

Top News for the Week

- [2019 new home sales exceed 10,000 units, up 15% from year ago](#)
- [Singapore condo resale volume shrinks 27.4% in 2019](#)
- [Makeover plans for Pasir Panjang Power District revealed](#)
- [MOM raises penalties for unfair hiring practices](#)

Residential

2019 new home sales top 10,000 units, up 15% from year ago

Private home sales in 2019 rose 15 per cent to 10,104 units - signalling a resilient housing market as unemployment remained low, despite an expectedly slow month in December.

Housing demand was robust across the board, with six of the top 10 selling projects located in the outside central region (OCR) as HDB upgraders continued to snap up private homes, noted Lee Sze Teck, Huttons Asia director research.

"This is unsurprising as the bulk of the demand came from the HDB upgraders market," said Mr Lee. With the HDB resale market bottoming out in 2019, this segment of buyers will likely bolster the buying volume in 2020, he added. The HDB resale price index edged up in the last two quarters of 2019.

Developers sold 2,635 units in the fourth quarter of 2019, up 43.5 per cent from 1,836 units in the same quarter a year ago. The 10,104-unit total transacted for the full year is 14.9 per cent higher than the 8,795 in 2018 and above the 26-year (1996 to 2018) average of 9,899 units.

In 2020, we could potentially see up to 50 launches and 11,000 units released for sale, said Huttons Asia's Mr Lee. Around 50 per cent of the launches are in the core central region (CCR).

Consultants expect sales momentum in 2019 to carry forward this year, with forecast sales volume at a similar level of between 9,000 and 10,000 units in 2020.

Links to the story:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/real-estate/2019-new-home-sales-top-10000-units-up-15-from-year-ago>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/business/property/new-private-home-sales-up-almost-15-thanks-to-hdb-upgraders>

Citizens from new markets among buyers of top condos here

The cooling measures introduced in July 2018 have dampened overall home-buying demand but in the top end of the condo market, foreigners may have shown more resilience.

Drawing data from the Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) Realis, a report showed that the number of non-landed private residential units in the Core Central Region (CCR) bought by Singaporeans sank some 38 per cent to 2,427 units after the curbs, while that for foreigners including permanent residents declined by about 30 per cent to 1,264 units. Residential purchases by companies in the same region shrank by nearly two-thirds, going from 142 units to 49 units.

Zooming in on the luxury residential real estate segment, the report said "foreign buying demand was more resilient than local demand in the face of the latest cooling measures", suggesting that some foreign buyers who were willing to pay the higher ABSD were high net worth individuals who were only interested in luxury homes.

In absolute terms, "Singapore citizens have always been the largest group of buyers of luxury homes in Singapore, even after the 2018 cooling measures", the report said.

Link to the story:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/real-estate/citizens-from-new-markets-among-buyers-of-top-condos-here>

Avenir sells 20 units on first day of its launch

Hong Leong Holdings Ltd (HLHL) said it moved 20 units of its joint venture "ultra-luxe" condominium project, The Avenir, at an average selling price of S\$2,960 to \$3,560 psf on the first day of its launch.

Only 40 units were released during its weekend launch. Seven out of the 20 units sold were premium apartments, said HLHL in a press release.

Two-thirds of buyers are locals while one-third are foreigners from China and the United States.

Links to the story:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/real-estate/avenir-sells-20-units-on-first-day-of-its-launch>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/business/luxury-river-valley-condo-sells-half-of-40-units-launched>

Van Holland sells 10 units at average S\$2,975 psf at launch

Freehold luxury residence Van Holland has moved 10 out of its 69 units at an average S\$2,975 per sq ft (psf) over its launch weekend, property developer Koh Brothers announced.

A "good mix" of one to three bedroom units were sold, Koh Brothers said in a press release. Most of the buyers are Singaporeans, noted Francis Koh, managing director and chief executive of Koh Brothers.

Link to the story:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/real-estate/van-holland-sells-10-units-at-average-s2975-psf-at-launch>

Freehold 12-unit Casa Sophia sold en bloc for S\$29m

All 12 units of Casa Sophia, a freehold apartment development along Sophia Road, are being sold for a total of S\$29 million.

This works out to around S\$1,200 per sq ft per plot ratio inclusive of an estimated S\$2.2 million development charge, BT understands.

The property is being bought by a Singapore-incorporated company that is equally owned by Chinese citizen Zhang Zhiming and Singaporean Huang Yanhong.

The buyer is expected to redevelop the property.

Link to the story:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/real-estate/freehold-12-unit-casa-sophia-sold-en-bloc-for-s29m>

Singapore condo resale volume shrinks 27.4% in 2019: SRX

The number of Singapore condominium units resold last year totalled just 9,017, sliding 27.4 per cent from 2018, according to a latest report on the non-landed private residential resale market.

As for December 2019, an estimated 650 units were resold during the month, dropping 15.4 per cent from the previous month but increasing 21.5 per cent year on year (y-o-y).

Meanwhile, overall prices of resale condos edged up by 1.7 per cent y-o-y in 2019, SRX noted. All regions saw costlier transacted units last year: prices rose 1.5 per cent in the core central region (CCR), 0.6 per cent in the rest of central region (RCR) and 2.3 per cent for condos outside of central region (OCR).

Links to the story:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/real-estate/singapore-condo-resale-volume-shrinks-274-in-2019-srx-0>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/business/property/condo-resale-prices-inch-up-in-2019-but-sales-plunge>

Rents for private non-landed homes and HDB flats rise in Dec 2019 from a year ago

Rents for both non-landed private homes and Housing Board flats rose in December last year from the year before, even as the number of rented condominium and private apartment units, and HDB homes, rose for the whole of 2019.

Flash data from a real estate portal showed that overall condominium and private apartment rents rose 3.7 per cent in December 2019 from a year ago, although rents last month decreased 0.9 per cent from November.

Figures in December 2019 are 16.6 per cent below their peak in January 2013.

Year on year, non-landed private home rents were up in all areas last month: the prime or core central region rose by 3.9 per cent, the city fringe of rest of central region by 4 per cent, and in the suburbs or outside central region by 3.1 per cent.

For non-landed private home rental transactions, there were 58,236 homes leased for the whole of 2019, 2.3 per cent more than a year ago.

Over in the public housing market, HDB rents in December last year increased 1.3 per cent from a year ago. December's rents also inched up by 0.1 per cent from November.

The number of HDB flats leased for the whole of last year hit 23,958, 1.9 per cent higher than 2018.

Links to the story:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/real-estate/rents-for-private-non-landed-homes-and-hdb-flats-rise-in-dec-2019-from-a-year-ago>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/housing-rents-inch-up-last-year-but-still-far-from-2013-peaks>

Commercial

WeWork to continue expansion in Singapore; market profitable despite global layoffs, says MD

Co-working space operator WeWork has been dogged by cash flow problems and was forced to lay off about a fifth of its workforce last year, but it remains in robust health in this region, it seems.

The layoffs - about 2,400 workers were affected - did not heavily affect Singapore and South-east Asia, said Mr Turochas Fuad, WeWork managing director for the region.

"Because of the fact that Singapore is a very profitable market, the impact was definitely less significant compared to the global numbers," he noted.

Mr Fuad noted that the Singapore outfit, which has around 200 staff, turned profitable within its first year of operation.

It has three more sites slated to open in Singapore this year, including the 21-storey building at 21 Collyer Quay occupied by HSBC. Mr Fuad said WeWork is looking to start operations at the building around the end of the year.

It is also expanding its Battery Road space from three floors to 14 at MYP Centre.

Link to the story:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/business/companies-markets/wework-to-continue-expansion-in-spore>

Hong Kong funds eye Singapore offices to dodge protest fallout

Hong Kong's protests are spurring more asset managers from the city to ask about opening offices in Singapore, according to consultants.

While the unrest is not the only factor, the development adds to signs that Singapore is picking up business in part due to the protests. The list includes a private equity gathering that is moving to Singapore this year, family office advisers getting calls about clients looking into the logistics for moves, and Hong Kong parents eyeing Singapore schools.

Link to the story:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/business/banking/hong-kong-funds-eye-singapore-offices-to-dodge-protest-fallout-0>

UBS wealth management overhaul claims around 20 jobs in Singapore

The wealth management arm of UBS, Switzerland's largest bank, is said to have laid off around 20 front-office employees in Singapore last week as part of a major global restructuring led by new division co-head Iqbal Khan.

A majority of the private bankers who got cut were desk heads or team leaders, people familiar with the matter told The Business Times (BT). Some wealth management client advisers, also known as relationship managers, were affected as well, the people said.

UBS declined to comment on the extent of the retrenchments so far, or if there would be further job cuts in Singapore.

Links to the story:

<https://www.business-times.com.sg/banking-finance/ubs-wealth-management-overhaul-claims-around-20-jobs-in-singapore>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/business/banking/ubs-starts-job-cuts-at-all-levels-in-asia-europe>

Retail

Retail sales not all sparkling at Jewel Changi Airport despite the crowds

Jewel Changi Airport may often be crowded but this has not translated into strong sales for all tenants.

Nine months after the opening of the 10-storey development, which boasts more than 280 shops and food and beverage outlets, some retailers say business has been slow.

When The Straits Times visited Jewel recently, sales staff at eight out of 17 shops surveyed said meeting sales targets has been challenging. Stores that offer unique concepts or are exclusively located at Jewel seem to be doing better than retail chains that have multiple outlets in more accessible areas of Singapore.

When asked about the retail environment at Jewel, Changi Airport Group referred The Straits Times to an October statement which said that the 135,700 sq m complex welcomes as many as 300,000 visitors a day.

The statement also said that Jewel attracted about 50 million visitors, including repeat customers, in its first six months. This figure surpassed the initial target of drawing 40 million to 50 million visitors yearly.

Link to the story:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/retail-sales-not-all-sparkling-at-jewel-despite-the-crowds>

Government

Makeover plans for Pasir Panjang Power District

By the mid-2020s, Singapore's Pasir Panjang Power District could host concepts such as a drone race course, a hobby factory run by seniors, a hotel, residences, giant slides or even a floating pool perched along the coast.

It will be one of the first few sites to be developed along the Greater Southern Waterfront, a stretch from Marina East to Pasir Panjang that will be transformed for residential and leisure use as the port shifts to Tuas.

The ideas, put forth by members of the public and architects, are now on display at the Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) Maxwell Road Centre, following a call for ideas to reimagine the place last year.

The waterfront land parcel will be released for development, possibly through a tender, sometime next year, National Development Minister Lawrence Wong said.

Link to the story:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/makeover-plans-for-pasir-panjang-power-district>

MOM raises penalties for unfair hiring practices; firm charged over false declaration

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) has upped the penalties for unfair hiring, even as an employer has become the first to be accused in court of making a false declaration following a probe into the company's allegedly discriminatory hiring.

Manpower Minister Josephine Teo announced that employers caught practising discrimination in their recruitment of workers stand to be barred from applying for work pass renewals for their existing workers during the period of debarment. Previously, debarment mostly applied only to new applications.

In addition, these employers will not be able to apply for new work passes for at least 12 months - up from at least six. For "more egregious cases", the debarment can last for up to 24 months.

The higher penalties apply to all work passes and can be imposed for various discriminatory hiring practices, including those on the basis of age, race, nationality and state of mental health.

Links to the story:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/government-economy/mom-raises-penalties-for-unfair-hiring-practices-firm-charged-over-false>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/firms-to-pay-heavier-price-if-they-dont-give-locals-a-fair-shot-at-jobs>

Economy

Retail sales fall for 10th straight month

Even huge shopping events like Singles' Day and Black Friday that had consumers shelling out left, right, and centre failed to lift retail sales in Singapore last November - the 10th straight month of decline.

Takings at the till fell 4 per cent compared with the same month in 2018 and largely in line with the 4.1 per cent decline predicted by analysts polled by Bloomberg.

If motor vehicles were excluded, retail sales would have fallen 0.6 per cent year on year, the Statistics Department noted.

Total retail sales value in November came in at about \$3.6 billion, with online turnover comprising an estimated 8 per cent, up from 6.1 per cent in October last year.

Links to the story:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/business/economy/retail-sales-fall-for-10th-straight-month>

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/infographics/retail-sales-continue-downward-jag-in-november>

Container throughput at Singapore port hits record high in 2019

Container throughput at the Port of Singapore hit an all-time high of 37.2 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) in 2019, the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) announced in a press release.

The 2019 container throughput is 1.6 per cent higher than the 36.6 million TEUs registered in 2018, and 31 per cent higher than the 28.4 million TEUs in 2010. This marks "strong growth in the past decade" amid challenging economic conditions, MPA noted.

The Port of Singapore handled a total of 626.2 million tonnes of cargo in 2019, down 0.6 per cent from 2018. Meanwhile, vessel arrival tonnage hit 2.85 billion gross tonnage (GT) in 2019, up 2.2 per cent from the previous year.

Singapore registered a bunker sale volume of 47.5 million tonnes in 2019, down 4.6 per cent. Nevertheless, MPA said in its press release that Singapore remains a key bunkering port.

Links to the story:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/government-economy/container-throughput-at-singapore-port-hits-record-high-in-2019>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/business/singapores-shipping-throughput-hits-record-high>

Shophouse

6 Chinatown shophouses up for sale with \$141m guide price

A portfolio of six conservation shophouses in Chinatown has been launched for sale via an expression of interest exercise, with a guide price of \$141 million.

Four of them are adjoining shophouses located at 42, 43, 44, 45 Mosque Street, while the remaining two adjoining shophouses are at 54, 56 Pagoda Street.

The group of four sit on a combined land area of around 8,804 sq ft, with a gross floor area of about 34,238 sq ft.

Meanwhile, the three-storey duo in Pagoda Street is on the doorstep of Chinatown MRT station. They have a land area of 3,010 sq ft and a total floor area of 9,226 sq ft.

The expression of interest exercise for the portfolio will close at 3pm on March 5.

Link to the story:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/business/property/6-chinatown-shophouses-up-for-sale-with-141m-guide-price>

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