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Apartment market gears up for autumn

By Stuart W. Elliott

August is typically one of the quietest months of the year for apartment sales, and brokers said this summer was no exception, with sales down from July. The market has slowed down since overheating early in the year, though brokers said sales are still relatively strong.

"It's slowed down from a frenzy earlier this year, but it's not slow," said Lori Berti, Midtown office manager for Coldwell Banker Hunt Kennedy.

"The spring was phenomenal, and the summer market has been a little bit more typical," said Linda Fenn, a senior vice president at Douglas Elliman.

According to a study by appraisal company Mitchell, Maxwell & Jackson, the number of signed contracts in Manhattan south of 96th Street declined 4 percent in August compared to the month before, decreasing to 534.

That was less of a slowdown than seen last year, when sales volume in August was 26 percent lower than in July, the study said.

The median sales price finished two percent lower in August from the month before, \$611,500 compared to \$625,864. Prices were 22 percent higher than last August, the study said.

"We haven't really seen any break in prices," said David Goldsmith, a broker at DG Neary Realty.

Brokers are generally more concerned with what happens in September, after Labor Day, when activity generally picks up.

"It's been hard to determine whether it's been a little slower because of the summer or because of something else," said Judith Karnas, an associate broker at Douglas Elliman.

"After Labor Day we'll really see what's happening in the current market," John Sheets, a director at Brown Harris Stevens, said at the end of August.

Goldsmith of DG Neary Realty said there will be several points at which market trends will become clearer.

"If it was really a summer slowdown, we'll know a week after Labor Day," he said. "If it is uncertainty about the election, we'll know a week after the election."

"If it's a general market malaise, we won't know until February," he added. "By that time, we'll know what bonuses are and we can factor that in."

Jim Mazzeo, president of Weichert Realtors, Mazzeo Agency, said it will take a little longer than right after Labor Day to get a clearer picture of the market.

"The market is traditionally a bit slow in September as well," he said. "September is a weird month-you have the Jewish holidays, the beginning of school, people closing up their summer homes. October gets much better."

Mazzeo also said a slow market would not be all bad. "That would increase the inventory a bit," he said.

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