

Step-by-Step Guide to Selling Your Home

My family is growing. I wish we had another bathroom. I need a dedicated home office space. I'd love to have more room to entertain and a gourmet kitchen wouldn't be bad either. You're noticing the signs that it's time to upgrade from your starter home.

Or, maybe it's . . . I want time to relax, enjoy my hobbies and travel more. I've maintained a large home for many years and now I'm ready to "right" size my home and enjoy a more carefree lifestyle.

In either case, you're probably wondering, how can I maximize my investment when selling my current home? The skilled Realtors at Cornerstone Real Estate Co are here to help you do just that and to assist with the many decisions you'll face as you prepare to sell your home. This guide was created to give you an overview of the steps involved in selling your home in the fastest time possible for the most money possible. So, let's get started!

I'VE DECIDED TO SELL MY HOUSE . . . HOW DO I PREPARE?

Choose a Listing Agent

This is the most important relationship you'll form on your home selling journey. Pick the right agent and odds are you'll get a better sales price for your house plus a trusted professional who has your back every step of the way. According to The National Association of Realtors' 2020 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers, the median sale price of a house sold with agent assistance was more than 10% over the median price of a FSBO (For Sale By Owner) house.

To find an agent, start with your network. Ask friends, relatives, neighbors and colleagues for recommendations. You can also click [here](#) and one of Cornerstone Real Estate's experienced agents will reach out to you. Interview more than one agent if possible and take note of the agent's knowledge of your local area, responsiveness and how he or she plans to market your property.

In particular, you might want to ask these questions to assess whether an agent is the right fit for you:

- Do you work as an agent full-time?
- How many homes have you sold in my neighborhood in the past year?
- What's the typical price range of homes you sell?
- What's your fee and how do you plan to market my house?
- Will I be working directly with you or with a team?
- How long, on average, are your listings on market and what's your average sold-to-list price?

Armed with this information, you'll be able to choose an agent who understands your goals, fits your personality and can get your home sold for top dollar!

Prep It

Today, more than ever, buyers have multiple ways to access property listings online so it's important to do everything you can to make a terrific first impression – online and in person. With just a bit of effort, you can make inexpensive changes that will result in a faster sale and higher purchase price. Condition, cleanliness and appearance matter! In this section, we'll discuss necessary repairs and minor renovations. In the next, we'll take a look at the benefits of staging.

The experienced real estate professionals at Cornerstone Real Estate Co will take a close look at your house and recommend minor fixes you can make to keep potential buyers from getting hung up on a loose door knob or a broken cabinet door. Your house may also benefit from small renovations like refinished floors or new, neutral paint that will keep buyers from viewing it as dated.

With the checklist below, imagine seeing your house for the first time and ask yourself, "If I was the potential buyer, would this house in this price range impress me?" If you find it hard to be objective, ask your Realtor or a trusted friend to provide honest feedback.

House Prep Checklist

- Curb appeal – does the exterior of the house including the yard, driveway and walkways look attractive, clean and well-maintained?
- Front entry – is the paint on the trim and door in good condition? Is the door hardware polished? Are the house numbers readable and in good condition? Is the interior clean and clutter-free?
- Living room, Dining room, Bedrooms & Home office – is the flooring in good condition? What about the walls and trim? Is the color palette of the walls, trim and floor in neutral, buyer-friendly tones? Are the windows sparkling?
- Kitchen – Is it spotless? Are the cabinets chip-free with properly opening and closing doors or drawers? Are the countertops in good condition and clutter-free? Are the appliances in good condition? Are the faucets leak-free and in good condition?
- Laundry room – Are the appliances in good condition? If your laundry room doubles as storage space, is it well-organized, neat and clean?
- Bathroom – Is it spotless? Are the cabinets chip-free with properly opening and closing doors or drawers? Are the fixtures clean, leak-free and tarnish-free? Is all caulk in good condition? If you have glass shower doors, are they free of soap scum? Is the linen closet neat and well-organized?
- Closet or Storage area – Is it clean, neat and well-organized?
- Basement – Is it dry and odor-free? Are the mechanicals in good working condition and clean? If it's finished, are the walls and flooring in good condition?
- Garage – Is it as clutter-free and clean as possible?
- Pole barn or other outbuilding – Is it structurally sound? Is the roof in good condition? If there's a concrete floor, is it in good condition? Is it as clutter-free and clean as possible?

Remember, first impressions are important and a well-kept look makes a favorable impression on buyers. An attractive house in good condition sells! Now that you've made any necessary repairs and your house is clean and clutter-free, let's get it in swoon-worthy condition by staging it.

Stage It

Staging can transform your house – making it look move-in ready, highlighting its best features and showcasing its potential. The goal of staging a house is to appeal to as many potential buyers as possible and to help them visualize themselves living in it. Staging also makes for beautiful listing photos which is especially important since most buyers begin their search by scrolling through listings online.

Here are some simple tips to get you started. If you'd like more information, we've created a home staging guide you can access [here](#).

Simple Staging Tips

- In spring, summer and fall, plant blooming flowers or cluster flower pots with seasonal flowers near the front entrance.
- Mow the grass regularly and consider removing yard ornaments.
- Add lighting to walkways, porches, decks and patios to highlight landscaping or architectural features.
- Organize everyday household items in pretty bins or crates and store out of sight if possible.
- Clear all horizontal surfaces of clutter.
- Consider removing personal items such as family photos to neutralize the space and to help buyers imagine living in the space.
- Arrange furniture so each room feels spacious, homey and easy to navigate.
- Strategically place house plants to add a sense of freshness or drama.
- Focus your effort on rooms where people tend to spend most of their time – kitchen, living room, primary bedroom and primary bathroom.

Whether you need to stage your house and how much staging it requires, depends both on the market and the house. For example, in a competitive buyer's market, staging can make the difference between a fast sale or languishing on the market for weeks. Work with your Realtor to determine whether staging is important for your house and to what degree.

Are you ready for your time and effort in prepping and staging to start paying off? That's great because now your Realtor will take, or arrange a professional to take, photographs and perhaps video of your gorgeous property! Beautiful photographs are key when it comes time to list.

So, you've chosen a Realtor, prepped your home for sale and staged it. Now, the big question: How do I set the price?

Price It

There are two main reasons a house sits on the market unsold – the condition and appearance of the house or the price. We've already taken care of condition and appearance so let's talk about pricing your house.

This is where your Realtor can make a crucial difference. A great listing agent:

- Has knowledge of the local market and real world experience in your community
- Can expertly assess how your house compares to similar ones available or recently sold in your area
- Can tour your house to obtain first-hand knowledge about its unique characteristics that may affect market value

Pricing a home is a little bit science and a little bit art. In order to accurately price your house, you and your Realtor will take into consideration three things:

1. Comparables

Comparables or “Comps” are similar houses that have recently sold in your area. A good comp will be similar to your house in location, age, acreage, square footage, number of bedrooms and bathrooms and other amenities. Your Realtor will combine data from the comps with their knowledge of the local market and available properties on the market.

2. Competition

In addition to recently sold homes, your Realtor will also look at currently available properties. These properties are your competition for a buyer.

3. Current Market Conditions

Your local housing market has a big impact on your pricing strategy. If you’re in a seller’s market, where demand from buyers outpaces the number of homes for sale, you may be able to price your house slightly above market value. If you’re in a buyer’s market, where the number of houses for sale outpaces buyer demand, you may have to price your house slightly lower than market value to attract buyer’s attention.

As you consider your Realtor’s advice on pricing your house, it’s important to stay objective. This is difficult for most of us because we usually think our home is worth more than it is. Why is that? Well, first of all it’s your home not just a house. You have an emotional attachment to it and you likely have memories and pride of ownership. And, second those online estimators we all know and love base their results on generalized factors, not your unique situation.

Alright, you’ve considered your Realtor’s advice and agreed on the right price for your house. Now, it’s time to list it!

I’M PREPARED . . . LET’S LIST IT!

Marketing Your House Online

Remember those beautiful listing photos? They’re key because the first place most potential buyers and their agents will see your house for sale is online. Your Realtor will list all the information regarding your property, a compelling description and the photos on their local multiple listing service. The MLS is accessible to real estate professionals and shares listings with consumer-facing sites like Realtor, Redfin and Zillow.

Holding an Open House

Want to take advantage of the buzz online marketing of your house is creating? Consider holding an open house soon after the house is listed. Your Realtor will typically hold an open house for two to three hours on a Saturday or Sunday, when buyers have time and flexibility away from their jobs.

Additionally, a separate broker’s open house could be beneficial. Unlike a standard open house where buyers can stop by, a broker’s open house is only open to industry professionals. Agents get a chance to view the house and think about clients who would be interested in it thereby giving you more exposure.

Your Realtor will likely recommend that you leave during the open house. Why? Because it makes good business sense for you to do so:

- The home owner’s presence can make it awkward for potential buyers – buyers want to assess the property on their own, without worrying about offending the seller.
- Buyers may have a hard time imagining themselves living in the house when the owner is present.
- You could say too much! You might point out something you think is a nice feature or amenity of the house, when it’s something that might turn off a potential buyer. Or, in chatting, you might blurt out something that could tip your negotiating hand, like how motivated you are to sell.

Here are a few tips to prepare for your open house:

- Even though you’ve already cleaned and organized, make sure appliances, windows and mirrors are fingerprint-free, closets are neat and organized and surfaces are clutter-free.
- Open all curtains and blinds to let in as much natural light as possible and turn on all the lights.

- Serve refreshments – warm cookies or freshly baked brownies and a cold or warm beverage depending on the season. It's the oldest trick in the book because it works!
- Securely store jewelry, prescription medication and other valuables.

After the open house, your Realtor will share feedback with you from the buyers and/or brokers. It may be exactly what you want to hear or it may reveal some areas that could be tweaked. Again, being objective is important and will help you and your Realtor assess if any adjustments are needed.

Keeping Your House Show Ready

We know this one is tough but as soon as your house is on the market, never leave home without tidying up. Make the beds, vacuum, keep the sink clear of dishes and wipe down bathroom surfaces. Also, be ready to leave the house on short notice. Not all buyers are able to provide 24 hours showing notice and you want to be as flexible as possible in allowing buyers to tour your home.

I Have an Offer! . . . Should I Accept It?

You have an offer, maybe multiple offers, on your house. Congratulations! How will you evaluate an offer, or offers, to determine if you should accept, reject or counteroffer? Your first instinct might be to pick the highest price offer but the price isn't the only thing you'll want to consider.

Your listing agent will be a big help here. He or she will assist you in evaluating these five areas in addition to the price:

1. Method of Payment

There are various methods of payment, with cash or some type of financing being the most common. An all cash offer, assuming other terms are agreeable, is ideal for both parties. The buyer doesn't have to fulfill an appraisal or financing contingency and having a contract with fewer contingencies means there are fewer ways for the deal to fall apart.

2. Down Payment

If the offer includes financing, your concern as the seller, is for the transaction to close. For that to happen, the buyer's mortgage has to be approved. Depending on the type of mortgage the buyer is qualified for, he or she must make a down payment. In general, the larger the buyer's down payment is, the stronger the offer is.

3. Earnest Money Deposit

The EMD is the cash the buyer is committing when the purchase agreement is signed to show they are serious about purchasing the house. This money is typically 1 – 3 % of the cost of the house and is usually held in an escrow account by the buyer's agent's broker or a title company.

If a buyer attempts to back out of an offer for no good reason, the seller typically keeps the EMD. So, the higher the EMD, the stronger the buyer's offer is.

4. Contingencies

Contingencies are provisions in the offer that must be met in order for the transaction to close. If they're not met, the buyer is able to walk away from the deal and keep their earnest money deposit. Some of the most common contingencies include a home inspection contingency, an appraisal contingency or a sale of the buyer's current home contingency.

5. Closing Date

The closing date is the day the buyer and seller sign the final paperwork and make the sale official. Typically, from the time you accept an offer until the date of closing is 30 – 45 days. Depending on your circumstances you may need or want a quick close or you may want a longer closing period.

Your Realtor likely has a good understanding of your priorities in the sale of your house and will expertly guide you through the decision-making process once you have an offer in hand. Many times sellers choose to negotiate an offer. Check out our blog post [here](#) for how to negotiate an offer.

I'M UNDER CONTRACT . . . LET'S CLOSE!

You've hit a major milestone and now it's time to get you to the closing table. A lot needs to happen during the 30 – 45 days between the time a property goes under contract and when you're able to close. Your Realtor will be a valuable asset in navigating this phase of the sales process.

Once the house is under contract, it will be inspected and if the buyer is financing the deal, appraised. If you've done the work during the prepping and staging phases, you'll be in good shape for the inspection. An inspection doesn't have to be scary and we've outlined what you need to know to be prepared in this [**blog post**](#).

While you no longer need to keep the house "show-ready" (thank goodness!), you do need to continue to maintain it. Most purchase agreements give the buyer the opportunity to do a final walk-through of the house within 24 hours of closing. The buyer will be expecting the house to be in "broom-swept" condition. This means there's no visible dirt or dust on the floor, any nail holes are patched and painted and there's no new damage from your move out.

Here are a few tips for the final walk-through:

- If the buyer is taking possession on closing day, you should be fully moved out and the house should be given a final deep cleaning prior to the walk-through.
- Leave any applicable owner's manuals or warranties in one place for the new owner. If you have receipts for repairs or service records, leave them in the same spot.
- Provide a list of home contractors or maintenance companies you've used in the past with their contact information.
- It's a nice touch to leave a fresh bouquet of flowers and a bottle of wine or champagne to welcome the buyer to their new home.

Closing Day!

The big day is finally here and all your hard work and preparation are about to payoff. There's just a few more details to wrap up:

- Bring photo IDs for anyone signing paperwork.
- Bring a cashier's or certified check if your closing costs aren't being deducted from your proceeds.
- Bring house keys, garage remotes, mailbox keys, etc. if the buyer is taking possession at closing.
- Confirm the buyer has transferred all applicable utilities into their name as of the date of possession.

SOLD!

Congratulations! You've sold your home. Whether you're moving into a larger home, downsizing to a smaller place or moving cross country for work, you're now ready for the next chapter in your story.

At Cornerstone Real Estate Co we strongly believe in helping people meet their real estate goals and making the buying and selling of real estate as cost effective as possible. We'd love to talk about your next move! [**Contact us**](#) today.