

Real Estate

YOUR HOME | YOUR LIFE



Land a High Appraisal

As many home buyers and sellers have found, an appraisal can make a world of difference in guiding a home's final selling price.

Not an exact science, the act of appraising a property provides an objective opinion that can be based on market value. And although final values can differ from appraiser to appraiser, there are certain steps you can take to make sure your home's price is in fighting shape when it hits the market.

GO LOCAL

Not all appraisers are created equal – at least in terms of knowing your neighborhood. Appraisers who don't know your area intimately can come back with an uninformed value.

And since the quality of your home's surroundings is a big factor within the appraisal process, finding a local appraiser who understands your location can be crucial in getting the most out of your asking price.

BE RESPECTFUL

Do not crowd your appraiser while he or she is making rounds through your home. Remember they are there to do their job, so try to avoid becoming a distraction.

Offer a few bits of information on improvements you have made to the home and positive changes that have occurred recently in your neighborhood, and then let them get to work.

Some appraisers connect a chatty homeowner with potential red flags on something they may be trying to hide about the house.

ADD VALUE

Well before you sell your home, consider making your improvements

strategically and in line with what will get you the most bang for your buck.

Fix up your bathroom and kitchen,

which are the top two rooms that can generate a positive return for your investment. The National Association

of Realtors also identifies wood floors, landscaping and enclosed garages as drivers that can increase appraisals.



Real Estate Agent Etiquette

Does your real estate agent have the right etiquette? When buying or selling a home, there are certain traits we expect from our representative.

Integrity, responsiveness and ethics are just a few. But what about etiquette? Real estate is a business built on reputation and word-of-mouth. Realtors are professionally trained to deliver their service in line with all etiquette standards.

Here are the signs of a real estate agent who displays optimum etiquette. Do not feel guilty about reporting agents who don't take their responsibilities seriously. Their employers understand the impact that dissatisfied customers can have on their overall brand and will be quick to help you resolve any issues.

- **Public Respect:** Great real estate agents are professional, courteous and always show up on time. They are respectful of their clients' time and work hard to accommodate their schedules when coordinating meetings and showings.

- **Communications:** Particularly if you're selling or buying your first home, you may be feeling overwhelmed with all of the information coming your way. A good Realtor will help convey this crucial material in concise, comprehensible terms for you to understand.

- **Full Attention:** Top-tier Realtors make you feel like you're the only client in the world. They ignore their ringing cell phone while meeting with you and are easy to track down through phone or email. It is a bit unfair to expect your Realtor to be 100-percent available, so be sure to show some flexibility of your own – as long as your agent gets back to you in a reasonable amount of time.

- **Notice:** If you're selling your home, then you understand the following nightmare scenario: Your house is a wreck and your real estate agent calls to ask if you can show it in 30 minutes to some interested clients. You don't want to lose a potential buyer, so you agree. A courteous agent will give you more notice than this so you don't feel under the gun to clean and vacate your home.



Green Is Good

Heating and cooling accounts for about 56 percent of the energy use in a typical United States home, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

This statistic has played a part in more homeowners going green. Environmentally friendly building, remodeling and decorating can all go a long way in decreasing our energy consumption, which can have a major positive impact on our wallets and the world around us.

HERE TO STAY

Going green is not a trend. Nine out of 10 recent home buyers say that heating and cooling costs were either “somewhat” or “very” important in choosing a home to purchase, according to a 2013 survey by the National Association of Realtors.

Twenty-four percent of survey-takers also said that energy-efficient appliances and lighting were important.

Other interesting findings included that buyers in the north and south placed a greater weight on heating and cooling costs, while new home buyers found more value in environmentally friendly features than those who purchased existing homes.

THE GREEN DESIGNATION

In 2008, the National Association of Realtors launched the Green Designation, which has provided training to nearly 9,000 real estate professionals.

The specialized trainings are focused on marketing homes with green features and building sustainable business practices. Realtors are equipped with knowledge of features,

strategies and even funding opportunities related to green living.

TAX BREAKS

The federal government is doing its part to convince home and business owners to think green.

Established by The Energy Policy Act of 2005, the federal tax credit for residential energy property now applies to solar-electric systems, solar water heating systems, fuel cells, small wind-energy systems and geothermal heat pumps.

The credit is available until Dec.

31, 2016, and allows a taxpayer to claim a credit of 30 percent of qualified system expenditures, which include labor costs for on-site preparation, assembly or original system installation, and for piping or wiring to interconnect a system to the home.



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Ensure a Successful Move

If all goes well with your plans to sell, you could be moving before you know it. But have you put in the proper planning? Have you coordinated moving trucks, utilities and an optimum closing date?

Those are all crucial aspects to consider, for sure, but ones you can be on top of with a little due diligence and strategy.

LESS IS MORE

The second you put your home on the market, you are announcing your readiness to pack up your belongings. But are you truly ready? Just how long will it take you to organize and box your items?

Even before you enlist the help of a realtor to sell your home, start paring down your possessions. There is no need to transport what you don't need to your new home.

Have a yard sale for extra moving cash or make a donation to your local charitable organization. The less clutter the better when it comes time to load up the moving truck.

CLOSING STRATEGY

Price isn't the only aspect of selling your home that you should negotiate. Experts urge you to build in some overlap between the closing dates of your old and new homes.

This will afford you the ability to paint walls, install flooring or make any last-minute repairs before you move in to your new home. Talk to your Realtor and mortgage broker about ways to make sure you have plenty of time to do so.

THE (LITTLE) BIG THINGS

In the excitement of moving, some aspects of a smooth transition can get lost in the shuffle.

Once you know your home is going to sell, start arranging for phone and utility hookups in your new home. These companies generally need a few days or more to get you connected and ready for service. Even the perfect new home will be less than ideal with no running water or utilities.

Also arrange for the type of internet connection you want. If you're moving from town into the country, reach out to your local phone or cable provider to find out your options or if your area is even equipped for high-speed connections.



Real Estate in Retirement

Retiring comfortably with plenty of funds for the perfect beachside condo is simply not realistic for many Americans.

A recent public policy institute study on housing by the American Association for Retired Persons found that many older adults are facing more difficult circumstances today than they were at the turn of the century.

This has left many people searching for the most affordable housing options on the market.

DOWNSIZE?

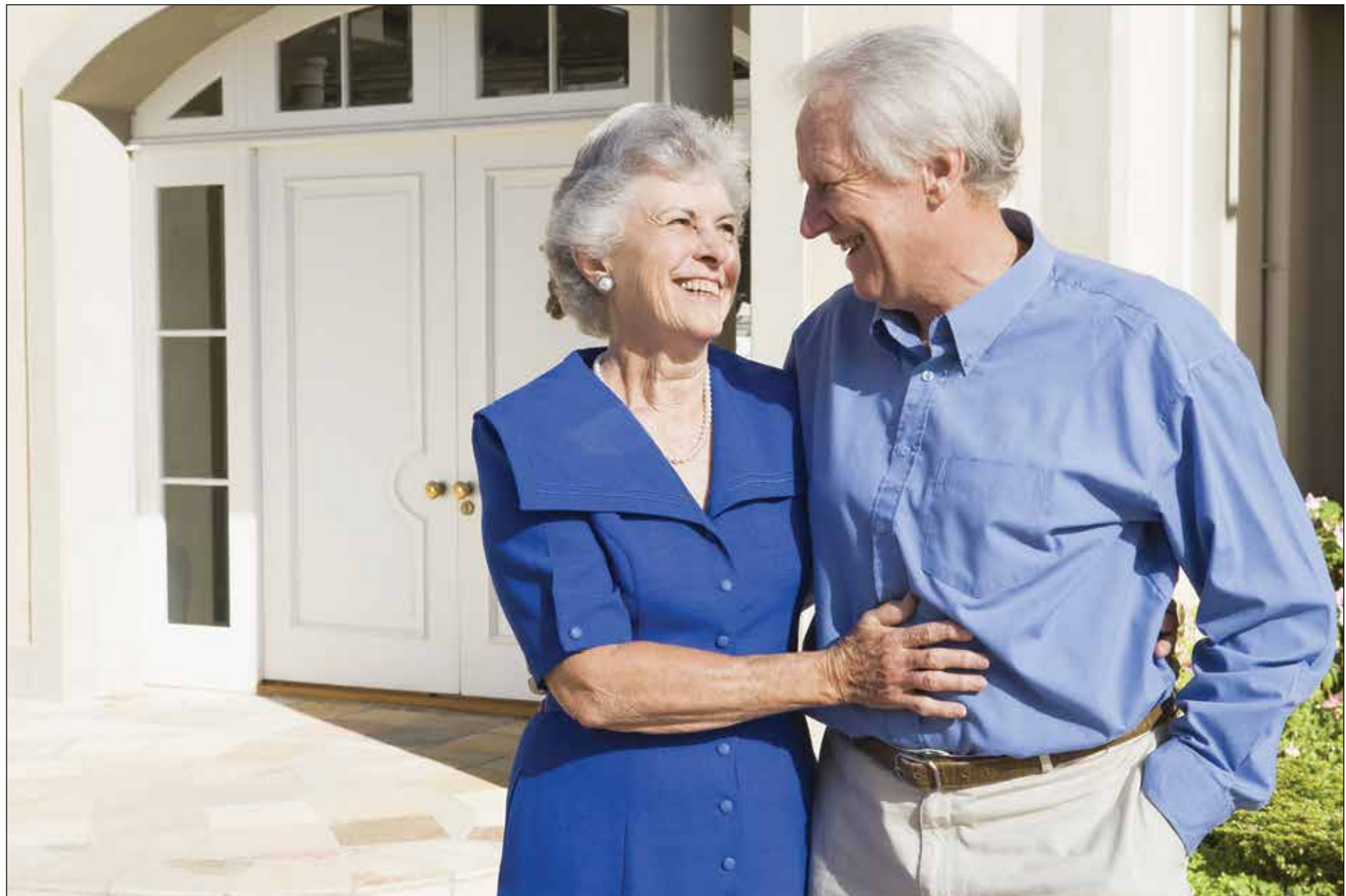
One of the best ways to preserve your nest egg is selling your present home for a smaller, more affordable option.

This can also include selling land to reduce property taxes or moving into a community housing arrangement set up on smaller lots.

But more than size and land, location can be the deciding factor in whether or not opting for a smaller home will save you money in the long run.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

More than 40 percent of Americans ages 50 to 64 plan on moving within the next five years, according to Nielsen's Demand Institute. If you're one of them, there are some very important factors to weigh before signing the



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closing papers.

There are seven, to be exact, says a collaborative study conducted by MetLife Mature Market and Stanford Center on Longevity: Housing, transportation, safe neighborhoods, health care,

supportive services, amenities and social integration.

COLLEGE TOWNS?

The AARP has surveyed many retirees who are opting to live their retirement years

in college towns, and many developers are building retirement communities affiliated with universities.

These developments often give residents full access to university facilities, not to mention an affordable array

of sporting events for retired sports enthusiasts.

Living close to colleges and universities also allows retirees the option of pursuing continuing education opportunities like courses in art, cooking or a foreign language.

Small Room? Make it Big

Very few factors have as big of an impact on home value than square footage. Small houses, and in particular small rooms, can be hard to furnish and design.

But that doesn't mean you have to tear down walls to solve your size issue. There are many things you can either add or take away from a smaller space to help convey the impression of a larger space.

THE RIGHT COLORS

A general rule to follow when trying to convert your smaller space into a seemingly larger living area is the lighter the better.

From bright white to muted cream, there are certain color combinations that not only look great, but create an optical illusion of sorts that can help make a room look brighter and bigger.

Lighter colors are more reflective and can bounce natural sunlight through the room, while dark colors absorb light and give off a more closed-in appearance.

Adding brightly colored art pieces and decorations into your smaller space can complement your wall color, amplifying the openness of the room.

LIGHTING IS KEY

In addition to the right colors, lighting can play a big role in visually boosting your



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living space.

Natural light is best, obviously, but there are certain things you can do to amplify a room even without windows. Choosing lamps or recess lighting with a unique structural design can help brighten up your room with a modern

touch. Be sure to choose high-wattage bulbs for optimum lighting.

If there is any way to add a window or a skylight to your room, this will be your best bet, helping connect your interior to the outdoors.

CLEAN IT UP

Have you ever walked into a room full of clutter and commented on just how much space there was? Not likely.

De-cluttering your small room – and keeping it that way – is a great strategy for

adding some extra space. If you're short on storage for a lot of the extra items in your room, you can build shelves for extra storing space.

Moving things from the floor to the walls will open up walking space and keep your room clutter-free.

Realty: By the Numbers

Ever wonder how long the average home takes to sell? How much percentage of the market is first-time homebuyers? The National Association of Realtors found out. Their 2012 numbers below show some interesting trends in the realty process.

ACTIVE HOME SEARCH (MEDIAN):

- Number of weeks searched: 12
- Number of homes seen: 10

FIRST-TIME VS. REPEAT BUYERS:

- First-time buyers: 39%
- Median age of first-time buyers: 31
- Median age of repeat buyers: 51

REPEAT AGENTS:

- Buyers who would use same agent again: 84%

ACTIONS TAKEN AS RESULT OF INTERNET HOME SEARCH:

- Walked through a home viewed online: 62%
- Found agent used to search/buy home: 32%
- Drove by/viewed a home: 76%

INFORMATION SOURCES USED IN HOME SEARCH:

- Internet: 90%
- Real estate agent: 87%
- Yard sign: 53%
- Open house: 45%
- Home book or magazine: 18%

