

Bricks & Mortar

REAL ESTATE REPORTER

Your Link 2 Realty

Property Assessment Freeze Lifted (OREA March 2008)

The end of a three-year assessment freeze could mean homeowners in some parts of the province may face double-digit hikes in property taxes. The provincial assessment freeze ended on January 1st. However, the Ontario government says it plans to spread out any assessment increases over the next four years.

The freeze was initiated following several complaints from property owners to the Ontario Ombudsman's Office that the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) was conducting inaccurate and unfair assessments. Following an investigation, the Ombudsman's Office made 20 recommendations for improvements to MPAC's assessment system including changes to the way the Crown Corporation communicated with property owners.

As of the last report, the Ombudsman stated that MPAC had completed 10 of the 20 recommendations and was moving forward on the remainder. Among the completed recommendations is a revised brochure that is sent out with reassessment notices. This brochure now mentions how important it is that MPAC's information be accurate and urges people to report any inaccuracies. It tells them clearly how they can review their assessment and look at up to 24 property comparables, through a section of its Web site called "About My Property". It also stresses: "If an error has been made, we will correct it. We are also happy to explain how we arrived at your assessed value and answer any questions." Finally, it explains all the various ways you can complain about or challenge your assessment. In addition, the MPAC Web site now offers a lot more information about how properties are evaluated, and has posted many of its procedures online.

A new Property Taxpayer Web Portal is also being developed, through which owners will be able to access their Property Profile Report and comparables. The assessment notice form itself is also being redesigned for 2008. MPAC has done internal consultations, focus groups and property taxpayer customer interviews about this new form – but it is still reviewing it, because of the potential impact of the province's new four-year reassessment schedule.

In the meantime, the revised assessment process is under way and property owners will be receiving their assessments in August and September. Current property taxes are based on market value assessments conducted by MPAC for January 1, 2005, and are determined by comparisons with the average city property value. If the estimated value of a property increases at a rate below the city average, the homeowner's property tax will decrease. If property value increases at a rate above the city average, the tax will increase. The reassessed values, with a valuation date of January 1, 2008, will apply to the tax years 2009 through 2012.

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Meet Christina Ly



Christina is our Marketing Director for our Real Estate Department. She is

responsible for creating and preparing promotional material, updating the company website, maintenance of records and databases, verification of data, inputting new member applications, relationship management of current members.

Christina holds a Bachelor of Management and Organizational Studies.

If you have any questions, you can contact Christina by emailing christina@charitylinkrealty.ca

Do you have any comments or inquiries about *Bricks & Mortar* REAL ESTATE REPORTER?

Please send them to: contactus@charitylinkrealty.ca

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Terminology Tips



Day On Market (DOM)

The number of days a property is listed for sale in a Multiple Listing Service® before it is sold or taken off the market. In a seller's market, when there are fewer properties listed and available inventory sells more quickly, the DOM figure should be low. In a buyer's market, when there is more inventory available and properties take longer to sell, the DOM figure will be higher.

A good question to ask about similar properties that have sold is: "How long has it been on the market before they sold?" This helps you determine which market your neighbourhood is presently in.



Biweekly Mortgage

A mortgage in which you make payments every two weeks as opposed to once per month. As a result, you end up making 26 payments, the equivalent of 13 monthly payments, over the course of a year. The extra payment reduces the principal amount of your mortgage, significantly reducing the amount of time it will take to pay it off. Speak to your lender to find out if they offer a biweekly payment option.

Buying or Selling?

call Tom Dampsy

Broker of Record

519-642-0619

1-877-832-6779



Company Name Change

CharityLINK Realty Limited, Brokerage is in the process of a name change. Our new company name will be Link 2 Realty Limited, Brokerage. We are really excited about our new branding and hopefully our name change won't cause any confusion.

Visit My New Blog

I - Tom Dampsy, Broker of Record of CharityLINK Realty Limited, Brokerage - have started a new blog. It will serve as your guide to living in London, Ontario. Viewers are invited to come read and discuss about everything you should know about London, including community and real estate news.

If you live in London, are thinking of moving to London, or have even just visited London, please visit my blog and share your experiences. I would appreciate any comments/questions, so we can create a dialogue. We want to know what you think about London, Ontario.

Please visit:
www.tomlinks2realty.blogspot.com

New Business



Ted Reece and John have started their own masonry business, **J.T. Masonry** (519) 280-4545. Their present remortar project can be seen at 192 Elmwood Av, London Ontario.

Have a new business? Email us contactus@charitylinkrealty.ca

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Spring Cleaning - Safety Tips

A few do's and don'ts to consider before you tackle the winter grime.

- **DO NOT** mix different cleaning products together as the resulting solution could give off toxic fumes. E.g: Chlorine Bleach mixed with Ammonia creates a poisonous gas
- **WEAR** gloves and/or eye goggles when working with caustic or corrosive products.
- Ensure **PROPER VENTILATION** and air exchange by opening windows and doors and running fans.
- Make sure your **PETS DO NOT** come in contact with your cleaning supplies or fumes.
- Rent a **CARPET & UPHOLSTERY SHAMPOOER** for your carpets chairs, sofa's even your car.

Call Before You Dig - and Eliminate Service Cuts

Putting up a fence?
Planting a tree?
Planning a pool, deck or new addition?



Spring is the busiest "digging season." It's pretty crowded underground - gas pipelines, electrical services, telephone and cable TV as well as water and sewer connections. And it's not just your service; there could be distribution networks for utilities that serve your neighbourhood as well.

It's not only the loss of service, damage caused by digging could leave you injured, or create a safety risk for others. Also, you may be subject to expensive restoration costs and potential legal action.

At least a week before you dig, contact **Ontario One Call Utility** notification service: 1-800-400-2255. For more information, check out the website: www.on1call.com/HomeDig.html

Save paper! Would you prefer receiving *Bricks & Mortar* **REAL ESTATE REPORTER** via email?

tom@charitylinkrealty.ca

subject line: Bricks and Mortar

our next edition will be emailed

Trying to Keep your Lawn Green

As we enter the hottest months of the year, water conservation becomes even more important. To keep your lawn looking great - and your water bill at a minimum - consider the tips below:

- To minimize water loss due to evaporation, avoid watering midday when the sun is the hottest and the most intense. The most effective time to **water your lawn is in early morning** preferably before 8 am.
- **Position your sprinklers.** Don't waste water by letting it fall on areas that don't need it, like your driveway, street, patio, or porch.
- **Don't over-water.** Your lawn only needs about one inch of water per week to thrive. Excessive watering can cause disease, yellowing, thatching and fertilizer leaching as well as unnecessary extra costs.
- Using a tin can, **time how long it takes your sprinklers** to disperse one inch of water, then water your lawn for only that amount of time.
- If **rainfall provides your lawn with at least one inch** of water in a week, no need for you to water.
- **Raise your lawnmower** blade to at least three inches. The higher cut means more shade for roots and soil, which helps reduce the amount of water loss due to evaporation.
- After you mow your lawn, **leave the grass clippings**, they'll help your lawn retain its moisture and fertilize as they break down.



New Energy Initiatives for Homeowners *(OREA March 2008)*

Grants are available for homeowners going green. Both the provincial and federal governments have programs designed to encourage energy reduction. By staying up-to-date on the latest programs, you can offer clients valuable information that could save them money.

Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) is offering a new residential energy efficiency assessment service to owners of single family homes, including detached, semi-detached and low-rise multi-unit residential buildings (MURBs) that are no more than three storeys high. Under the ecoENERGY Retrofit program, property owners can qualify for federal grants by improving the energy efficiency of their homes and reducing their home's impact on the environment.

How It Works

NRCan-certified energy advisors conduct a detailed on-site assessment of the home's energy use for the attic down to the basement. They provide a personalized report, including a checklist of recommended retrofits to improve the energy efficiency of your home and, in some cases, to reduce water consumption. The report also shows the grant amounts for each eligible upgrade that you can receive by carrying out these energy-saving improvements. The maximum grant you can receive for a home is \$5,000.

For instance, if you replace an old natural gas furnace with the most efficient unit available (92% AFUE or annual fuel utilization efficiency gas furnace with DC variable speed motor) you could qualify for \$1,350 in rebates: \$500 (Federal) plus \$500 (Provincial) plus \$100 from Enbridge plus \$250 from the Ontario Power Authority (Cool Savings Rebate). According to the Ontario Ministry of Energy, replacing an old system

(63% AFUE) with a new high efficiency condensing furnace (93% AFUE) in an average 1,200 square foot, detached house will result in savings of about \$450 per year.

Because of its high-tech design, a high-efficiency natural gas furnace squeezes the most heat out of every heating dollar. For every dollar you spend on energy, it produces 88 to 97 cents worth of heat. It could save up to 24% in energy and related energy costs and will also help insulate homeowners from increasing energy prices.

The high efficiency furnace and many of the other retrofits eligible for rebates come with a higher price tag, but environmentally conscious homeowners believe the energy cost savings – and reduced greenhouse gas emissions – are well worth it. Also, from a resale perspective, many potential homebuyers will view "greener" appliances as a desirable feature.

For more information on the ecoENERGY Retrofit Rebate program visit the following sites:

- Natural Resources Canada (Federal) Web site (under residential housing, home improvements) at: www.oe.nrcan.gc.ca/residential/personal
- Ontario Ministry of Energy Web site at: www.energy.gov.on.ca and click on the Rebate update.
- For information on qualifying toilets from the federal and provincial perspective, go to www.veritec.ca under Reports, 11th Edition (test results start on page 16)
- For information on residential rebates from the Ontario Power Authority – Cool Savings Rebate Program, go to: www.everykilowattcounts.ca
- For information on Energy Star appliances go to: www.energystar.gc.ca.
- For information on Enbridge rebates, check under Residential, Rebates Incentives and Energy tips at: <https://portal-plumprod.cgq.enbridge.com>



Considering a Condo

Whatever the reason – kids moving out, looking for a less work/maintenance-lifestyle, spending more time traveling – you may be thinking about switching to a condo-minium. Before deciding please consider the following:

How well do you tolerate noise or close neighbours? In a condo, you'll hear more of it than you're used to, be it from you neighbours, or from the building's mechanical systems (e.g. elevators). Come to think of it you might need to be more considerate of your new neighbours, who will hear more of you, too!

While making the switch from a house to a condo means freeing yourself of repair and maintenance duties, you'll still have to pay your share of those expenses via a monthly condo fee. Note that monthly fees can rise (as expenses in our homes do), and when they do, you'll have no control over the increase.

Living in a condo means abiding by the rules and regulations specified in its governing documents, which can pertain to anything from pets to parking. Before purchasing in any condo complex, familiarize yourself with its rule and regulations to determine whether you can live with them. Ask (your potential new) neighbours how they enjoy living there.

Lastly, downsizing from a house to a condo probably means purging a lot of your belongings. Parting with things you've collected over the years can be difficult and very rewarding. Find new homes for these items. I am sure family members, friends or charitable organizations will appreciate your thoughtfulness.

U.S. Sub Prime Mortgage Meltdown...Could it Happen in Canada?

With the sub prime mortgage market in crisis mode, it doesn't look like the housing news could get any worse for our neighbours in the States. Thinking of buying there, now could be an excellent time! Could the same thing happen in Canada? NO.

The overwhelming opinion is that, due to a number of vital differences between the U.S. and Canadian economies, housing markets, borrowing patterns, types of mortgages, it is highly unlikely the mortgage mayhem can cross the border to Canada.

In many cases, sub prime mortgages in the U.S. were issued to high-risk borrowers at a temporarily lower ("sub prime") interest rate, and these lenders often extended loans worth more than the value of the property. As interest rates rose, market values declined and many mortgagors with these loans found themselves owing more than their property was worth. 0 or minus equity!

According to the Canadian Association of Accredited Mortgage Professionals, our sub prime market makes up 5% or less of all mortgages in Canada, versus 20% in the U.S. In addition, all high-ratio mortgages in Canada – those with less than 20 % for a down-payment – must be secured by mortgage insurance.

The outlook of Canada's economy continues to be good. We have continued strength and stability in our mortgage & housing markets. While the sub prime mortgage crisis from the U.S. must have some ripple affect in our economy, our more conservative financial nature is generally expected to cushion us from the brunt of this U.S. fallout.