

## Tips for Finding the Perfect Neighborhood

The neighborhood you choose can have a big impact on your lifestyle—safety, available amenities, and convenience all play their part.

1. Make a list of the activities—movies, health club, church—you engage in regularly and stores you visit frequently. See how far you would have to travel from each neighborhood you're considering to engaging in your most common activities.
2. Check out the school district. The Department of Education in your town can probably provide information on test scores, class size, percentage of students who attend college, and special enrichment programs. If you have school-age children, also consider paying a visit to schools in the neighborhoods you're considering. Even if you don't have children, a house in a good school district will be easier to sell in the future.
3. Find out if the neighborhood is safe. Ask the police department for neighborhood crime statistics. Consider not only the number of crimes but also the type—burglaries, armed robberies—and the trend of increasing or decreasing crime. Also, is crime centered in only one part of the neighborhood, such as near a retail area?
4. Determine if the neighborhood is economically stable. Check with your local city economic development office to see if income and property values in the neighborhood are stable or rising. What is the percentage of homes to apartments? Apartments don't necessarily diminish value, but they do mean a more transient population. Do you see vacant businesses or homes that have been for sale for months?
5. See if you'll make money. Ask a local REALTOR® or call the local REALTOR® association to get information about price appreciation trends in the neighborhood. Although past performance is no guarantee of future results, this information may give you a sense of how good an investment your home will be. A REALTOR® or the government planning agency also may be able to tell you about planned developments or other changes in the neighborhood—like a new school or highway—that might affect value.
6. See for yourself. Once you've narrowed your focus to two or three neighborhoods, go there, and walk around. Are homes tidy and well maintained? Are streets quiet? Pick a warm day if you can and chat with people working or playing outside. Are they friendly? Are their children to play with your family?

## **Tips on Buying in a Tight Market**

Increase your chances of getting your dream house instead of losing it to another buyer, with these easy steps.

1. Get prequalified for a mortgage. You'll be able to make a firm commitment to buy and make your offer more desirable to the seller.
2. Stay in close touch with your real estate sales associate to find out first about new listings that come on the market. And be ready to go see a house as soon as it goes on the market.
3. Scout out new listings yourself. Look at Internet sites, newspaper ads, and drive by the neighborhood frequently. Maybe you'll see a brand-new "for sale" sign before anyone else.
4. Be ready to make a decision. Spend lots of time in advance deciding what you must have so you won't be unsure when you have the chance to make an offer.
5. Bid competitively. You may not want to start out offering the absolute highest price you can afford, but don't try to go too low to get a deal. In a tight market, you'll lose out.
6. Keep contingencies to a minimum. Restrictions such as needing to sell your home before you move or wanting to delay the closing until a certain date can make your offer unappealing. In a tight market, you'll probably be able to sell your house rapidly. Or talk to your lender about getting a bridge loan to cover both mortgages for a short period.
7. Don't get caught in a buying frenzy. Just because there's competition doesn't mean you should just buy anything. And even though you want to make your offer attractive, don't neglect inspections that help ensure that your house is sound.

## The Pros and Cons of Condos

Condominiums and townhouses offer an affordable option to single-family homes in most areas. But consider these facts before you buy.

1. **Storage.** Some condos have storage lockers, but usually there are no attics or basements to store belongings.
2. **Outdoor space.** Yards and outdoor areas are usually smaller in condos, so if you like to garden or entertain outdoors, this may not be a good fit. However, if you hate yard work, this may be the perfect option for you.
3. **Amenities.** Many condo properties have swimming pools, fitness centers, and other facilities that would be very expensive in a single-family home.
4. **Maintenance.** Many condos have onsite maintenance personnel to care for common areas, do repairs in your unit, and let in workers when you're not home.
5. **Security.** Many condos have keyed entries and or even door attendants. Plus, you'll be closer to other people in case of an emergency.
6. **Reserve funds and association fees.** Although fees generally help pay for amenities and provide savings for future repairs, you will have to pay the fees agreed to by the condo board, whether or not you're interested in the amenity or not.
7. **Resale.** The ease of selling your unit is more dependent on what else is for sale in your building, since units are usually fairly similar. Single-family homes usually are more individual.
8. **Freedom.** Although you have a vote, the rules of the condo association can affect your ability to use your property. For example, some condos prohibit home-based businesses. Others prohibit pets. Read the covenants, restrictions, and bylaws of the condo carefully before you make an offer.
9. **Proximity.** You're much closer to your neighbors in a condo or townhome. If possible, try to meet your closest prospective neighbors before making a decision.

## 5 Reasons You Need a REALTOR®

1. A real estate transaction is complicated. In most cases, buying or selling a home requires disclosure forms, inspection reports, mortgage documents, insurance policies, deeds, and multi-page government-mandated settlement statements. A knowledgeable guide through this complexity can help you avoid delays or costly mistakes.
2. Selling or buying a home is time consuming. Even in a strong market, homes in our area stay on the market for an average of \_\_\_\_ days. And it usually takes another 60 days or so for the transaction to close after an offer is accepted.
3. Real estate has its own language. If you don't know a CMA from a PUD, you can understand why it's important to work with someone who speaks that language.
4. REALTORS® have done it before. Most people buy and sell only a few homes in a lifetime, usually with quite a few years in between each purchase. And even if you've done it before, laws and regulations change. That's why having an expert on your side is critical.
5. REALTORS® provide objectivity. Since a home often symbolizes family, rest, and security, not just four walls and roof, homeselling or buying is often a very emotional undertaking. And for most people, a home is the biggest purchase they'll ever make. Having a concerned, but objective, third party helps you keep focused on both the business and emotional issues most important to you.
6. REALTORS® are members of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, a trade organization of more than 1 million members nationwide. REALTORS® subscribe to a stringent code of ethics that helps guarantee the highest level of service and integrity.

## Questions to Ask When Choosing a REALTOR®

1. How long have you been in residential real estate sales? Is it your full-time job? (While experience is no guarantee of skill, real estate, like many other professions, is mostly learned on the job.)
2. What designations do you hold? (Designations, such as GRI and CRS®, which require that real estate professionals take additional, specialized real estate training, are held by only about one-quarter of real estate practitioners.)
3. How many homes did you and your company sell last year?
4. How many days did it take you to sell the average home? How did that compare to the overall market?
5. How close to the initial asking prices of the homes you sold were the final sale prices?
6. What types of specific marketing systems and approaches will you use to sell my home? (Look for someone who has aggressive, innovative approaches, not just someone who's going to put a sign in the yard and hope for the best.)
7. Will you represent me exclusively, or will you represent both the buyer and the seller in the transaction? (While it's usually legal to represent both parties in a transaction, it's important to understand where the practitioner's obligations lie. A good practitioner will explain the agency relationship to you and describe the rights of each party. It's also possible to insist that the practitioner represent you exclusively.)
8. Can you recommend service providers who can assist me in obtaining a mortgage, making repairs on my home, and other things I need done? (Keep in mind here that real estate professionals should generally recommend more than one provider and should tell you if they receive any compensation from any provider.)
9. What type of support and supervision does your brokerage office provide to you? (Having resources, such as in-house support staff, access to a real estate attorney, or assistance with technology, can help a real estate professional sell your home.)
10. What's your business philosophy? (While there's no right answer to this question, the response will help you assess what's important to the real estate practitioner—fast sales, service, etc.—and determine how closely the practitioner's goals and business emphasis mesh with your own.)
11. How will you keep me informed about the progress of my transaction? How frequently? Using what media? (Again, this is not a question with a correct answer, but that one reflects your desires. Do you want updates twice a week or don't want to be bothered unless there's a hot prospect? Do you prefer phone, e-mail, or a personal visit?)
12. Could you please give me the names and phone numbers of your three most recent clients?