

MANCHESTER REVALUATION: Condominium owners are finding their units make good investments

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MANCHESTER -- The city has been in a condominium frenzy over the last five years, with the number of condos increasing by nearly 50 percent, according to a review of tax valuations sent out by the city.

In 2001, 3,065 condominiums were assessed for taxes. This year, the number is 4,586, a number that includes stand-alone homes in a condominium ownership situation.

They range in value from \$461,500 for one of the three-story townhouse condos built near the Merchantsauto.com Stadium to \$48,400 for a one-bedroom, 392-square-foot condo at Bass Island Estates.

"It's a great alternative to individual home ownership, which is not in the reach of a lot of people," said Arthur Sullivan of Brady-Sullivan Properties. "It's really the only way people can get started into the market."

His company started converting apartments to condominiums three years ago, he said. This year, Brady-Sullivan expects to undertake 1,000 condominium conversions in New Hampshire, most of them in Manchester, Sullivan said. The market has slowed down over the past year, but Brady-Sullivan still sells approximately 100 condos a month, he said.

Condo assessments rose a median 84 percent, the same median increase for single-family homes. (The median is the middle number of points in a series arranged in order of size. This differs from an average, which refers to the result obtained by dividing a sum by the number of quantities added together. In the series of numbers 50, 55, 85, 88, and 92, the median is 85 and the average is 74.)

Sullivan said he's not surprised that condos have increased in value over the last five years. Traditional home builders will hold onto a single-family house to get top price. But condo converters like to get out of a project quickly and start another.

"Almost as soon as we're out, we're seeing appreciation," he said.

And like single-family homes, more expensive condos are more likely to get a tax break:

* The median increase of condos assessed at \$125,000 or less was 82 percent.

* The median increase of condos assessed between \$125,000 and \$250,000 was 88 percent.

* The median increase of condos assessed at more than \$250,000 was 68 percent.

Deanne Blackinton saw her two-bedroom condo at Eastmeadow Way off Bodwell Road increase 110 percent, to \$207,400.

Three years ago, Blackington paid \$50,000 less for the condo, she said in an e-mail message to www.unionleader.com. She said the assessments on the 62 condos in her development vary by as much as \$40,000.

"Will I file for (an) abatement hearing? Need you ask?" she said. "If this is any indication of the product quality throughout (the revaluation), perhaps the city should be the first in line to request, no demand, an abatement of the fee paid for this debacle."

But Stephan Hamilton, an assessor with the city, said the feedback he has received from most people is that the new values are accurate. Any obvious errors are quickly corrected, he said.