

From BLOG postings at www.valeriezinger.com

Listing Your Ottawa House

Things To Do and Consider Before Your
House Goes on the Market

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WHAT NINE THINGS SHOULD YOU HAVE READY WHEN I LIST YOUR HOUSE?

Here are some things that you can find or prepare in advance of meeting your real estate rep.



Survey and Floor Plans. Have you got a copy of the most recent property survey? If so, we will want to put that in the House Binder and make available to the purchaser. In the last move, my husband and I got the survey as part of the package. It was interesting and we filed it. A couple of years later there was a question with the City of Ottawa as to who was responsible for removing a dying tree. Having the survey proved to the city arbourist that the tree was on city property. This saved us hundreds of dollars in removal fees. In addition to the survey, do you have the builder's floor plan? This would be a wonderful thing to provide to the purchaser plus it will help in measuring the rooms.

Tax Bill. Maybe you are paying your taxes with your PIT (Principle, Interest and Taxes) and don't have a copy. I would like you to contact the city and get a copy of the bill. This is an essential piece of information for the MLS listing. Buyers are very keen to know the taxes.

Energy Bills. While a family with babies and toddlers is likely to keep the house warmer and use more water than a couple who are at work all day, your energy and water bills (gas, water, hydro, oil) will give the prospective buyer an indication of what it cost to run the house. This is interesting information to have handy and we will be questioned about the energy costs.

Photos. I hope that you have some recent pictures of your house and yard - when it wasn't beneath 4 feet of snow. We will want the buyers to see how lovely the yard is, where the pool is located and how your gardening efforts have enhanced the property. We may need to have some of the best photos enlarged for our house book. Sell, sell, sell. When my husband and I were selling our house in the Glebe, we had two sets of photos - the photos of the yard with all the plants and trees in full splendour and a set of photos when the house was built in the late 1800s with the first family that lived in the house. I believe that those historical photos were a significant selling feature.

Receipts. If you have had some major house work done in the past 3 - 5 years, we will want to let the buyers know. The receipts will prove when the work occurred, who did it and if there is any warranty left. The receipts that you should find -new shingles, new porch, floors/carpets, furnace, windows, septic tanks and wells (more about this next), any room renovations and extensions. We want the buyer to know that you have had work done on the house and that it is move-in ready.

Water Wells and Septic Tanks. If you live in the city, you are off the hook for this one. However, if you are outside of the main part of the city and not on city sewer and water, then we want to show the buyers your well record (when it was drilled, what quantity of water, etc.). The buyer is going to want to have the water tested. Run your taps and clean out the filter at the end of each tap. We are not going to know where the buyer will take the sample. I hope you have the septic use permit and any receipts for work done on the tank (such as having it recently pumped).

List of Positives. At breakfast tomorrow morning, jot down the reasons why you have enjoyed living in the house. Sell, sell, sell. Buyers will be interested in the park that you love, the wonderful block party every Canada Day, the proximity to the Dairy Queen, how easy it is to clean the tile floors and the high fence in the backyard so the deer don't get in to eat your plants. Whatever it is that you love about the house, let me know.

Key. I need a key to your house to put in the lock box. Please have a spare key ready for me. If you are like me, it is likely on a key chain somewhere in the house. If you have an alarm system, I will need the code.

Be Prepared - We Are Going To Be Selling

Photo credit: Plan of Ground Floor @ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/salimfadhley/188276262/>

WHAT ARE FIVE THINGS TO DO TO YOUR OTTAWA YARD BEFORE LISTING AND SHOWING?

Here are five things that you can do to your yard to make your home more attractive to buyers looking for homes in Ottawa.

Sweep - It is so simple to get out the broom and sweep the front steps, veranda and driveway. If there is a lot of mud, then you might want to hose these areas. However, be friendly to the environment and try sweeping as your first method.

Wash - Wash your windows so that they gleam. Wash the front door and anywhere where people will touch - the railings, the door knob, front flower pots, and other things in your yard that the rain will not cleanse.

Open the windows - Not only will this air out the house but it will ensure that when the buyer tests the window cranks that they will indeed work. Driving up to a house with open windows gives a nice sense of freshness.

Put away the toys and tools - If you have kids toys, a plastic basketball hoop, the winter shovels and the garden rake all in the front yard, don't be surprised if buyers just drive past your home. The thinking is that the front yard is an indicator of the care and attention in the house.



Finally,

Buy a couple of baskets of flowers - Baskets are usually already blooming and will give instant curb appeal. I know, you don't want to plant before the May long weekend but this is part of making your house attractive. Buy the plants already grown and colourful.

Make your home as attractive on the outside as it is on the inside.

Photo credit: Spring flowers - HDR experiment @ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/robfahey/163166069/>

WHAT IS ANOTHER THING TO DO TO YOUR OTTAWA HOUSE BEFORE LISTING?

Paint your door. What? Paint wood? Most men think that you will be struck dead from painting a wood door (or any wood in the house for that matter) but...

Consider painting your front door. When I was in Ireland I fell in love with the doors painted in high gloss primary colours. What a treat!!!! You live in the house with the yellow (or red, or green or blue) door. From a long line of row houses, it is apparent which one is yours by the colour of the door. In Ottawa, where row houses are so popular, where builders have built every house on the block or neighbourhood, you might want a way to distinguish your home from others. Get together with your neighbours and think of painting each door a different colour.



Maybe the primary colours are not going to work but... you can step away from the white metal door or bland wood door and into a world of some colour. The people at the paint shops can give you help in choosing colours. Remember - If you are going to paint your door, be ready for the comments from your neighbours and do as professional a job with the primer and paint as you can. Have some fun. After all, it is just a door to your house and not the entrance to the Louvre. Okay, one caveat, if you are living in a house with an historical designation you may not be able to apply your creativity to colour choices but then, you already know that.

Photo credit: Newly painted front door @ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nordique/749855379/>

SHOULD YOU CALL THE “STAGE COACH” TO YOUR OTTAWA HOME? FIVE THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU CALL



You are going to sell your house and have seen all of those TV shows about getting your house staged before putting it on the market. What should you do? I will meet with you and provide an opinion of the amount of work that may or may not be required.

We are all sensitive to criticism. It is tough to hear that your house isn't perfect. Before spending money on the services of a professional stage *coach*, you can do the following five things.

Tart up the yard and your front door. The front of your house gives buyers their first impression of your house. As you know, you only have one chance to make a good first impression. So... if there is snow - shovel; if grass - mow; if you have flower beds - weed; windows - wash (inside and out); front door - paint. You can take a picture of your house to a paint store such as [Randall's](#) and the staff will help you pick an accent colour for your door.

Clean your house. Start scrubbing. This is not the 3 hour blitz that you do every week or two but a thorough top to bottom clean. If you have the money, bring in a cleaning service and work with them to get the job done. Wash your windows to let in the light. You want to watch out for mould in the grout in the bathroom. This area bothers people - a lot. Sometimes buyers will love your house but be looking for every single fault just to justify their first offer. Reduce the reasons and increase the offer.

Remove clutter. I will do a long article on this at a later date but for now think - clutter is taking up valuable real estate. Your house will look smaller if every nook and corner is stuffed. To make the house look bigger, remove unnecessary things. Think of this as your first round of packing for the move. One caution, don't strip your house so much that it looks artificial. Over-staged homes are beginning to bother buyers almost as much as homes with too much clutter.

Be selective on personal items. Buyers are curious. Remember, they are out looking and by the nature of this function they start getting curious about who lives in the houses that they are visiting. Do you want people to know where and when you graduated by the degrees hanging on your walls, how the family enjoyed Disneyland by the photos everywhere, what medicine you take by the bottles left in the kitchen cupboard, what items you purchased at an 'adults only' shop? Yes, you live in the house but some things are just better left private. Look at your house and see what it will tell strangers about you. If it is too revealing, remove it or store it out of sight.

Fix the broken bits. You don't need me or a professional stager to tell you that the leaky faucet, the broken window, the running toilet, the missing knob on the cupboard door and the broken air conditioner all need to be fixed or replaced before the house goes on the market. Several houses ago, I lived with a hump in the middle of the wall-to-wall living room carpet. It became invisible to me until I needed to sell the house. The first person I called, after my real estate rep, was a carpet installer to stretch the carpet and get rid of the excess material. I only wish I would have taken the time to remove the flocked wall paper. It drove me crazy and I am sure every potential buyer was put off by that paper. Well, that was at the beginning of my habit of moving and I would not make that same mistake now.

Now that we have the 'bones' done, we can consider the services of a stager. There may or may not be a payback on getting the house painted, furniture rearranged and furniture leased for the duration of the sale. We may want a stager to give us his or her most valuable advice. Telling us to clean the house or fix the tap is just something that we can do without being told.

Photo Credit: Stage Coach @ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/thivierr/773614933/>

Right Price for Your Ottawa Home - Over Market Value

Many sellers want to set a high price for their home and then promise themselves and their realtor that they will consider reducing the price at a later date - if the house does not sell. God forbid. Here are some reasons why listing your house above market value is not a good strategy:

1. **A high price will keep buyers away.** Your wonderful home is just what a buyer wants but not at the price. The buyer will not put in an offer in case it insults you. If the offer that the Buyer wants to make appears too low, the buyer is uncomfortable with the thought that their offer may insult you so they will continue to look elsewhere. Most Realtors will tell you that trying to get a buyer to put in this type of offer is one of the most difficult things to accomplish. Some people will not even look in your home because the price is outside of their MLS criteria that they have used to screen homes. Your price has eliminated potential Buyers before they have even seen your home.
2. The first people to see your home are often the most serious buyers and **a too high price will not have buyers return when there is a price reduction.** The initial flurry of buyers slows down the longer the house is on the market. It will be a struggle for your realtor to call back all of the initial buyers - even people who have put in a low offer and been refused - when you finally decide to lower the price. In one case, over 60 people toured an overpriced home, when the price was reduced twice, only one person was still in the market. Real potential buyers were lost when the price was too high.
3. **Too long on the market.** Most buyers ask their agents how long a house has been on the market. This gives them an indication of problems with the house or with the price (otherwise

the house would have sold). Too long on the market and buyers don't want to buy a "picked-over". In addition, owners start getting weary of always having their home in show home condition. The state of cleanliness and orderliness may start to deteriorate.

4. **Signs of greed and then desperation.** A price that is set too high looks to buyers like greed and then, when there are one or more price reductions, the buyer starts to think that desperation has set in for the seller. Some buyers do not want to be a player in either setting.



5. The **realtor's sign on the lawn starts to look old.** Okay, this is from my perspective but I want the neighbours to think that I can sell homes. If my sign is on your lawn too long, everyone who goes by on a daily basis is going to start thinking that I have failed to bring you an offer and sell your home. I want to sell your house and to make you and your neighbours think positively about my skills.

6. **Fishing - not really selling.** Sometimes a seller will put an unrealistic price on their home - just in case. The thinking is " *There is a sucker born every minute.*" (P.T. Barnum). While the seller will sell if someone is naive enough to buy the house, few buyers with agents will take the seller and the price seriously. These are the houses that buyers skip over.

7. **Your value and the bank's value.** Most offers are conditional upon arranging financing. This means that the mortgagee will be valuing the house to determine what mortgage level is appropriate. So.... If you have overvalued your home, found a naive buyer and think the sale will go through - think again. The bank will let the buyer know if the house is overvalued (as, hopefully, their realtor will already have done). This is a case of "nice try". You think: "So what? I will always find another buyer." Well, under the MLS this will appear as a Conditional Sale that did not go through which will alert Realtors that there is something going on with the home, one problem may be the value. Also, while your home is conditionally sold, not as many people will be interested in viewing it. You may continue to lose buyers.

8. **No amount of advertising will overcome the wrong price.** Some sellers think that, with the right advertising, anything will sell. This is not K-Tel. You cannot chop, slice and dice the house for a "low - low - never before seen price". Buyers will have Realtor buying agents. Agents will have access to information. People spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on a house may do some investigation that will say that .. "*You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.*" *Abraham Lincoln.*

Finally, when setting a sale price for your home, ask for - demand to have your Realtor's expertise. Look at comparable houses in your area. Look at the economy. See if your home has plus or minus features compared to other homes and see if these features will require a price adjustment. If you want a sale, set your price to attract buyers.