

# RELIEF FOR HOME BUYERS

**T**HE drop in house prices is a good thing. As the median house price doubled in just a few years, hitting half a million dollars, there grew a belief that a house's price could never come down. It is a pernicious belief.

Buyers and sellers of housing need to know they are not in a gold-rush universe if they are to accept reasonable terms of an offer.

That people make money on their houses, town houses and condos is great, but it is not the purpose of the market. Its purpose is to provide housing.

Remember that the more money sellers get, the smaller the home first-time buyers can afford, or the farther they have to drive to work. At some point, the good fortune of sellers pushes first-time buyers back into the rental market. And thus, while we think it is a good thing that house prices go up over time, we hope they rise gently.

Statistically, the downturn here is not deep. In King County, the median price of single-family houses, including town houses, was off 1.1 percent in December from the same month a year before. The decline is greater if

measured from the peak prices reached last summer, but those peaks were reached only for a short time.

The change in the market is also greater considering the number of properties for sale, and how long it takes to sell the average house. In King County in December, there was a seven-month supply of houses on the market. That suggests that many sellers still have top-of-the-market prices in mind.

Prices may need to fall long enough to shake that mindset. We hope they do not fall too much, because that creates a problem of walkaways.

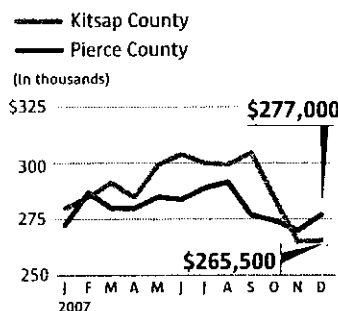
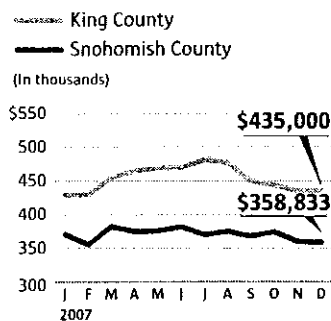
A robust economy includes affordable starter homes and middle-class neigh-

borhoods for families. So, we hope home prices do not recover and skyrocket again. That is sentiment only. Our hopes, plus a buck, will buy you a small bag of potato chips. Houses, alas, cost more.

## Home-price activity

Here's a look at monthly median sales prices for single-family homes in the central Puget Sound region. Median means half sold for more, half sold for less.

### Single-family homes\*



\* Includes town homes  
Source: Northwest Multiple Listing Service  
THE SEATTLE TIMES

Seattle Times editorial board members are editorial page editor James F. Vesely, Frank A. Blethen, William K. Blethen (emeritus), Robert C. Blethen (emeritus), Carolyn S. Kelly, Ryan Blethen, Lee Moriwaki, Joni Balter, Lance Dickie, Bruce Ramsey, Kate Riley and Lynne K. Varner.