

## Aspen-Snowmass real estate continues its staggering season

by Madeleine Osberger, Aspen Daily News Staff Writer  
Nov 9, 2020 Aspen Daily News



Currently there are six properties priced over \$20 million under contract in Aspen, including a home on Willoughby Way listed at \$32.9 million. (Courtesy image)

The surge of real estate contracts written from June through October may have started to slow due to seasonal adjustments, but in terms of property sales and pandemic-influenced trends in Aspen and Snowmass Village, 2020 will be a year to remember.

It may not rival the mid-aughts in number of sales transactions, but total dollar volume could well approach a record-setting number as Aspen has already surpassed \$2 billion in residential sales (exclusive of fractional and deed-restricted properties), according to broker Andrew Ernemann. He's in the process of compiling an exhaustive report on Aspen/Snowmass real estate activity.

A boom in properties priced \$15 million and above has helped drive that surge. Currently there are six properties priced over \$20 million under contract in Aspen, according to the multiple listing service, with a Willoughby Way home at \$32.9 million leading the pack.

So far this year there have already been 16 sales above \$20 million.

Tim Estin, who like Ernemann is an Aspen Snowmass Sotheby's International broker and author of his own market interpretation, the "Estin Report," said he has been stunned in 2020 by the swift sales in the \$10 million-plus segment, which are trending about 340% above the average number of similar sales in the past six years.

"The number of properties sold over \$10 million has been staggering," Estin said. Through Oct. 31, a total of 77 properties at \$10 million and above had sold compared to 24 at this same time last year and 24 in 2018.

## **From walkability to spacious and private**

In recent years and leading up to the pandemic, many buyers were looking for properties that allowed easy access to restaurants and downtown Aspen activities.

Andrew Ernemann has seen those priorities shift almost overnight to where some people are now looking for more space and opting for suitable parcels well outside the downtown core.

Large ranches and rural properties, some of which had lingered on the market for years, have caught up in 2020's buying spree.

"We definitely have a big demand for rural properties," Ernemann said. "We've heard a clear statement from people moving here who say, 'I want more space.' That's the exact opposite from people who want to live in town and walk everywhere."

One of those rural properties that saw a new owner was the late Bob Beattie's legacy ranch in Woody Creek, situated on nearly 6 acres and which sold Aug. 31 for \$4.094 million.

When Tim Estin was asked if the majority of his clients who bought property here in 2020 were doing it as a business investment or based upon emotion, he said the latter was true.

"Buyers have shared with me what their lives have been like since the pandemic arrived: living in terrifying large population environments that were hit hardest initially by the pandemic; the new challenges of kids and working parents now at home full-time and a sense of running out of space, inside and out," Estin said.

Other concerns buyers shared with Estin as to why they were inclined to purchase here now, range from California wildfires, urban unrest and growing homeless populations near the cities.

"Listening to clients, their experiences become real and palpable. The term 'urban exodus' greatly simplifies the story of lives being up-ended, of tragedy, of fear, of a desire to escape and for the fortunate...an opportunity to really hone in on what is important and how one wants to live one's life," Estin said.

The great urban exodus and low inventory of local properties have resulted in pricing that Estin referred to as the "COVID premium," which in some cases are coming onto the market at least 15% higher than the most recent comparables that were sold.

Ernemann said that listing inventory is down by about 20% year over year which has resulted in some of the price pressure. Which begs the question: Are Aspen property prices nearing their summit?

"It feels like we're heading into the top of the market," said Ernemann, pointing out that, "2020 will be the first year we've had double-digit price appreciation for three years in a

row since 2006, '07 and '08," and that when one sees that for three years in a row, it can start to feel unsustainable.

Ernemann also referred to data that shows Aspen condominium prices have risen about 20% this year, single family homes are up about 12% and Snowmass Village prices overall are up about 5-6% this year over last.

Estin had a different take: "Are these rising prices sustainable? Loglc says no but we are in unprecedented times now, and in the past 40 years the long-term trend for local real estate prices has been skyward."

*Madeleine Osberger is a contributing editor of the Aspen Daily News. She can be reached at [madski@aspendedailynews.com](mailto:madski@aspendedailynews.com) or on Twitter @Madski99*