

Tips for Finding the Perfect Neighborhood

Your neighborhood has a big impact on your lifestyle. Follow these steps to find the perfect community to call home.

Is it close to your favorite spots? Make a list of the activities — movies, health club, church, etc. — you engage in regularly and stores you visit frequently. See how far you would have to travel from each neighborhood you're considering to engage in your most common activities.

Check out the school district. This is especially important if you have children, but it also can affect resale value. The Department of Education in your town can probably provide information on test scores, class size, percentage of students who attend college, and special enrichment programs. If you have school-age children, visit schools in the neighborhoods you're considering. Also, check out www.schoolmatters.com.

Find out if the neighborhood is safe. Ask the police department for neighborhood crime statistics. Consider not only the number of crimes but also the type — such as burglaries or armed robberies — and the trend of increasing or decreasing crime. Also, is crime centered in only one part of the neighborhood, such as near a retail area?

Determine if the neighborhood is economically stable. Check with your local city economic development office to see if income and property values in the neighborhood are stable or rising. What is the percentage of homes to apartments? Apartments don't necessarily diminish value, but do mean a more transient population. Do you see vacant businesses or homes that have been for sale for months?

See if you'll make money. Ask a local REALTOR® or call the local REALTOR® association to get information about price appreciation in the neighborhood. Although past performance is no guarantee of future results, this information may give you a sense of how good of an investment your home will be. A REALTOR® or the government planning agency also may be able to tell you about planned developments or other changes in the neighborhood — like a new school or highway — that might affect value.

Make personal observations. Once you've narrowed your focus to two or three neighborhoods, go there and walk around. Are homes tidy and well maintained? Are streets quiet? How does it feel? Pick a warm day if you can and chat with people working or playing outside.