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ALL-POINTS CHECKLIST FOR SELLING YOUR HOME



FOR SALE

Nothing pays *dividends* to sellers of a house quite like elbow grease. Good *housekeeping and repair, spaciousness, and pleasant aromas bring top dollar and fast sales*. Conversely, the *demons* to the business of homeselling are *dirt, lack of light and space, too much deferred maintenance, and bad odors*.

This checklist endeavors to pinpoint those specific items around the home that are or can be the key to a successful sale. The list is extensive, but the most salable properties usually reflect attention to each of the areas discussed. If your home has extensive deferred maintenance and time or funds are limited, it may not be practical to cover all the points, but do the best job possible.

Now that you've decided to sell your home, there are a number of things which you can do to help get the best possible price in the shortest amount of time. So invest the time to make your home sparkle. Use this checklist as a guide to a faster more profitable sale.

THE YARD AND EXTERIOR

PAINT. Few things will enhance the salability of a house quite so much as painting the outside. Before painting, scrap or water-blast any blistered or peeling paint; repair gutters and downspouts; and replace wood showing dry rot. Wood, trimwork, gutters, and wrought iron should receive primary attention.

FRONT ENTRY. Give special care to this area. This is where buyers get their first opportunity to make a close inspection, and they will pick it apart looking for flaws, so eliminate them. All woodwork should be freshly and neatly painted, including the front and storm doors. Replace a badly worn or broken doorbell button. Polish the door brass and make sure that all door knobs are tight and working properly. Repaint or replace an unsightly mailbox. Replace or repair any cracked or crumbling stoops, walkways, or sidewalks, and put out a new or clean door mat. Do a thorough weeding and pruning job on any flower beds near the entry, and try to have some flowering plants growing.

YARD. Mow and trim the lawn. Weed flower beds, trim shrubs and bushes, and remove or replace dead plants or trees. Water regularly during the growing season. Pick-up any debris, toys or lawn equipment.

DRIVEWAY, GARAGE/CARPORT. Wash down the driveway and the sidewalks. Clean up grease or oil spots; remove the soil at least, if not the stain. See that the garage door opens freely and that the automatic door opener is in good working order. If possible don't park cars in front of the house or in the driveway, and try to have very few parked on the street near the house. Recreational vehicles or boats should be in the garage or carport or behind a fence in the back. Derelict cars or ones being overhauled should not be visible from the street and preferably should not even be present.

FENCE. A few missing stakes or slats are real eyesores to buyers, yet are usually inexpensive and easy to fix. Repair, paint, or stain as necessary.

ROOF. Make sure that roof is in good repair. Straighten the TV antenna, if necessary. Remove any tree branches bearing on the roof. Clean and wash out all gutters and downspouts.

AIR CONDITIONERS/EVAPORATIVE COOLERS. Repaint or replace any rusted exposed metal. Correct improper draining.

PATIO. A nice spread of outdoor furniture looks very appealing. If necessary, borrow from a friend to enhance showability.

SWIMMING POOL. Adjust chemicals until the pool sparkles. Hose dust and cobwebs from filtration equipment. Store chemicals and tools neatly.

LOOK AT BASICS AROUND THE HOUSE

WINDOWS. Repair or replace torn or bent screens. As a last resort, remove them entirely; no screens are better than unsightly ones. Replace any cracked or broken panes. Make sure that all windows open easily and remain open as designed. Also, notice foliage near windows. A window framed in ivy can give a warm, homey feeling, but cut it back if the foliage is restricting the light coming into the room. Drapery rods should be affixed firmly to walls and work smoothly; draperies should be reasonably clean and hang properly.

DOORS. Repair or replace doors with holes. One method of repair, short of replacement, is to cover a hole with a mirror or piece of paneling. Check to see that all doors open and close freely, including closet doors and patio or sliding glass doors. Oil any squeaky doors. Tighten the hardware, particularly doorknobs. Tighten hardware on kitchen and bathroom cabinets, too.

WALLS. As with the exterior, painting will pay dividends out of all proportion to the time and effort spent. Wallpaper should be clean and adhere smoothly to walls. Patch all major holes in wallboard and plaster. Loose handrails on stairways should be secured to walls. Clean or paint air-vent covers. Basements will look bigger and brighter if the walls are freshly painted.

FLOORS. Repair or replace missing or damaged pieces of tile, carpet or hardwood. If needed, wax and polish hardwood or tile floors. Repair of a loose stair tread-plate or loose carpeting on a stairway is a priority.

CARPETS. Steam-cleaning is the best answer for soiled carpet; shampooing seldom does the job where showability is concerned. If pet odors are present, be sure to clean the carpet some time before the home is placed on the market to be sure the odors have been eliminated. Loose carpet should be anchored properly.

FURNITURE. Arrange furniture to make each room appear more spacious and attractive. If a piece of furniture is badly worn, store it temporarily in the attic or at your neighbors.

CHECK MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL FEATURES

LIGHTS. Every light socket in and around the house should have a good bulb of adequate wattage. Don't overlook those outside, in the garage, utility room, halls, closets, or over the kitchen sink; and in the oven and exhaust hood.

SWITCHES AND FIXTURES. Repair or replace wall switches, outlets, and light fixtures that don't work. Replace any broken switch plates. Note: If you are not fully competent to handle these repairs, call a professional.

APPLIANCES. Those that will be sold with the home should be in good working condition. If specific equipment does not work and you do not intend to repair it, Point this out!

PLUMBING. Badly chipped or irreversibly stained sinks and tubs should be renamed, patched, or replaced. Continuously running, leaky or excessively noisy toilets should be fixed, as well as dripping faucets. All clogged or slow drains should be cleared. All caulking should be

clean and fresh looking. Repair or replace any that isn't. All sprinkler systems should be working properly with no defective heads.

ARRANGE FOR SPACIOUS LOOK

One of the best and least expensive ways to improve the showability of your home is to open up as much space as possible. Openness stimulates positive feelings in buyers. Overstuffed rooms or closets give the impression of being smaller than they really are. You can't change the size of what you have, so try to present it in a pleasing way. If necessary, rent a mini-warehouse to store your excess belongings in while the house is on the market.

CLOSETS AND STORAGE AREAS. One of the most frequently voiced requirements of buyers is for closet and storage space. Open up your storage areas by getting rid of items you aren't using and don't plan to move.

COUNTERS AND CABINETS. The same principle applies here: overcrowding gives the impression of inadequacy. This applies to bathrooms and kitchens, with the kitchen being most important. Store infrequently used counter-top appliances. Do some prudent discarding in cabinets.

GARAGE. Buyers will pay a premium for a garage if they can visualize it being of value to them, but it's hard to sell the virtues of a garage when it is filled to overflowing. If your garage has become a two-car attic, remove the excess to a mini-warehouse for the duration.

HINTS ON HOUSEKEEPING

BATHROOMS. Few places in the home can get so dirty so fast, and yet few things will "unsell" a house as fast as dirty baths. The vanity, sink, faucet hardware and mirror are focal points, and these should be cleaned until they sparkle. Other potential problems might be soap residue in a shower, a moldy shower curtain, accumulated dirt in the track of a sliding shower door, soiled or missing grout, stained toilet bowls, and dirty or battered bathmats.

KITCHEN. Like baths, kitchens get dirty all by themselves. Most buyers will inspect this area carefully, so extra time invested here is well spent. Clean the stove inside and out paying special attention to removing all grease, food particles, and stains. Replace badly stained or corroded reflector plates under the heating elements or electric range tops. Don't neglect the kitchen exhaust hood; buyers frequently check this area as a clue to general housekeeping. Clear off all countertops of excess equipment, cookbooks, and utensils. Make sure that the interiors of all cabinets are neat and orderly.

WINDOWS. Clean windows are an absolute necessity if a house is to look its best. Wash windows and sills until sparkling clean. Curtains and drapes should be freshly laundered, and all mini-blinds should be dusted.

WATER HEATER AND SOFTENER. Perhaps because it is so unusual, a sparkling clean water heater or water softener really impresses buyers- and it takes so little time and effort.

SNIFF OUT UNPLEASANT ODORS

WET TOWELS AND WASHCLOTHS. Residents of a home frequently aren't aware of what a potential source of bad odor these are. Replace all used towels with fresh ones before showing.

SOILED CLOTHES. When the house is being shown, keep dirty laundry out of the living area; move it to the utility room, garage, or storage area. This applies especially to a diaper pail.

GARBAGE. Take all trash and garbage out of the house, particularly any food-related discards from the kitchen. And make sure no potatoes or onions are going bad under the sink or in the pantry. After running the garbage through a disposal unit, grind up part of a lemon to add a fresh smell.

FIREPLACE. Unless you plan to have a roaring fire burning in the fireplace during open house, clean out the fireplace removing all ash and unburned wood. Be sure to do a thorough job to remove any chance of that stale fireplace smell.

SEWER GAS IN THE HOUSE. Do whatever is necessary to correct this problem before the house is placed on the market.

CATS AND DOGS. As a first step, move the cat's litter box out of the house. Be sure to clean up after the dog before any showings.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

VALUABLES. You may have valuable possessions that you like to display in your home, but when the house is being shown to strangers is not the time. Never leave small valuable items lying around on counters or visible in closets or cabinets. Get them out of sight, if not out of the house. Don't invite a problem.

EXCLUSIONS FROM THE SALE. Make a note now of items you do not intend to include with the sale of the house. Freestanding items generally are not included, but when in doubt spell it out. Some items that often cause misunderstandings are light fixtures, draperies, large mirrors, water softeners, garage door openers and TV antennas.

KEYS. As you are readying the house for market, make a note to gather all the keys for the house, including keys for doors, deadbolts, garage doors, and any padlocks around the property.

INSTRUCTION MANUALS. As with keys, gather manuals and warranties for the mechanical equipment in the house - kitchen appliances, water heater and softener, air conditioning and heating units, evaporative cooling units, pool and filtration equipment, and electronic air filters.

TIPS FOR SHOWINGS

LIGHT. A bright, cheerful atmosphere will make your home look more appealing and will put the potential buyer in to a more relaxed frame of mind. Open all draperies unless there is an objectionable view, and pull up the shades during the day. In most rooms you should turn on lights for a bright and cheerful look. Lamps and indirect lighting are preferable, but use overhead lights if that's all there is in a particular room. Let the buyer know that you have nothing to hide.

LIGHT SWITCHES. If some wall switches operate wall outlets, plug in a lamp or radio to demonstrate that the switch works. When a buyer flips a switch and nothing happens, he instinctively suspects a problem.

AROMAS. Set out some fresh flowers, both for their appearance and fragrance. Bake cookies or bread, or cook a beef roast; don't cook seafood or strong-smelling vegetables like cabbage or cauliflower, and be careful of fried foods.

CLOSETS. Keep doors closed except for walk-in closets. Have those doors slightly ajar and turn on the lights to draw attention to this special feature.

POSTERS AND SIGNS. We live in a tolerant age, but don't take a chance on offending a potential buyer. Remove any signs or posters that might be considered offensive.

ASHTRAYS. Dirty ashtrays are both unsightly and a source of objectionable odor to nonsmokers. Keep them clean.

ROOMS. All rooms should be neat and tidy. Make all beds, plump up the cushions on the sofa and chairs, and straighten furniture so that it looks like it belongs in the room. Stack

newspapers/magazines neatly and out of sight. Make sure dishes are put away and the kitchen sink is clean. All clothes should be picked up and either hung in the closet, folded away in the drawer, or placed in the laundry hamper.

UTILITY BILLS. Have copies of the past 12 months' bills available, or at least a written summary of the amounts paid monthly for that period.

CHILDREN. Send children outdoors to play or take them for a walk around the block. This will eliminate confusion and keep the prospect's attention focused on your home.

PETS. Get them out of the house, if not off the property. Some people don't like dogs, and nobody likes muddy pawprints on a clean suit or dress. Cats can be just as objectionable to the person who doesn't like them, and invariably a cat will single out the cat-hater to use as a rubbing post.

MUSIC. Soft background music will help create a relaxed mood that prompts buyers to linger and enjoy. But no music is better than loud music. And never have the TV on when the house is being shown.

YOUR PRESENCE. Most buyers will not relax and closely inspect a home if the owners are present, so try to arrange to turn the home over to the salesperson. If you must remain home, refrain from talking unless questions are directed to you. All too often, a seller will jump in to point out some special feature, fearful that the salesperson might overlook it. But, please bear in mind that some of the most successful salespeople will say little or nothing during the showings, and for two reasons: first, they have made their selling points before entering the house; and second, they want the buyers to discover some things for themselves in order to build excitement. The salesperson also know the buyers' temperaments. So trust the salesperson's professional abilities.

ONE FINAL NOTE:

The legal principle of *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware) is dead or dying. We are living in an age of consumerism, and it's hard to find a court that won't favor the buyer in a dispute. In fact, consumer groups and many government agencies are taking the posture that the seller has a positive obligation to disclose everything.

If you have a problem in your home, don't mask it. A common example is the homeowner who spray-paints a ceiling to cover water stains caused by a leaking roof. If you have a major problem that you don't intend to correct, be candid about it. Sure, some people will be turned off by the prospect of a major repair, but most buyers who otherwise like the home will be philosophical about a problem openly displayed. And usually they will discount the price they offer by far more than the cost of the repair. So be forewarned: hell hath no fury like a buyer burned.