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House-Buying Guide: A Checklist

Michigan State University

Cooperative Extension Service

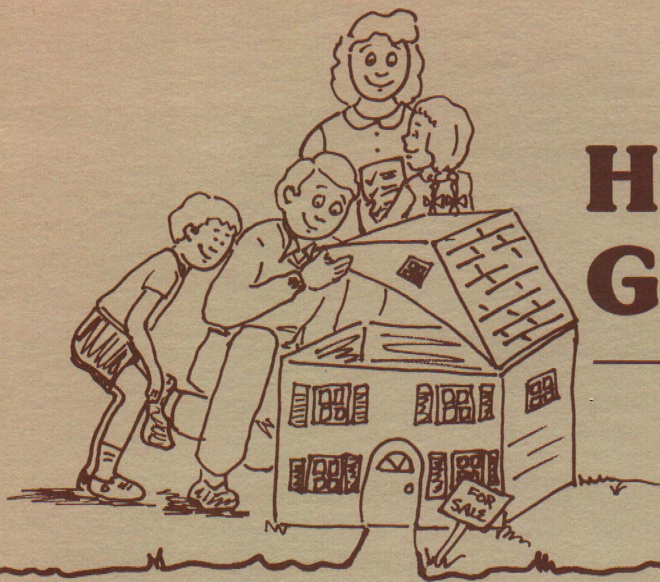
Housing Impact Committee

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HOUSE-BUYING GUIDE

a checklist

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When House-Shopping, Involve all the Family

BUYING A HOUSE is the largest investment most families make. The decision to buy a house commits the family to a substantial long-term debt, and of even more importance, it commits the family to a way of living.

This checklist will help you carefully think through the qualities and features you want in a house and to evaluate any house you consider buying.

Each family's needs are different. What is important to one family may be immaterial to another. It is unlikely that any one house will have all the features you want. With price a major factor, be willing to make trade-offs. In the final decision you are the one to know what is most important to you.

Older Houses

Will changes required to meet your needs in an existing house cost more than buying or building a new one?

Can you obtain a good house with more space for less money by remodeling a sound structure?

Location

Is it zoned for a strictly residential district?

Are there desirable shopping centers, schools, churches, parks and transportation nearby?

Does the house conform to size and current market price of others in the neighborhood?

Is the neighborhood in the path of commercial or industrial growth?

If in a new area, are available utilities private or public—water, sewers or septic tanks with adequate drain field? Are streets and sidewalks complete? Is there fire and police protection?

Is the street free from heavy traffic?

Do the neighbors appear to be congenial?

Are obnoxious industrial fumes or wastes in the direction of prevailing winds relative to the property?

Is the neighborhood attractive, pleasing and well maintained?

Is it unlikely that assessments (for streets, sewers, etc.) or property taxes (for schools, services, etc.) will increase in the near future?

Lot and Orientation

Is the house located on the lot so as to allow a private area on the protected side for a patio?

Is amount of lawn to be mowed reasonable for you?

Is the driveway direct? Is there parking for guests near entrance? (A minimum of 35 feet allows two cars to be parked.)

Is the house located on the high part of the lot to allow for good surface drainage toward the street?

Are there shade trees? Do you consider the landscaping attractive?

Do the largest windows with protective overhang face south? (If so, the house will get solar heat in winter and be cooler in summer.)

Is there both a pleasant view and a feeling of privacy, especially in the living and dining areas?

Do rooms have good light and ventilation?

Are outside entrances protected from weather?

Design of House

Is the style and type of construction acceptable to you? (Contemporary or traditional; 1-story, raised ranch house, 1½-story, 2-story, split level; basement, crawl space, or slab on grade.)

Are there enough areas for sleeping for your family?

Does it have a family room, den, patio, if these are important to you?

Does the house look attractive?

Do windows line up neatly on the outside of the house and appear pleasing in size and shape?

What is the total floor area in square feet (excluding garage and basement)? What is the price per square foot (excluding garage and basement)?

Is there waste (unusable) space in the house?

Are exterior doors at least 3 feet wide and interior at least 2½ feet?

Can main living areas be shut off from the rest of the house to minimize heating during winter months?

Floor Plan and Traffic

Are front and rear entrances convenient to the drive?

Is there a covered connection between garage or carport and the kitchen?

Are living, working and sleeping areas properly zoned from each other?

Is the kitchen readily accessible to both family room and patio?

Are kitchen and living room free from cross traffic?

Are stairways and halls wide enough (minimum width for halls, 3 feet, 4 inches; stair risers not over 7½ inches high)?

Is bathroom or lavatory easily reached from bedrooms and from the yard or patio?

Bedrooms

Are bedrooms large enough (a minimum of 120 sq. feet for room with double bed, and 150 sq. feet for two twin beds)?

Is there space for overnight guests?

Is there enough wall and floor space in each bedroom for clearance around needed furniture? Will desks or play equipment be used in any rooms?

Is closet space in each bedroom adequate for clothing and bedding? Closets should be at least 24 inches deep; 27 inches is better.

Is there storage here or elsewhere for out-of-season clothing and bedding?

Is there cross ventilation in each room?

Bathrooms

Does the house have enough bathrooms in proportion to the size of the family and number of bedrooms?

Is there safe storage for cleaning, medical and linen supplies used in the bathroom?

Is there proper light and ventilation?

Kitchen, Other Work Areas

Is the kitchen large enough and properly arranged for the number of people who will work there at one time?

Is there storage space for supplies and small equipment which will be used here?

Is there eating space in or close to the kitchen?

Does the arrangement permit efficient meal preparation?

Are major appliances included, or is there space for them in the proper places?

Is there a dishwasher or provision for one in the future?

Is there a work area for laundering—washer, dryer, laundry tray, storage of soiled linen, ironing board and sorting table?

Is there storage for laundry supplies?

Is space provided for a freezer?

Are work areas well-lighted both day and night?

Can children's play be supervised from work areas?

Do water supply lines have shutoff valves?

Living and Dining Areas

Is the living room large enough for comfortably seating your family and guests? (width, 12 to 15 feet.) Does it have sufficient wall space to accommodate the furniture you would like to use?

Is the living room located so that it is not necessary to pass through it to reach other rooms from the front entrance?

Is there storage space for books, card tables, records, magazines and newspapers in either the living room or family room?

If there is a fireplace, is it located so that people can be seated facing and adjacent to the fireplace opening? Is there storage space for firewood nearby?

Is the living room cheerful and bright, with at least two exposures?

If there is a family room, can furniture be arranged to allow for dining, watching TV, for card games or sitting in front of the fireplace?

Is there storage near the front entrance for guests' wraps?

Is there a separate dining room, or do you feel that dining space in connection with family room or kitchen is sufficient?

Activity Areas

In accordance with your family needs, interests and hobbies, is there an area in the house which might be used for:

—Writing, typing, study?

—Desk or office space for family business and records?

—Children's play, indoors and out?

—Hobbies and adult recreation?

—Sewing, mending, knitting?

—Storage of supplies for these activities and sports?

Utilities

Is the electric service 240 volts and at least 100 amperes? (If house has electric heat, 150 or 200 amperes are required.)

Are there at least a dozen individual electric circuits?

Are there enough electric outlets properly located?

In kitchen and workshop—one double outlet for every 4 feet of linear wall space over work counters.

In dining, living and sleeping areas—one double outlet for every 12 feet of linear wall space.

In hallways and patio—one double outlet for every 15 feet of linear wall space.

Special purpose outlets are needed for the range and clothes dryer, and separate outlets for dishwasher, waste disposer, wall clock or other special equipment you desire.

Are weatherproof electrical outlets available outside at the front and rear of the house?

Are there enough switches so that you can light your way ahead of you?

Is there adequate water supply and safe sewage disposal?

Is water pressure adequate? If water pressure seems excessive, does the home have a pressure regulator?

Are outside hose bibs provided?

Is the water heater large enough to handle demands from both the family and the water-using appliances?

Is the water heater vented and located close to bath, kitchen and laundry? Is there a hose bib drain for the tank? There should be an overflow pipe.

Is there a good heating system, properly vented and adequate for keeping the entire house comfortable?

Is the type of fuel economical in accordance with local rates?

Structure

Is the foundation on solid ground or filled land?

Are floors free from buckling and squeaking?

If the floor is concrete, is there a vapor barrier beneath?

If there is crawl space, does it have a vapor barrier and adequate ventilation?

Is the floor covering in each room satisfactory from a maintenance standpoint?

Will outside walls require periodic painting?

Are inside walls finished for ease of maintenance?

Is insulating glass or double glass used for large windows and storm sash on exposed sides? Are windows and doors weather-stripped?

Are walls, ceiling and floor of the house adequately insulated?

Are attic rooms properly insulated?

Is the roof construction and material satisfactory from a maintenance standpoint?

Is attic space adequately ventilated?

Has soil been treated for termite control?

Is deterioration evident where any wooden parts of the structure come in contact with the ground? (Wood siding should be at least 8 inches above grade.)

Are gutters and downspouts free from rust and in good condition?

Miscellaneous

Is there storage space for gardening equipment and supplies?

Is the garage or carport adequate in size?

Is the price of the house within your ability to pay?

Do the taxes and maintenance costs seem reasonable?

Does the builder have a good reputation?

What expense is anticipated for necessary repairs?

What is the appraised market value of the house? (Ask the assessor. If the appraised value is lower than the seller's asking price, you may wish to negotiate a lower price.)

For more information on housing and home environment contact your County Extension Home Economist.

