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You're buying more than a house

I often hear homebuyers talking about the criteria for their home searches—their must-haves and nice-to-haves. They need three bedrooms and at least two full baths. They need one story. They need a garage. They'd like granite countertops.

While those are important criteria, I less frequently hear talk about an equally important consideration: neighborhood. When you're done deciding what you'd like *inside* your home, ask yourself these questions about what you'd like *outside* your home.

Where do you work?

Most people travel to work five days a week, 50 or so weeks a year. That's a lot of trips from your house to your office, so consider the costs and convenience your commute when searching for a home. But don't just decide that a house 10 miles from your office is a better option than one that's 15 miles away. Try the commute on a Monday morning. Maybe it takes 45 minutes to travel those 10 miles and 30 minutes to drive the 15-mile route.

Where will your kids learn?

Parents of school-age children or buyers planning to start a family need to pay attention to school districts. Your Texas Realtor can help you figure out which area of town belongs to which district. Then you can do some research to decide which schools work best for your kids. Even buyers without kids will want to consider school districts in their search, as a home in a well-regarded district means better resale value.

Is it safe?

There are plenty of Web sites that offer crime data for neighborhoods. But don't limit your research to a computer. Talk to the people who know the area: current residents and the police department. They can help you interpret the data as well as offer their own insights.

It's how far to the supermarket?

That five-bedroom house in the newest subdivision in the county may contain all the must-haves on your list, but consider where you'll buy groceries, shop for clothes, and go out to eat. Some buyers gladly drive 20 minutes to the nearest gas station in exchange for a huge new house, while others grow tired of the distances. Know what's important to you.

How does it feel?

Before you dismiss this question as too touchy-feely, hear me out. You're spending a lot of money to purchase a place where you'll be spending a lot of time. Shouldn't you feel good about where it's located? Walk around the immediate neighborhood and talk to residents. Visit the area at different times and on different days to see what it's like. Is there a lot of traffic? Can you hear cars from a highway or whistles from freight trains?

Who can you ask?

When you're deciding the must-haves and nice-to-haves for your next home, make sure to include the criteria for the neighborhood on your list. Your Texas Realtor is an expert in your local market and can help you determine which areas best fit your needs.

For more information, I invite you to visit the redesigned TexasRealEstate.com.

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