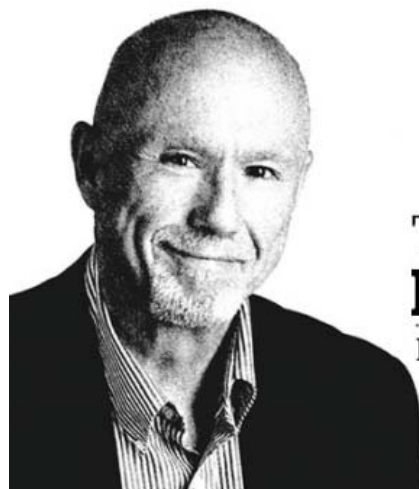


## SULLIVAN: The Millionaire Club ain't what it used to be

Paul Sullivan / North Shore News

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The  
**NORTH SIDE**  
Paul Sullivan

The property assessments are in for 2016. Hello, all you new millionaires out there.

I'm talking about you, homeowners of Central Lonsdale, where the assessed value of your detached homes went up 22 per cent from \$984,000 to \$1.19 million.

Or you in the Hamilton Street area, up 24 per cent, over the million-dollar threshold to \$1.15 million.

How does it feel to be sitting on more than a million bucks worth of property?

It doesn't mean what it once did, does it? There was a time it would have been a mark of distinction. These days, it feels more like a mark of extinction. And I mean that literally. If your property is worth more than \$1.2 million, you no longer qualify for that \$570 homeowner's grant on your property tax.

I know. Cry me a river, right?

But the real estate situation in Metro Vancouver is so cockeyed that many property millionaires can't afford to pay a \$500 tax boost.

The North Shore is just as infected by real estate disease as the rest of Metro. Everywhere you look: millionaires. Blueridge? Up 19 per cent to \$1.05 million. Lynn Valley? \$1.13 million, up 13 per cent. Of course, don't forget Canada's priciest postal code: the year over year average increase of 16.9 per cent in West Van is in the province's top five.

Sadly, most of this new wealth is kind of illusory. If you sell and cash in, try to find comparable lodgings anywhere south of Pemberton or west of Hope. I suppose you could move to Tumbler Ridge, where real estate values have decreased more than 30 per cent in the last year, and the average price of a home is now below \$200,000 thanks to the collapse of the resource economy. Of course, you'd have to live in Tumbler Ridge.

And most of us have really done nothing to build our little piles of equity, except insist on waking up every morning (beats the alternative). When our family moved here in '89, we bought a house in Norgate for a price that was south of

\$170,000. Now, houses in Norgate, if you can find one, are straddling the million-dollar mark. A million bucks gets you 1,500 square feet on a concrete slab. It's kind of like a double-wide without the promise of mobility.

Many of us are sitting in these dubious mansions waiting for the roof to fall in. Mostly that's a metaphor for a market correction, but for some it's a literal possibility as all available cash goes into the mortgage payment, and there's none left for trifles like roofs and plumbing.

And that's if you can afford the mortgage payment. Someday, mortgage rates are going to rise above the current ridiculously low levels, and when the time comes to renegotiate the sticker shock could kill more than one momentary millionaire.

Yep, for those of us not willing to move to Tumbler Ridge or Moose Jaw, all that lovely equity is effectively useless. You're talking about our homes in our hometown. We don't want to move.

But, motivated by the promise of a pot of cash at the end of the rainbow, people get clever. They go out and find the next North or West Vancouver. It's called Squamish, where you can still buy in. You'd better hurry; Squamish has already been infected by million-dollar disease — prices have gone up more than 17 per cent over last year — so if you wait much longer, you will be commuting from Pemberton.

Or you could try Vancouver Island. Just get into that three-sailing wait with all the other boomers from across Canada who want to live in a place where it's not winter from October to May.

The real estate market may be hot, but real estate is cold comfort. I get a kick out of that Millionaire Lottery jingle: Live like a Millionaire. How's that? Huddled in the cold because you can't afford the heat, waiting for the plumbing to freeze or the bank to foreclose? Enjoy.

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