

Preparing Your Home For Sale

Make a great first impression

Prospective buyers make up their minds about your house even before they get out of the car. To ensure they have the right idea, mow the lawn, clean up your yard, shovel the snow, and sweep driveways and porches. Make sure that your front door, porch, railings and steps are washed if they require it, and tuck away all recycling and garbage bins at the back of the house.

De-clutter

Clutter eats equity, as many prospective buyers cannot see past it. And because you are already planning to move, this is a great time to pack away any items that are not necessities. Purge your closets, empty cupboards, and box up decorative items. All surfaces (counter tops, table tops, shelving, etc.) should be at least three-quarters empty. Furniture can also be a form of clutter and reducing it and rearranging it can often make rooms feel more spacious and help with traffic flow. If necessary, rent a storage locker to keep what you want, and then donate or throw away the rest.

De-personalize

You want potential buyers to be able to imagine themselves living in your home, so stash away items that are connected to your family or personal interests (i.e., trophies, photos, etc.). Also make sure that personal hygiene products, such as shampoo bottles and toothbrushes, are also tucked away.

Keep it fresh

There's nothing worse than having a potential buyer walk into your home and smell smoke, pet or cooking odors. A good solution is to try and open all your windows for 10-15 minutes a day, rather than spraying a lot of air freshener - which may make the problem worse or trigger allergies for people visiting your home. Carpeting and upholstered furniture can absorb a lot of odors, so you may also want to consider having these items professionally shampooed. If you smoke, try to smoke outside until your house is sold.

Declare a war on grime

Cleanliness is one of the most important aspects of preparing your home for sale, as it often gives potential buyers the impression that a home is well cared for. Your home will be closely inspected by visitors, so do a thorough cleaning of your entire home including appliances, walls, door handles, light fixtures and the inside of cupboards. If you don't have time to do a proper cleaning it is worth the investment of hiring a professional cleaner to do it for you.

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Hire a handyman

Dripping faucets, cracked tiles and moldy caulking can knock thousands of dollars off of the price of your home. When buyers see these "small" maintenance items, they often get the impression that a home is not being looked after and "needs a lot of work", which can result in a lower offer (or no offer at all). A fresh coat of neutral paint in key rooms can also help provide the impression that a home is clean and well maintained.

Light it up

The brighter and sunnier the space, the easier it is to sell. Start by making sure all of your windows are clean, which can let in as much as 30% more light! Thoroughly clean light fixtures and shades, and add lighting to areas that seem dim. It is also a good idea to temporarily remove any energy-saving bulbs that can be dimmer and cast unflattering light, and replace with traditional higher-wattage bulbs (making sure to put in the maximum wattage allowed per fixture, but not more than is allowed).

Make sure your home is safe

If you have listed your home in the winter, make sure that your driveway and walkways are shovelled and clear of debris and ice. Every effort should also be made to remove any potential hazards inside the home including pets. All dogs - big or small - can be unpredictable when strangers are entering a home, and it is important that you avoid any potential liability by making sure they are not in the home when your house is on the market and viewings are taking place. Also, not all potential buyers will be "pet people", and/or may have allergies, and you don't want them making a decision about whether or not to buy your home based on the fact that you have pets. So make sure you have a solid plan in place for having your pets stay elsewhere while your home is on the market, or at a minimum have them away from the home during viewing hours.

Every day

If your property is active on the market and showings are taking place, follow this daily checklist to be sure your home is looking its best:

- Beds are made
- Daily personal items are put away (i.e. toothbrush, mail, shoes, etc.)
- Kitchen and bathrooms are clean
- Floors have been swept and/or vacuumed
- Curtains and blinds are open
- Lights are on
- Alarm is off
- Home has been aired-out for 10 minutes or more
- Pets are elsewhere, yard is free of dog waste, and litterbox is cleaned
- Driveway/sidewalks are shoveled and safe
- Special instructions have been communicated to your agent (i.e. certain door locks shouldn't be used).