

Tips for new house hunters

Last week we talked about steps first time buyers can take to prepare for their first home purchase. This week we've moved on to the fun part: house hunting itself. Here are five tips to make the house hunting experience more enjoyable.

1. Choose a community before a house. There are plenty of homes to choose from, but be sure you're happy with the area before looking for the house itself. Consider what you and your family want in a community. For example, are you looking for a quiet suburban neighborhood with plenty of space and outdoor activities? Or a more urban setting, walking distance to shops and cafes? Be sure your buyer's agent has a clear idea not only of what you're looking for in a home but in a community.

2. Use smart phone apps. There are many iPhone and Droid applications that help simplify house hunting, enabling you to locate properties for sale based on your current location, find nearby amenities

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(schools, parks, restaurants, etc.), map your route to multiple properties, check crime statistics, and more. You can also save and compare properties of interest on your mobile device.

3. Map it. Most home search websites now have embedded maps, allowing you to identify potential impediments (example: nearby high tension wires) before you drive out to see the home. In many cases, sites like Google Maps also include a panoramic street view to give you a sense of the area.

4. Take advantage of previewing services. Many buyer's agents will preview homes for you. This means the agent visits properties on your behalf, weeding out the "duds" and showing you the most promising matches to save you time and frustration in your search.

5. Check out commuting op-

tions. Use trip planning tools at sites such as www.mbta.com to explore public transit options. The MBTA's "trip finder" tool will give you the most direct route from any property of interest. If you're considering driving to work you may also want to Google terms like "Boston commuting guide" to find sites that compare commute times via train vs. highway. If you have the time, you might even want to do a test drive to see what the morning commute is like from homes of interest.

Do you have a real estate question?

Write to our real estate blogger Leslie Mann at realestatequeries@yahoo.com. She'd be glad to answer your questions here.

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