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CARRY A CHECKLIST WHEN HOUSE-HUNTING

Home-buying benefits from an organized approach

If you're thinking of purchasing a home, you've probably already started looking. You may have seen quite a few homes and it's getting hard to remember all the details.

Do you remember which one had the ensuite bath and which one had the walk-out basement? How much storage space did the first choice on your list have? Were appliances included in all of the homes you viewed? And what about property taxes and maintenance costs associated with each home? Can you remember how close the home was to local amenities like stores, schools, parks and the hospital? Compiling a house-hunting checklist as you go through the homes is an excellent way of keeping track of features and drawbacks of each home.

Develop a form for yourself that includes space for all the standard questions like location, asking price, annual property taxes, mortgage terms and includes a checklist of other items that are important to you and your family. Your REALTOR can help you with this.

Here is a general checklist when viewing the interior and exterior of a home:

EXTERIOR

Jot down your impressions of the exterior of the home, noting the lot size and shape, position of the house on the lot (facing north or south, east or west), and whether it has a private or shared driveway. Also note whether it has a large front, side, and backyard and what condition the landscaping is in and whether there are many mature trees and shrubs.

What type of siding does the home have and what kind of shape is it in? Is it a detached home or half of a duplex? How many stories does it have? Don't forget to jot down whether it has an attached or detached garage and whether it can accommodate one or two cars. Also note whether there is a porch or verandah, storage shed and whether the yard is fenced. How private is the home?

While still outside, take a good look at the roof and note its general condition and age. Check to see if any roof repairs were made recently.

INTERIOR

Once you've completed your checklist for the exterior, it's time to move indoors. Make a note of the total number of rooms in the home.

Check all windows and note whether they are single pane or thermopane. Do they open and close without sticking? What about the doors? Also make a note of their general condition and whether the locks and latches work.

The kitchen is an essential part of any home, so note its general size and colours, whether it has an eat-in area and sufficient cupboard space. Is there a pantry or food preparation island? What condition are the countertops and sink in? Are the cupboards old or new? What shape is the floor in and what is it made of? Is the existing lighting adequate for carrying out kitchen tasks, as well as dining? Also make sure there are enough outlets to run your appliances. Are the fridge, stove, and dishwasher included with the sale? Are they all operational? Note how many burners the stove has and whether it's gas or electric.

Once you've completed your kitchen checklist, move to the dining room and note its size, whether it's separate from the kitchen and the condition of the floors and walls. Are there any built-in cupboards? Is the chandelier being sold with the house? Take similar notes for the living room. Is there a fireplace? How many windows are there and what are their sizes? Do the window coverings stay when the house is sold?

If the home has a family room, note whether it's closer or adjacent to the kitchen, if it has access to outdoors and if



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it has a fireplace or wood stove. Is the stove CSA approved?

Move on to the bedrooms and note their size and closet space and whether there are any window coverings or adjoining bathrooms. Also note the type of flooring in each bedroom and the colors the rooms are painted.

Make notes on the number and size of bathrooms and the condition of the fixtures. Check all faucets and flush toilets to make sure they are in good working order and to see if there is adequate water pressure. Look for signs of mould and deterioration — sometimes these are warning signs of inadequate ventilation.

BASEMENT

Next, move to the basement. Note whether it is full or partially finished or unfinished. Is there adequate headroom for moving about? Is there a fireplace or wood-burning stove? Also look for signs of moisture — such as watermarks and peeling paint.

Note whether there is a utility area and whether the washer and dryer are being sold with the house. Again, look for signs of water damage.

Find out if any recent renovations have been made to the home. It's also very important to ask about the type of heating, water service, plumbing (copper or other) and electrical amperage. Is the hot water heater owned or rented? Is it gas or electric and what is its capacity? What type of insulation is in the house?

Ask your REALTOR about any details you're unsure of. By arming yourself with a checklist and finding out all the pertinent information ahead of time, you'll find the process much more enjoyable and much less daunting.

YOUR CHECKLIST

For peace of mind you may wish to have a certified home inspector provide you with a detailed report on the condition of the home, but the following general checklist may help you ensure the home meets your needs:

- What size and shape is the lot? Is it fully serviced with sewage, water, gas and electrical lines?
- How many square feet of living space are there? How many rooms?
- What type of floors is beneath the carpeting?
- Are the room sizes adequate for your needs, including storage and closet space?
- Are the kitchen and bathrooms adequately ventilated?
- Is the kitchen suitable? Are there enough outlets and space for appliances?
- What kind of heat system is used and how much does it cost to heat the house?
- Are the electrical outlets throughout the home adequate?
- Do windows and doors open and close easily?
- What is included in the sale — appliances, etc.?
- Is there sufficient parking? How large is the garage?
- Is a property condition disclosure statement available? This form provides information about the state of the property to all potential buyers.
- What is the zoning on the property, and on surrounding properties? What changes to the immediate vicinity can be expected?
- Are there any restrictive covenants, i.e., specific limitations on such things as use, occupancy, exterior finish? Are there any easements, i.e., rights or privileges one party may have to use the land for a special purpose?