

*Manhattan real estate slowly ticks back up*

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Manhattan real estate sales are slowly ticking up, with a pandemic-high of 155 contracts signed last week, but the market is still off 15% from the same time last year, according to an UrbanDigs analysis.

After weeks of depressed activity, transactions more than doubled in the week ended July 19, from 68 the week before, the data shows. The number of new homes that hit the market doubled year over year, to 554. Inventories reached a high for 2020 the week prior, with 558 new listings.

“It seems like the buyers are back, but we’re not quite at normal market activity levels,” John Walkup, UrbanDigs’

chief operating officer, said during an interview with Crain’s. In a normal week, 155 contracts is what the market would expect to see during a holiday week, such as the Fourth of July, he said.

When the market was shut down and buyers couldn’t see units, there was hardly any activity at all, Walkup said, adding that “it takes guts” to purchase a home without seeing it first. “No one’s really going to do that,” he said.

With the city in the third phase of its reopening and a return to normal-ish real estate operations, the uptick in activity comes from pent-up demand from both buyers and sellers.

Although agents started showing properties again June 22, it has taken several weeks for the market to see any significant activity, because purchasing real estate typically takes time.

“People had this misnomer that we would open and contracts would spike,” said Elizabeth Ann Stribling-Kivlan, senior managing director at Compass, “but the contracts process itself takes a few weeks.”

Last week’s buyers started looking for homes as early as a month ago and represent only the first wave of pent-up demand that the market will see, Walkup predicted.

Katie Landow, an agent at Warburg Realty, said her buyers want to move quickly and are either looking to upgrade or are first-time buyers who see an opportunity.

“Buying now is a great idea,” said Mihal Gartenberg, also a Warburg agent. “The savvy buyer recognizes that rates are low and we’re in a buyer’s market.”

Still, listings are coming on the market faster than buyers are scooping them up, and that is going to push prices down, Walkup said.

“As buyers have more choices, sellers are naturally going to have to reprice things,” he said, adding that he doesn’t think the market has reached a price bottom yet.

Even if buyers continue to make deals, though, Stribling-Kivlan said she doesn’t think prices will start soaring, either.

“We have to look at everything as a whole,” she said.

“We have to watch for the next six months. We have a major election coming, and we still don’t know what’s going to happen with the school systems.”

What she does know, she said, is that people will always want to live in New York City. Contracts doubling is a great sign for the market, she added.

“There is a resilience to New York,” she said.