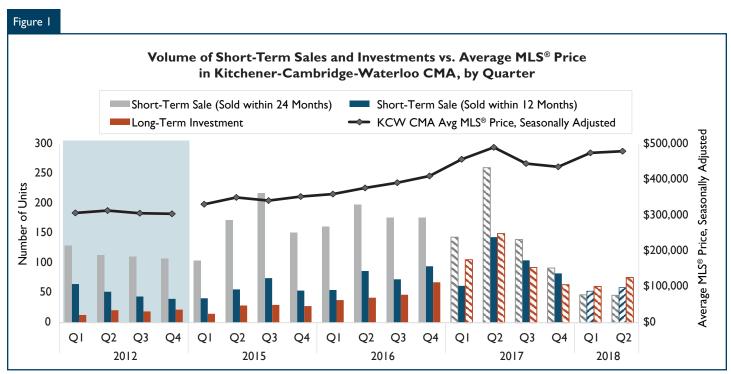
Sources: Ontario Regional MLS® Database, permit data from the City of Kitchener, City of Cambridge, City of Waterloo, author's calculations

Investment Activity Picked Up Pace when Prices Accelerated

For both short-term sales and long-term investments, activity in 2012⁸ was markedly less compared to what was experienced during 2015 and onwards. From 2015 QI to 2017 QI, the amount of investment properties acquired moved in tandem with average MLS[®] prices (Figure I). Perhaps unsurprisingly, investment activity became more pronounced as the pace of average price growth increased, which makes intuitive sense since there is larger potential gains to be realized in a market where prices are growing rapidly.

It is important to note that since we are counting investments using a 24-month window with up to February 28th, 2019, we were only able to fully account for short-term sales and long-term investments up to February 28th, 2017. In other words, for quarters from 2017 QI onwards, there are likely additional investment addresses to be counted (denoted by dashed bars in Figure I). However, in order to illustrate that the number of short-term sales activity did fall around the same time as when average MLS[®] prices fell in 2017 Q2 to Q3, we examined the subset of shortterm sales bought and sold within twelve months, which is fully counted for up to 2017 Q4. If we only consider this subset, we see that indeed, the number of short-term sales bought and sold within 12 months exhibited a similar pattern to average prices, peaking in 2017 Q2 and declining in 2017 Q3.

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Dashed bars indicate quarters where additional numbers of short-term sales or long-term Investments could potentially increase since we are still within a 24-month window. For more information, please see Appendix Section <u>24-Month Window</u>.

Sources: CREA (seasonally adjusted by CMHC) Ontario Regional MLS® Database, Permit data from the City of Kitchener, City of Cambridge, City of Waterloo

Over Half of All Short-Term Sales and Investment-Related Transactions Occurred in Kitchener

Kitchener saw more short-term sales and investment activity than Cambridge or Waterloo. Although this is partly because Kitchener has the largest population out of the three cities, population size alone does not entirely explain the findings. Between 2015 and 2018 Q2, 45% of all transactions (MLS[®] and new homes across the three cities) occurred in Kitchener (Appendix Figures AI to A3); however, Kitchener was the site of 53% of all short-term sales. Comparing similar metrics, it is apparent that Waterloo saw disproportionately less investment activity than what its overall transactional activity would suggest.

Interestingly, the proportion of shortterm sales and investments occurring in Kitchener has grown over time. Table II shows the percentage of transactions in Kitchener involving an investment grew from 3% in 2015 to 11% in 2017.

| Table II: Proportion of All Transactions Involving Short-Term Sales and Investment Activity, by City | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| | Kitch | ener | Camt | oridge | Waterloo | | |
| | Transactions Involving Short- Term Sale | Transactions Involving Long-Term Investment | Transactions Involving Short- Term Sale | Transactions Involving Long-Term Investment | Transactions Involving Short- Term Sale | Transactions Involving Long-Term Investment | |
| 2012 | 12% | 1% | 12% | 3% | 8% | 2% | |
| 2015 | 14% | 3% | 16% | 2% | 10% | 2% | |
| 2016 | 14% | 4% | 13% | 4% | 11% | 2% | |
| 2017 | 15% | 11% | 9% | 6% | 6% | 5% | |
| 2018 Q1 - Q2 | 3% | 5% | 2% | 4% | 2% | 2% | |
| 2015 - 2018 Q2 Total | 13% | 6% | 11% | 4% | 8% | 3% | |

Sources: Ontario Regional MLS® Database, permit data from the City of Kitchener, City of Cambridge, City of Waterloo, author's calculations

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Short-Term Sales and Long-Term Investment Activity near LRT Stations Grew as Average Sales Price Increased

While the annual number of transactions (MLS[®] and new homes) occurring within a 1.0 km radius of the LRT stations has stayed roughly the same over time, the number of properties acquired for either a short-term sale or long-term investment has changed. In 2012. 7.8% of all short-term sales and long-term investments acquired were addresses within a 1.0 km radius of stations. As per Table III, this figure grew from 9.3% in 2015 to 14.4% in 2017, before falling in the first two quarters of 2018, mimicking the movement of average MLS® prices (Figure I). This movement can be largely attributed to short-term sales activity.

I in 5 Address Identified as a Short-Term Sale or Long-Term Investment was Purchased by a Non-Local Buyer

For 94% of the short-term sales or long-term investments occurring between 2015 and 2018 Q2, we were able to proxy for the buyer's city of origin by using their agent's home office as a proxy.⁹ Local addresses are those located within Kitchener, Cambridge, or Waterloo. From Figure II below, we see that the share of non-local buyers in the three cities gradually increased, peaking in 2017 Q2. This trend moves in tandem with the average prices in KCW CMA.

Table III: Share of Short-Term Sales and Long-Term Investments Identified Near LRT Stations Increased

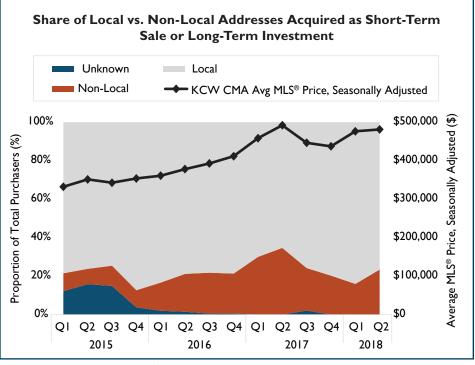
| Year when Property was Acquired | % of Total Transactions within 1.0 km of a LRT Station | % of ST Sales and LT Investments within 1.0 km of a LRT Station | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| 2012 | 10.9% | 7.8% | | | |
| 2015 | 10.5% | 9.3% | | | |
| 2016 | 12.2% | 13.1% | | | |
| 2017 | 12.3% | 14.4% | | | |
| 2018Q1-Q2 | 12.4% | 8.7% | | | |
| 2015 - 2018 Q2 Average | 11.7% | 12.3% | | | |

Sources: Ontario Regional MLS® Database, Grand River Transit (<u>www.grt.ca</u>) , author's calculations

| Table IV: Percentage of Local vs. Non-Local Purchasers | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-----|-----|--|--|--|
| | Local Non-Local Unknown | | | | | |
| 2012 | 78% | 7% | ١5% | | | |
| 2015 - 2018 Q2 Average | 77% | 19% | 4% | | | |

Sources: Ontario Regional MLS® Database, Realtor.ca, author's calculations

Figure II



Sources: Ontario Regional MLS® Database, CREA (seasonally adjusted by CMHC), author's calculations

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A non-local buyer made one of every five short-term sales or long-term investments during that time. We estimate that 72% of those non-local buyers originated from the Greater Toronto Area. Not surprisingly, the second and third-highest source of non-local buyers came from Guelph and Hamilton. A previous study¹⁰ from CMHC found that the growth relationship of house prices in Hamilton and Guelph was tightly linked to that of the GTA. Prices may have escalated in many regions in the Greater Golden Horseshoe in between 2015 and 2017 QI, but the relative affordability¹¹ of the Waterloo Region encouraged not only homebuyers, but also those looking to acquire an investment property or enter into a short-term sale at a lower price point, to come into the Region.

87% of short-term sales or longterm investments identified listed the size of the property. Using this data, we were able to calculate the average sold price per square foot. From Table VI, we found evidence that non-local buyers displayed a growing propensity towards more expensive properties. Between 2015 and 2018 Q2, the average unit acquired for a short-term sale or long-term investment by a non-local buyer was around \$272 per square foot, which was 5.5% more expensive than the units acquired by a local buyer.¹²

| Table V: Places of Origination of Non-Local Buyers, 2015 - 2018 Q2 | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--|--|--|--|
| | % of Non-Local Buyers | | | | |
| Greater Toronto Area | 72% | | | | |
| Guelph & Wellington County | 14% | | | | |
| Hamilton | 5% | | | | |
| Other | 10% | | | | |

Sources: Ontario Regional MLS® Database, author's calculations

| Table VI: Average Sold Price per Square Foot (\$) between Local vs. Non-Local Buyers | | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|--|--|--|--|
| Local Non-Local | | | | | | |
| 2015 | \$218.75 | \$212.80 | | | | |
| 2016 | \$244.22 | \$244.19 | | | | |
| 2017 | \$295.06 | \$299.10 | | | | |
| 2018 Q1-Q2 | \$315.59 | \$318.31 | | | | |
| 2015 - 2018 Q2 Average | \$257.46 | \$271.54 | | | | |

Sources: Ontario Regional MLS® Database, author's calculations Note: 2012 was excluded due to the small sample size of non-local buyers.

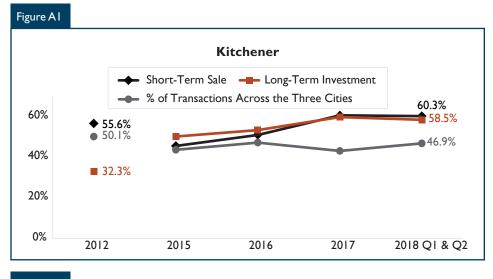
Concluding Remarks

Using our definition of what constitutes an investment, the results of this paper show that approximately 9.0% of MLS[®] transactions and new builds which became available between 2015 OI and 2018 Q2 were involved in a short-term sale or long-term investment. Seeking to better understand the trend over time, it was found that short-term sales and long-term investment activity followed the growth of MLS[®] prices, gaining momentum during the period of price acceleration, and becoming particularly prominent during the spring of 2017. The fact that investment activity picked up pace during this time makes sense since there is larger potential gains to be realized in a market where prices are growing rapidly.

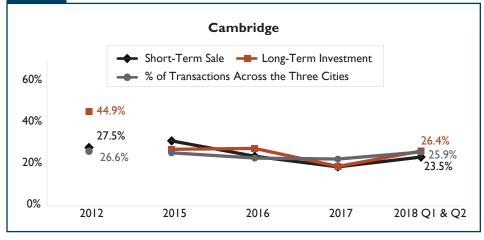
We also examined the question of whether KCW CMA became more attractive to non-local buyers during our period of study. In this matter, we found that the share of non-local buyers moved and peaked along with average MLS[®] prices. Lastly, regarding the new LRT transit system, we found that as average MLS[®] prices grew, the proportion of short-term sales and long-term investment activity near LRT stations increased. This result suggests that proximity to transit may have contributed to investors' decisions on where to purchase.

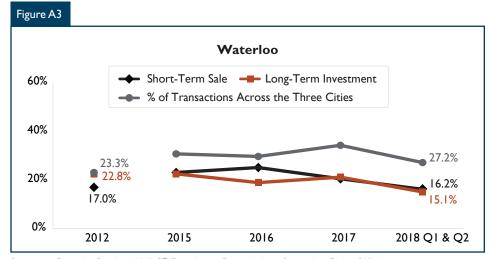
Appendix

Proportion of Short-Term Sales and Long-Term Investments vs. MLS[®] and New Build Transactions across the Three Cities









Sources: Ontario Regional MLS® Database, Permit data from the City of Kitchener, City of Cambridge, City of Waterloo, author's calculations

Supplementary Tables

Prices were increasing across CMAs in Central Ontario in between 2015 QI and 2017 QI at roughly the same pace. In particular, it is worthy to note had one bought a property in 2016 QI and then sold it in 2017 QI, regardless of whether it was in the GTA or KCW, the average price gain would have been 27 to 28%. The key point to bear in mind is that prices in KCW were relatively less expensive than the other CMAs. A relatively lower price point is not only attractive to first-time homebuyers, but likely also attracted those wishing to make a profit off of a short-term sale, owing to a lower barrier to entry.

| Table AI: Average Prices across CMAs, Seasonally Adjusted | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------|--------|----------|------------|
| | Average Prices, Seasonally-Adjusted | | | | | YoY C | Frowth | |
| | GTA | Guelph | Hamilton | KCW | GTA | Guelph | Hamilton | КСЖ |
| 2014Q1 | \$546,265 | \$358,989 | \$400,373 | \$321,538 | 8% | 2% | 7% | ۱% |
| 2015Q1 | \$586,668 | \$374,275 | \$439,097 | \$332,175 | 7% | 4% | 10% | 3% |
| 2016Q1 | \$665,247 | \$404,874 | \$468,699 | \$360,923 | 13% | 8% | 7% | 9 % |
| 2017Q1 | \$850,683 | \$513,119 | \$548,505 | \$458,450 | 28% | 27% | 17% | 27% |
| 2018Q1 | \$759,480 | \$507,43 I | \$538,934 | \$476,280 | -11% | -1% | -2% | 4% |

Sources: CREA, seasonally adjusted by CMHC

| Table A2: Average Price Difference between CMAs and KCW CMA | | | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
| | GTA | Guelph | Hamilton | | |
| 2014Q1 | \$224,727 | \$37,45 I | \$78,835 | | |
| 2015Q1 | \$254,493 | \$42,100 | \$106,922 | | |
| 2016Q1 | \$304,324 | \$43,95 I | \$107,776 | | |
| 2017Q1 | \$392,233 | \$54,669 | \$90,055 | | |
| 2018Q1 | \$283,200 | \$31,151 | \$62,654 | | |

Sources: CREA, seasonally adjusted by CMHC

Methodology

Definition of "Short-Term Sale" and "Long-Term Investment"

For the purposes of this study, we define a "short-term sale" to be an address acquired and then subsequently sold within the next 24 months. Addresses from both the new construction and resale markets were accounted for. A "long-term investment" was an address acquired and then leased out within 24 months, since this illustrates that the buyer had no intention of living in the unit long-term.

While the definition of what separates the difference between "short-term" and "long-term" is inevitably subject to debate, we decided to use 24-months as the benchmark since this is what the IRS uses to determine one's eligibility for tax exemptions made on the sale of one's principal residence.¹³ In other words, to fulfill the ownership requirement in the eligibility test for gains exemption, one has to have owned their home for at least 24 months. While the American tax code does not apply in Canada, we think that the fact that the tax authority of a large country has chosen to use 24 months as its thresholds lends some credibility to using this specific window to label whether a home was bought for living in or for investment purposes. To our knowledge, the Canadian tax system does not have a similar 'period of time' requirement to satisfy when determining one's eligibility for exemptions on the sale of their principal residence.

Counting in a 24-Month Window

When counting the number of properties bought for the purposes of a short-term gain or long-term investment, we counted the address on the day that it was first acquired. For instance, an address bought on September 1st, 2015, and then leased out in January 1st, 2016 was designated as a property bought for investment purposes in September 2015.

Under this methodology, it was not possible to fully count the number of investments or short-term sales (bought and sold within 24 months) acquired between 2017 QI to 2018 O2 at the time of this study. This was because a 24-month window starting in 2017 Q1 ends in 2019 QI, past the February 28, 2019 cutoff of when the data collection for this project was undertaken. The series "Short-Term Sale (Bought and Sold within 24 Months)" and "Long-Term Investment" shown in Figure I are denoted in dashed bars from 2017 QI onwards to denote that these numbers are preliminary and will likely increase.

However, in order to illustrate that the number of short-term sales activity did fall around the same time as when average MLS[®] prices fell in 2017 Q2 to Q3, we examined the subset of short-term sales bought and sold within 12 months. In between 2015 and February 2017, nearly half of all short short-term sales were acquired and sold within twelve months. The number of short-term sales bought and sold within 12 months has remained at a relatively similar ratio to the number of shortterm sales bought and sold within 24 months. This ratio was 43% in 2012, 35% in 2015, and 43% again in 2016.

MLS[®] and Permit Data

This study uses data from two sources: MLS[®] data from the Ontario Regional MLS[®] Database and municipal permit data. Our aim is to examine short-term sales and long-term investment activity of properties acquired between January 2015 and June 2018.

Addresses where a sale was followed by a lease within 24 months were deemed to be long-term investments. Addresses where a lease was recorded (also taken from MLS® data⁶), but not a sale beforehand, were excluded because it was not possible to determine how long ago the property was first purchased by the seller, and therefore could not be identified as an investment which occurred during our period of study. In some cases, an address was sold more than twice during the period of interest. Since each sale involved a different seller, we counted each individual seller as an investor.

In order to capture investment activity involving newly-built homes, we obtained construction permit data from the City of Kitchener, City of Cambridge, and the City of Waterloo and matched these addresses to addresses in the resale market. For each address, permit data provided the Permitted Occupancy Date. This is the first day that any person is allowed to occupy the unit in question as per the discretion of the municipal inspector, which this study used as a proxy for the first possible day of possession. Addresses from the permit data which were missing the field for Permitted Occupancy Date were excluded.

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Holding Periods Lengths

By subtracting the date at which an address was first bought from the date at which it was later sold, it was possible to determine the holding period of the short-term sale. For example, if 5668 Example Ave. was recorded to have been sold on October 1st, 2015, and then sold again on September 30th, 2016, we calculate the period in between those dates. Similarly, the same logic was applied to determine the length of time a buyer held onto a property before demonstrating intention of leasing it out.

Identifying Non-Local Investors

MLS[®] transactions list both the listing brokerage and the cooperating brokerage. The listing brokerage and agent associated represent the seller, while the cooperating brokerage represents the office of the buyer's agent. Using the address of the cooperating brokerage, we were able to proxy for where the buyer is from.

The name of the cooperating broker was occasionally missing from the MLS[®] transaction data. In cases where the name did not appear in the database on realtor.ca, the agent's office was entered into the realtor.ca search engine instead. In instances where a brokerage had more than one office, the brokerage and agent's full name was searched online to determine which branch of the brokerage the agent was based in. Oftentimes, the agent's office location was found easily by searching for the agent in the franchise's database.

| Table A3: Transactional Data for 5668 Example Ave. | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Sale Date | Seller/ Lessor | Sale Price | Rent (\$) | Listing Date | Days until Seller or Investor Listed the Property | Description |
| October I st , 2015 | Jackie | \$340,000 | | September 15 th , 2015 | September 20 th , 2016 | Jordan bought and sold the unit withir |
| September 30 th , 2016 | Jordan | \$405,000 | | September 20th, 2016 | minus October 1st, 2015 equals 355 days | 355 days. He made a short-term profit |
| | Chris | | \$1,800 / month | November I ^{st,} 2016 | November 1 st , 2016 minus September 30 th , 2016 equals 32 days | Chris bought the leased out the unit withir 32 days. He is a long-term investor |

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Kitchener Waterloo Association of Realtors (KWAR) for providing access to MLS[®] data in the Ontario Regional MLS[®] Database, as well as the City of Kitchener, City of Cambridge, and City of Waterloo for providing permit data. The author would also like to thank Amy Barker from the CMHC GIS team for providing distance-related analysis, as well as all reviewers for their insights and suggestions. Responsibility for any calculation errors remain my own.

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endnotes

- ¹ MLS[®] is a registered trademark of the Canadian Real Estate Association.
- ² During the same period between the first quarters of 2016 and 2017, Greater Toronto Area CMA saw its seasonallyadjusted average MLS[®] sales price rise by 27.8%.
- ³ For instance, during 2016 QI, average MLS[®] price of GTA CMA was \$665,200 while it was \$360,900 for KCW CMA.
- ⁴ 'New builds' refer to new-constructed properties that were recently completed and permitted by the municipality to be occupied in. For example, a housing unit was counted as a 'new build in 2018' if it was permitted by the municipality to be lived in between January 1st, 2018 and December 31st, 2018.
- ⁵ Please see Appendix for detailed methodology on the identification of addresses studied.
- ⁶ There is a distinction between 'Addresses' and 'Transactions.' Two transactions are needed to qualify whether a property is a short-term sale or a long-term investment: the transaction when the property is first purchased, and the transaction where the property is subsequently sold or leased. Every address identified has *at least two* transactions involved (and > 2 transactions if the address was leased more than once to different tenants).
- ⁷ This study uses leasing data obtained from the MLS[®] system, but does not include the amount of rental units listed on other sources (eg. Kijiji, Prop2go, property management companies, etc.); therefore, the figures and results presented in this study pertaining to long-term investments should be taken as a conservative estimate.
- ⁸ In order to determine whether short-term sales and long-term investment activity exhibited any different behaviour compared to years before 2015, we identified the number of short-term sales and investment activity of addresses acquired in 2012.
- ⁹ As per the methodology used the report Wali, Amran "London's Heated Resale Housing Market: The Effects of GTA Buyers and Repeat Sales" (May 2018, CMHC).
- ¹⁰ Michel, Jean Sébastien 'GTA House Price Spillovers to Surrounding Centres' (CMHC, January 2017).
- ¹¹ Please see supplementary tables in Appendix for illustration of the relative affordability of KCW CMA.
- ¹² For example, the median size of single-detached homes sold in 2018 in the cities of Kitchener, Cambridge, and Waterloo was 1,508 sq. ft. Using the price difference of \$14.08 per sq. ft., homes bought for the purpose of a short-term sale or long-term investment by a non-local buyer were \$21,200 more expensive than those bought by the local buyer.
- ¹³ U.S. Department of the Treasury. Internal Revenue Service. (2018). Publication 523: Selling Your Home (Cat. No. 15044W). Retrieved from <u>https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p523.pdf</u>

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