

# Home Seller Toolkit



**Contents:** Preparing Your Home for Sale  
Use a REALTOR®  
Home Seller Check List



## Steps to Home Selling

### 1 MEET WITH A REALTOR®

There is no commitment on your part for the initial meeting. It will be educational and let you know next steps and help you decide whom you feel comfortable representing you in the transaction.



### 2 ESTABLISH A PRICE

Your REALTOR® will provide a market analysis which evaluates comparable homes in your area to determine the best asking price.



### 3 PREPARE YOUR HOME

View your home through the eyes of a prospective buyer and ask yourself what you'd expect. Your REALTOR® will provide some useful ideas for decluttering, staging, or improvements. The next step is photographing the home, so you want to make it as attractive as possible.



### 4 LIST IT FOR SALE

Once the home is ready for sale, your REALTOR® will begin advertising the property and make it available in the multiple list service so all real estate professionals can view and share with their buyers.

### 5 OFFER AND CONTRACT

Your REALTOR® will guide you through the buyers' offers and negotiation process. Once an offer has been accepted and a signed contract is in place, the buyer will begin the process of getting an appraisal and property inspections.



### 6 CLOSING

This is the transfer of funds and ownership. You will sign several documents and arrange to receive the sale proceeds. Typically, you will have emptied the house of your belongings for the new buyer. Be sure to have keys to all doors (and sheds or garages) along with alarm codes or other necessary information for the new owner.





## Questions to ask **When Considering Selling**

These questions will help you decide whether you're ready for a home that's larger or in a more desirable location. If you answer yes to most of the questions, you may be ready to move.

### **Have you built substantial equity in your current home?**

Check your annual mortgage statement or call your lender to find out how much you've paid down. Usually you don't build up much equity in the first few years of your mortgage, as monthly payments are mostly interest. But if you've owned your home for five or more years, you may have significant, unrealized gains.

### **Has your income or financial situation changed?**

If you're making more money, you may be able to afford higher mortgage payments and cover the costs of moving. If your income has decreased, you may want to consider downsizing.

### **Have you outgrown your neighborhood?**

The neighborhood you pick for your first home might not be the same one in which you want to settle down for good. You may have realized that you'd like to be closer to your job or live in a better school district.

### **Are there reasons why you can't remodel or add on?**

Sometimes you can create a bigger home by adding a new room or building up. But if your property isn't large enough, your municipality doesn't allow it, or you're simply not interested in remodeling, then moving to a bigger home may be your best option.

### **Are you comfortable moving in the current housing market?**

If your market is hot, your home may sell quickly and for top dollar, but the home you buy will also be more expensive. If your market is slow, finding a buyer may take longer, but you'll have more selection and better pricing as you seek your new home. Ask your real estate professional what they see happening locally.

### **Are interest rates attractive?**

Low rates help you buy "more" home, and also make it easier to find a buyer for your current place.

### **Is the effort and cost of maintaining your current home becoming difficult to manage?**

A REALTOR® can help you decide whether a smaller house, condo, or rental would be appropriate.



# EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

The sale or purchase of a home is one of the most significant events in a person or a family's life. It is more than a transaction. It shapes the hopes, dreams, aspirations, and economic destiny of those involved. Federal, state, and local laws, along with the REALTOR® Code of Ethics, protect people from discrimination when they are renting or buying a home, getting a mortgage, or engaging in other housing-related activities.

## REALTOR® COMMITMENT TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The term REALTOR® identifies a licensed real estate professional who is a member of the National Association of REALTORS®. REALTORS® conduct their business in accordance with a strict Code of Ethics. Article 10 of the Code provides that REALTORS® shall not deny equal professional services to anyone because of their race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity. A request that a REALTOR® act in a discriminatory manner in the sale, lease, or rental of property cannot legally or ethically be fulfilled by a REALTOR®.

## FAIR HOUSING RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The home seeker, the home seller, and the real estate professional have rights and responsibilities under the federal Fair Housing Act, as well as other federal, state and local laws.

### For the Home Seller

As a home seller or landlord, you are required by federal law to do business with prospective purchasers or renters without regard to their race, color, religion, sex, handicap (disability), familial status (presence of children under 18 in the household), or national origin. State and local laws may prohibit discrimination based on additional characteristics, such as veteran status or sexual orientation. You may not instruct the licensed real estate broker or agent to put any limitations on the sale or rental of property based on these characteristics, because the real estate professional is also bound by law not to discriminate. Under the Fair Housing Act, a seller or landlord may not treat prospective buyers or tenants differently because of their race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin. A seller may not, based on these characteristics:

- Advertise a preference for certain buyers or tenants;
- Falsely represent that a property is unavailable for sale or rent; or
- Establish different terms or conditions in any aspect of the purchase or rental of housing.

## FURTHER ASSISTANCE

If you believe you have been discriminated against in a housing transaction, you may file a complaint for investigation by a public or private agency. In Maryland, this organization is the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights. <https://mccr.maryland.gov> REALTORS® associations will accept complaints alleging violations of the Code of Ethics from a person who alleges discriminatory treatment by a REALTOR® in the purchase or rental of housing. REALTOR® associations have a responsibility to enforce the Code of Ethics through professional standards procedures and corrective action in cases where a violation of the Code of Ethics is proven to have occurred.



## Use a REALTOR®

Selling a home can be ... complicated. It makes sense to seek the help of a professional, specifically a REALTOR® who can help you through every step of the process. A REALTOR® isn't just a real estate agent. They're professional members of the National Association of REALTORS® and abide by its strict code of ethics. Not all real estate agents are REALTORS® - make sure you work with one who is. Here are just a few reasons why you should use a REALTOR® to help you with this important transaction.

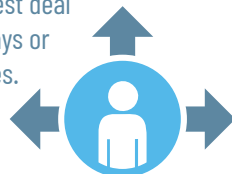
### 1 ETHICAL TREATMENT

Every REALTOR® must adhere to a strict code of ethics, which is based on professionalism and protection of the public. As a REALTOR®'s client, you can expect honest and ethical treatment. A REALTOR®'s first obligation is to you, the client.



### 2 EXPERT GUIDANCE

Selling a home usually requires dozens of forms, reports, disclosures, and other technical documents. A knowledgeable expert will help you prepare the best deal and avoid delays or costly mistakes.



### 3 OBJECTIVE INFORMATION

REALTORS® have access to comprehensive information about competing homes for sale in your area, and homes that have recently sold. This information is critical in determining an appropriate asking price.



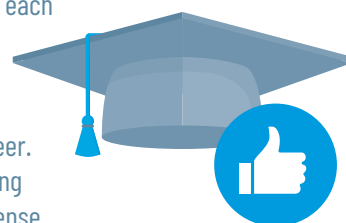
### 4 NEGOTIATION EXPERTISE



There are many factors up for discussion in a deal. A REALTOR® will look at every angle from your perspective, including drafting a sales agreement that allows enough time to complete inspections of the property before you are bound to complete the transaction.

### 5 UP-TO-DATE EXPERIENCE

Most people only buy and sell only a few homes in their lifetime, usually with quite a few years in between each purchase. Even if you've done it before, laws and regulations change. Many REALTORS® handle hundreds of transactions over the course of their career. Also, REALTORS® must complete continuing education each year to maintain their license.



### 6 CONNECTIONS

REALTORS® make it their mission to know just about everyone who can possibly help in the process of buying or selling a home. Mortgage lenders, title companies, home inspectors, home improvement contractors—the list goes on—and they're all in your REALTOR'S® network.



### 7 YOUR ROCK DURING EMOTIONAL MOMENTS

A home is so much more than four walls and a roof. As for most people, property represents the biggest financial transaction they'll ever make. Having a concerned, objective third party helps you stay focused on the issues most important to you.





## Questions to ask **When Choosing a REALTOR®**

### **How long have you been in residential real estate sales? Is it your full-time job?**

Like most professions, experience is no guarantee of skill. But much of real estate is learned on the job.

### **How many homes did you and your real estate brokerage sell last year?**

This will touch on how much experience they have, and how up-to-date they are on the local market.

### **What designations or certifications do you hold?**

Real estate professionals have to take additional specialized training in order to obtain these distinctions. Designations and certifications help define the special skills that an agent can apply to your particular real estate needs. One designation sellers might for is the CRS®, or Certified Residential Specialist, but there are also specialists for military customers, seniors, and those who are considering a short sale, among others.

### **How many days does it take you to sell a home? How does that compare to others?**

The REALTOR® you interview should have information about their performance on hand and be able to present market statistics from their local MLS to provide a comparison.

### **What's the average variation between your initial listing and final sales price?**

This is one indication of a REALTOR®'s pricing and negotiating skills.

### **What specific marketing systems and approaches will you use to sell my home?**

Your agent should have an aggressive, innovative plan and understand how to market property online.

### **Will you represent me exclusively, or might you also choose to represent the buyer?**

While it's usually legal to represent both parties in a transaction, your REALTOR® should be able to explain his or her philosophy and/or brokerage policies on client obligations and agency relationships.

### **Can you recommend service providers who can help me obtain a mortgage, make home repairs, and so on?**

Practitioners should be able to recommend more than one provider and let you know if they have any special relationship with any of the providers.

### **How will you keep me informed about the progress of my transaction?**

The best answer here is a question. A real estate agent who pays attention to the way you prefer to communicate and responds accordingly will make for the smoothest transaction.

### **Could you please give me the contact information of your three most recent clients?**

Ask their former customers if they would use the agent again in the future.





## Agency

Understanding brokerage relationships

### Customer

- A person who has not entered into a written brokerage agreement
- Must be treated honestly and fairly
- Agents must disclose material facts they know or should know
- Duty of confidentiality owed to prospective client\*

### Client

- A person who has entered into a written brokerage agreement with a broker
- Agent owes client duties of reasonable care: loyalty, disclosure, confidentiality, diligence, and accounting

### Brokerage Relationship

A relationship created by a written brokerage agreement between a client and a broker where the client authorizes the broker to provide real estate brokerage services in a residential real estate transaction

#### Buyer agent

A licensed real estate broker, associate broker, or salesperson who, in accordance with a written brokerage agreement, represents a buyer/tenant in the acquisition of real estate for sale/lease

#### Seller agent

A licensed real estate broker, who in accordance with a written brokerage agreement, acts as the listing broker, or a licensee affiliated with the listing broker

#### Subagent

A licensee from another company that is authorized, through the listing agreement, to show the home to buyer customers on behalf of the seller\*\*

#### Dual Agency

A relationship in which a licensed real estate broker or designated branch office manager acts as a dual agent

#### Dual Agent

A licensed real estate broker or designated branch office manager who acts as an agent for both the seller/landlord and buyer/tenant in the same transaction

#### Intra-company agent

The two agents who have been designated by a dual agent to act on behalf of a seller/landlord or buyer/tenant in the same transaction\*\*\*

#### Notes:

\* Duty is owed to a customer with whom you've discussed forming a brokerage relationship.

\*\* A subagent's duty of loyalty is to the seller.

\*\*\* Intra-company agents are affiliated with the same brokerage.



## Home Sale Check List

You've asked yourself about selling your home. You've researched REALTORS®. What else do you need before making the leap?



### PRE-SALE HOME INSPECTION

Know your surprises before they, well, surprise you. A home inspector can examine your home for things you need to take care of, prior to placing your home on the market. Get your house in top shape before that first open house? Ask your REALTOR® for referrals, if you need one.



### GET ESTIMATES FOR THE BIG THINGS

Does your wood floor need serious work? Refrigerator on the fritz? It's important that you catalog all "big-ticket" items that need fixing or replacement. Perhaps you won't need to do these repairs (though the more you can do, the more appeal you build into the house) but having the prices of each of these fixes will be handy once negotiations begin.



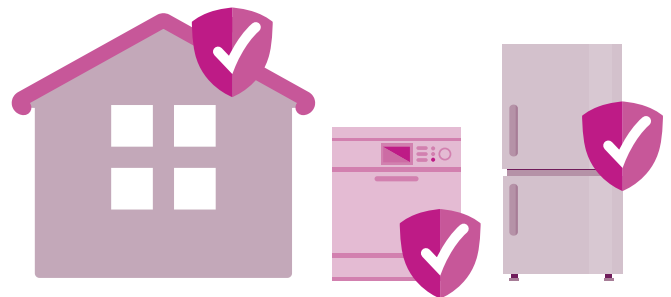
### CLEAN YOUR SPACE!

Now's the time to declutter. Donate unwanted things. Pack up the things you seldom use, and place all those boxes neatly in your garage, or someplace else where you have access. Organize everything. Clean everything: carpets, floors, windows. The more you can do, the more you're giving yourself an advantage when it comes time to list your house.



### WARRANTIES

Furnace, dishwasher, new roof, any large item that conveys with the house: find your warranties and have them at your ready. Don't let a last-minute frantic search for one piece of paper ruin your deal!







## How to **Add Curb Appeal**

**Trim** bushes and branches so they don't block windows or architectural details.

**Set** a pot of bright flowers (or a small evergreen in winter) on your porch or front walkway.

**Install** new, matching locks and knobs on your front door.

**Repair** any cracks or holes in the driveway, and clean oil spots with degreaser and a steel brush.

**Edge** the grass around walkways and trees.

**Stow** your garden tools and hoses out of sight, and clear kids' toys from the lawn.

**Buy** a new mailbox.

**Upgrade** your outdoor lighting.

**Purchase** a new doormat for outside your front door.

**Clean** your windows, inside and out.

**Polish** or replace your house numbers.

**Mow** your lawn. Also, turning on the sprinklers for 30 minutes before the showing will make the whole yard sparkle.

**Place** a seasonal wreath on your door.



## How to **Prepare for the Photoshoot**

With the majority of buyers shopping for homes online, high-resolution slide shows and video tours are a must. Here's how to make your home shine on camera.

### **Understand the camera's perspective.**

The camera's eye is different from the human eye. It magnifies clutter and poor furniture arrangement so that even a home that feels comfortable in person can look jumbled online.

### **Make it spotless.**

Cameras also tend to magnify grime. Don't forget floor coverings and walls; a spot on a rug might be overlooked during a regular home showing, but it could become a focal point online.

### **Know what to leave.**

You want to avoid clutter, but try to have three items of varying heights on each surface. On an end table you can place a tall lamp (high), a small plant (medium), and a book (low).

### **Snap practice pictures with your own camera.**

This will give you an idea of what the home will look like on camera before the photographer shows up. Examine the photos and make changes to improve each room's appearance, such as opening blinds to let in natural light, removing magnets from the refrigerator, or taking down distracting art.

### **Pare down.**

Removing one or two pieces of furniture from each room, even if just for the shoot, can make your space appear larger on screen.

### **Rearrange.**

Spotlight the flow of your space by creating a focal point on the furthest wall from the doorway and arranging the other pieces of furniture to make a triangle shape. The focal point may be a bed in a bedroom or a china cabinet in a dining room.

### **Accessorize.**

Include a healthy plant in every room; the camera loves greenery. Energize bland decor by placing a bright vase on a mantle or draping an afghan over a couch.

### **Keep the home in shape.**

Buyers who liked what they saw online expect to encounter the same home in person.



## How to **Attract More Buyers**

These tips will help you convince buyers your property offers top value for their dollar.

### **Amp up curb appeal.**

Look at your home objectively from the street. Check the condition of the landscaping, paint, roof, shutters, front door, knocker, windows, and house number. Observe how your window treatments look from the outside. Something special—such as big flowerpots or an antique bench—can help your property stand out after a long day of house hunting.

### **Enrich with color.**

Paint is cheap, but it can make a big impression. The shade doesn't have to be white or beige, but stay away from jarring pinks, oranges, and purples. Soft yellows and pale greens say "welcome," lead the eye from room to room, and flatter skin tones. Tint ceilings in a lighter shade.

### **Upgrade the kitchen and bathrooms.**

These are make-or-break rooms. Make sure they're squeaky clean and clutter-free, and update the pulls, sinks, and faucets. In a kitchen, add one cool appliance, such as an espresso maker.

### **Screen hardwood floors.**

Refinishing is costly, messy, and time-consuming, so consider screening instead. This entails a light sanding — not a full stripping of color or polyurethane — then a coat of finish.

### **Clean out and organize closets.**

Remove anything you don't need or haven't worn in a while. Closets should only be half-full so buyers can visualize fitting their stuff in.

### **Update window treatments.**

Buyers want light and views, not dated, heavy drapes. To diffuse light and add privacy, consider energy-efficient shades and blinds.

### **Hire a home inspector.**

Do a preemptive strike to find and fix problems before you sell your home. Then you can show receipts to buyers, demonstrating your detailed care for their future home.



## Checklist For Better a Home Showing

- ☐ **Remove clutter.** Clear off counters and pack unnecessary decorative items. Put extra furniture in storage, and remove out-of-season items. Don't forget to clean out the garage, too.
- ☐ **Let it shine.** Cleaning windows and screens will help bring more light into your home. Replace burnt bulbs, and consider higher wattage in low-light areas. Clean the walls or brush on a fresh coat of bright, neutral paint. Replace heavy curtains with sheer ones and show off your view.
- ☐ **Keep it clean.** A deep clean before listing your home will make upkeep easier. Consider hiring a cleaning service to help.
- ☐ **Maximize comfort.** In summer, shut A/C vents on the first floor so more air will get upstairs. Reverse the process in winter.
- ☐ **Perform a sniff test.** Clean carpeting and drapes to eliminate odors. Open the windows to air out the house. Consider potpourri or scented candles and diffusers. For quick fixes in the kitchen, cotton balls soaked in vanilla extract or orange juice can instantly make the fridge a nicer-smelling place. Boil lemon juice in your microwave, then add it to your dishwasher to eliminate odors. You can also run lemon rinds through the garbage disposal for a similar effect.
- ☐ **Take care of minor repairs.** Sticky doors, torn screens, cracked caulking, or a dripping faucet may seem trivial, but they'll give buyers the impression that the house isn't well-maintained.
- ☐ **Tidy up outdoors.** Cut the grass, rake the leaves, add new mulch, trim the bushes, edge the walkways, and clean the gutters. A pot of bright flowers near the entryway adds great curb appeal.
- ☐ **Set the scene.** A bright afghan or new accent pillows easily jazz up a dull room. Pretty dishes or a simple centerpiece on the tables can help buyers picture themselves living there. Try staging a chess game in progress. If you have a fireplace, lay fresh logs or a basket of flowers there.
- ☐ **Make the bath luxurious.** Make sure your personal toiletry items are out of sight, along with old towels and toothbrushes. Add a new shower curtain and fancy guest soaps.
- ☐ **Send the pets to the neighbors.** If that's not possible, crate or confine them to one room, and let the real estate practitioner know where they'll be to eliminate surprises.
- ☐ **Lock up valuables and medication.** Agents can't watch everyone all the time.
- ☐ **Head out.** It can be awkward for everyone if you're home at the time of a showing



## Checklist For the New Owners

Before the property changes hands, consult this list to make sure these items are transferred with the house.

- ☐ **Owner's manuals and warranties** for any appliances left in the house.
- ☐ **Garage door opener(s).**
- ☐ **Extra set of house keys.**
- ☐ **Other keys.** Think beyond the front doors; do you have any cabinets or lockers built into the home that require keys?
- ☐ **A list of local service providers,** such as the best dry cleaner, yard service, plumber, and so on. You're not just helping the new owners, but also the local businesses you're leaving behind.
- ☐ **Code to the security alarm** and phone number of the monitoring service if not discontinued.
- ☐ **Smart home device access.** Any devices listed as fixtures need to be reset for the new homeowner. Make sure your account information and usage data are wiped from the device so that they may use it. Check with your device's manufacture to find out how to do this.
- ☐ **Numbers to the local utility companies.** This can be especially helpful to owners who may not yet have easy access to the Internet in the new home.
- ☐ **Contact info for the condo board or home ownership association,** if applicable.



MarylandHomeownership.com is a site owned and managed by Maryland REALTORS®, the state association that represents, educates, and provides guidance to its 28,000+ membership across the state. Our members follow the highest ethical standards, as established by the National Association of REALTORS®, which includes a commitment to fair and equal housing for all. In their roles as REALTORS®, our members adhere to the highest professional, ethical, and health standards.

Parts of this toolkit were adapted from material from the National Association of REALTORS® and additional buyer and seller resources.

*Thank you for using a Maryland REALTOR®!*

