



SELLER'S *guide*

YOUR GUIDE TO A SUCCESSFUL
HOME SELLING PROCESS



Why Should I Choose Stewart Title of Austin?

Financial Strength and Ratings:

We are owned by Stewart Title, one of the nation's largest title insurance companies, with assets over \$1 billion. When you work with our team of underwriters, you can have peace of mind that your real estate investment has the protection it needs from a company with real financial strength.



RISK MANAGEMENT:

Stewart has a staff of experienced underwriters as well as a local Escrow Operations Manager that can provide assistance resolving any objections to title, document preparation and hands-on management of difficult transactions.



EXPERIENCE:

Our escrow staff averages over 20 years of experience and we have some of Austin's most seasoned abstractors and examiners at our land title plant, also averaging over 20 years of experience.



SERVICE:

We've built our success one customer at a time by providing a higher level of service and proficiency to all parties involved in the closing process. Stewart Title of Austin is big enough to serve you and small enough to know you.



TECHNOLOGY:

It is our commitment to keep up with the changes in technology and provide the most up-to-date tools in the industry. That's why the "Tools and Resources" section of our website has been developed to equip real estate professionals with the proper tools for working more efficiently. All of this, with the convenience of 24-hour access.



LOCATIONS:

With convenient locations throughout the Central Texas region, we're only a step away and ready to serve you. Go to stewart.com/austin to learn more.

Title Insurance

What is it For and How Does it Work?



Fire insurance protects you against losses from fire. Collision insurance guards you against the cost of a damaged car. Theft insurance – well, you get the idea. Title insurance protects your title to real estate that you are about to acquire. To understand why title protection is essential, we need to consider real estate for a moment.

YOUR OWNERSHIP OF REAL ESTATE

Real estate is so basic a form of wealth that many special laws have been enacted to protect ownership of land and the buildings which stand on the land. You should realize whenever you buy property that the owner who is selling it to you has extremely strong rights as do his family and heirs. There may also be others, in addition to the owner, who have “rights” in the property you are going to buy, perhaps governmental bodies or contractors, for example. Some of the things a title search uncovers are previous owners, easements, and many other court actions or recorded documents which can affect title to real estate.

PROTECTING YOU AGAINST HIDDEN RISKS

Protection against loss from covered claims on real estate which cannot be discovered by examination of the public records is another part of the benefit which Stewart Title of Austin provides. For example, the title to the home, which you have paid for and for which you have received a deed, could be threatened or lost by circumstances, such as forgery, confusion due to similar names or error in the records.

HOW A TITLE INSURANCE POLICY PROTECTS YOU

If a claim is made against your title as covered by your policy, Stewart Title protects you by:

- Defending your title, in court if necessary, at our expense
- Bearing the cost of settling the claim if it proves valid, in order to perfect your title and keep you in possession of your property

SUMMARY

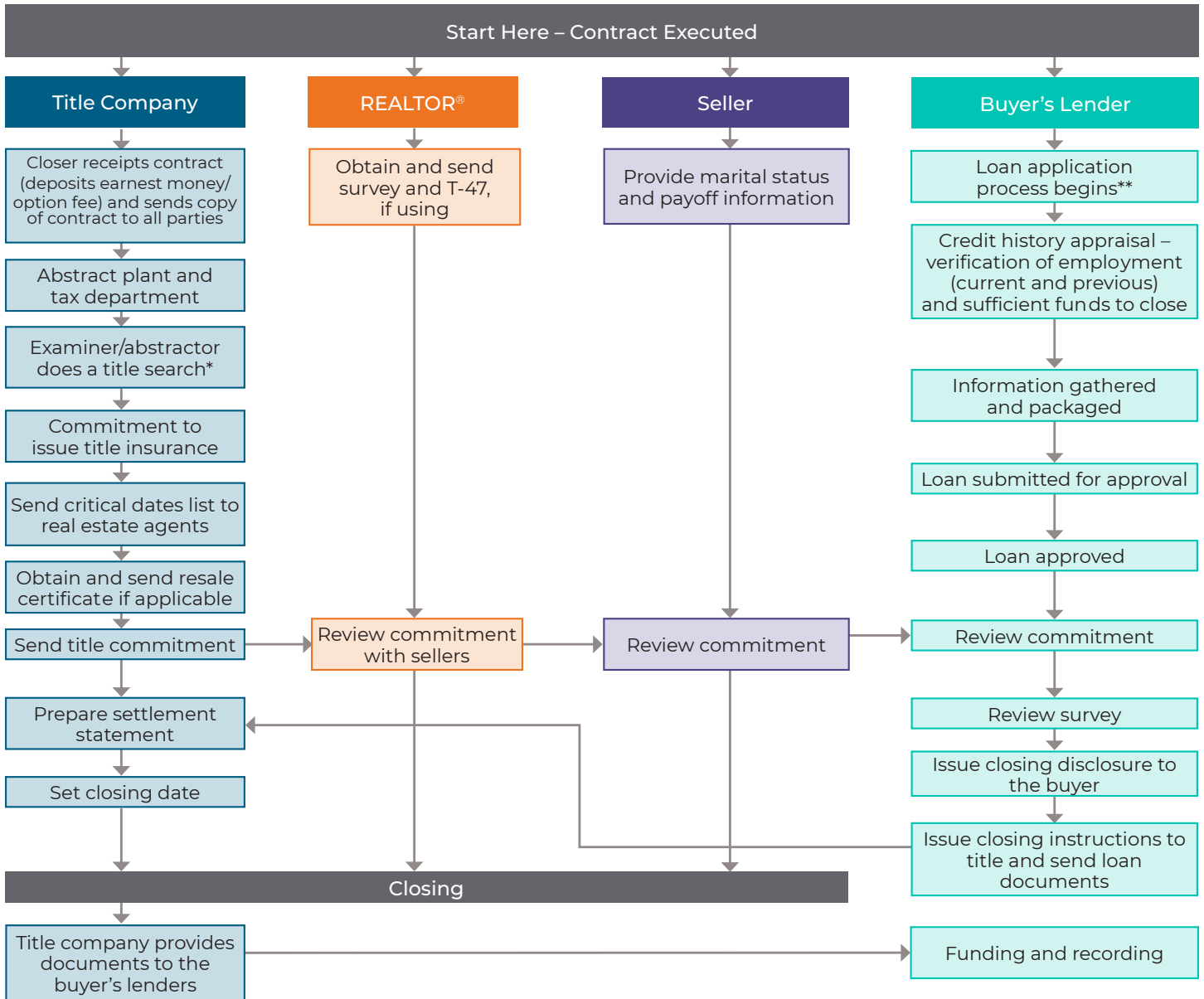
Owner’s title insurance provides a guarantee that the insured will suffer no loss by reason of a covered claim to or attack on the title.

AND YOU ONLY PAY ONCE

Unlike other forms of insurance, the original premium is your only cost for as long as you own the property. There are no annual payments to keep your owner’s title insurance policy in effect.

From Contract To Close

The Seller's Steps To Closing



Title search includes:

- ▶ Search history of property – owner of record, liens
- ▶ Clouds on title – documents filed by legal description
- ▶ Search of buyer and seller – liens, lawsuits, divorces, probates, documents filed by person's name, no property description

Loan application process includes:

- ▶ Verification of buyer's income, stability, credit, assets to close
- ▶ Confirmation of property's value (the appraisal)
- ▶ Some lenders order the appraisal and send with closing instructions to the title company

Estimate of Closing Costs For the Seller



SELLER'S CHARGES	CONVENTIONAL	VA	FHA	CASH
Attorney's Fee	\$175	\$275 - \$325	\$175	N/A
Buyer's Loan Fees	Per contract	Per contract	Per contract	N/A
Commission	Per contract	Per contract	Per contract	N/A
Discount Points	Per contract	Per contract	Per contract	N/A
Escrow/Closing Fee	\$500 (\$500 for Refi)	\$500 (\$500for Refi)	\$500 (\$500 for Refi)	\$500 (\$500 for Refi)
Flood Certificate	\$0	\$50-\$75	\$0	\$0
Guaranty Fee	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00
HOA Fee	Per HOA addendum	Per HOA addendum	Per HOA addendum	Per HOA addendum
Home Warranty	Per contract	Per contract	Per contract	Per contract
Owner's Title Policy	Promulgated rate	Promulgated rate	Promulgated rate	Promulgated rate
Payoff	Principal balance plus interest through payoff date			
Recording Fee	\$40	\$40	\$40	\$40
Repairs	Actual Cost	Actual Cost	Actual Cost	Actual Cost
Survey	\$450 - \$650	\$450 - \$650	\$450 - \$650	If requested
Tax Certificates	\$65	\$65	\$65	\$65
Tax Prorations	From Jan.1 - closing	From Jan.1 - closing	From Jan.1 - closing	From Jan.1 - closing
Tax Service Fee	N/A	See below*	N/A	N/A
Termite Inspection Fee	\$0	\$75	\$0	\$0
Underwriting Fee	\$0	See below*	\$0	\$0

*A veteran/buyer may not pay attorney fees, escrow fees, pest inspection fee, processing or underwriting fee or tax service fee if the veteran is paying a 1% origination fee. These estimates are subject to change, and there may be extra charges not included herein. Please contact your lender for actual charges.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Appraisal Fee

What an appraiser charges to deliver a professional opinion about how much a property is worth.

Attorney's Fee

Consideration paid for document preparation or attorney review of documents.

Buyer's Inspection

Examination of property for various reasons such as termite or repairs.

Buyer's Loan Fees

Fees collected by the lender to compensate for the work in evaluating, processing and making the loan.

Escrow or Closing Fee

The fee paid to the closing agent (title company) to act as a disinterested third party who handles the finalizing of the loan or home purchase.

Commission

The amount paid to the real estate agent or broker when you buy a house; usually a percentage of the home's price.

Credit Report

An evaluation of the buyer's credit made by a credit bureau for the lender.

Discount Points

A fee paid to receive a lower interest rate.

Flood Certificate

This fee covers the map search to determine if your home requires flood insurance.

Guaranty Fee

This fee represents the charge by government-sponsored enterprises like Fannie Mae® and Freddie Mac® to guarantee an investor in that loan will receive all scheduled principal and interest payments until the loan is repaid.

Home Warranty

A type of insurance that covers repairs to specified parts of the house for a specific period of time.

Homeowners' Association Fee

Amount each homeowner in a condominium or PUD pays for their share of the common area's expense.

Hazard Insurance

Insurance coverage that compensates for physical damage to property.

Lender Required Escrows

Typically an additional month or two of reserve or escrow deposited with lender.

Lender's Inspection

Required by lender to determine condition of the property.

Mortgagee's Title Policy

Title insurance policy that protects the lender.

Origination Fee

Lender's fee for establishing a new loan.

Owner's Title Policy

Title insurance policy that protects the buyer.

Payoff

The outstanding balance of an existing loan.

Processing Fee

Lender fees to cover the initial cost of processing the loan.

Recording Fee

Cost to note in a book of public records the terms of legal documents affecting title to real property.

Repairs

Charges required to restore or maintain property.

Survey

Cost of surveying the property to determine the size of the lot your home is on.

Tax Certificates

Certificates issued by tax service showing current year and any delinquent taxes.

Tax Prorations

To divide taxes proportionately to time of use.

Tax Service Fee

Fee paid to a tax service to verify to the lender that property taxes have been paid when due.

Termite Inspection Fee

Cost for an inspection to determine if termites are present in the building.

Underwriting Fee

Charge to evaluation of a loan application to determine risk in making loan.

VA Funding Fee

Fee the Department of Veterans Affairs charges veterans obtaining a VA loan.

Contract to Close

Seller's Checklist

OPTION PERIOD

- Get the seller's social security number, mortgage company phone number and lien numbers to your Stewart Title escrow officer
- Notify the client of inspection date and time
- Change status in MLS
- TAR Authorization Form

MLS

- Amendment
- Have parties execute and provide copies to the title company and lender (if necessary)
- Repairs
- Make certain repairs are completed by licensed professional (Paragraph 7F of Earnest Money contract) and provide copies of repair slips and invoices to the title company
- Turn paperwork into broker and attach appropriate documents Submit paperwork to broker:
 - Contract
 - Addenda
 - Brokerage Services Forms
 - Buyers Representation Agreement

FINANCING

- Get lender info from buyer or from approval letter
- Call and make friends with the lender
- Offer to email contract
- Check in weekly with lender
- Obtain approval, according to the Third Party Financing Addendum
- Approval letter should state full approval or approval contingent upon lender's review of title policy, survey and appraisal
- Other issues you may need to address with the lender and the title company:
 - When will the docs and closing disclosure be delivered to the title company?
 - Is either party a mail out?
 - Will a POA be used?

DEADLINES

- Additional earnest money
- Deliver survey to the buyer – are there any changes?



- HOA
- Seller's disclosure
- Environmental assessment
- Septic approval
- Seller financing
- Credit report
- Contingencies
- Sale of other property
- Leaseback
- Terms and insurance
- Title Commitment
- Title company has 20 days to deliver and may extend 15 more days
- All requirements on Schedule C must be fulfilled
- Trust documents
- Liens
- Right of First Refusal
- Judgments
- Surveyor needs Schedule B
- First Right of Refusal needs Schedule A
- Objections to the title and/or survey must be in writing and submitted according to 6A of contract

GET READY FOR CLOSING

- Disbursement Authorization to title company
- Utilities
- Make sure both parties connect or disconnect service
- Submit invoices, repairs and reimbursements to the title company
- Follow up on status of lender docs/closing disclosure
- Order home warranty and submit to title company
- Follow up on septic approval
- Set closing date and time
- Notify all parties, including lender
- Review closing disclosure/settlement statement

AFTER CLOSING

- Celebrate!
- Change status to SOLD
- Take down sign, brochure box, and/or lockbox
- Make certain broker receives their check





7 Steps To A Smooth Closing For the Seller

1. Existing Lien Holders

As soon as possible, please provide your closing officer with the name of your existing lien holder(s), along with their address and phone number. We will also need the loan numbers.

2. Homeowners' Association

We need contact information for the management company as early in the transaction as possible. Delivery of homeowners' association documentation is often time sensitive.

3. Existing Survey

If the buyers and sellers have agreed to use an existing survey at closing, Stewart Title must review the survey prior to closing and receive verification from the sellers that no improvements have been made since the date of the survey.

4. Social Security Numbers

We will need the Social Security number of all the property owners for tax reporting, and because the lender may require Social Security numbers for payoff information.

5. Identification

Don't forget to bring your driver's license or other U.S. issued form of official picture ID to closing.

6. Wiring Information

Upon funding of the transaction, we will be glad to wire your proceeds into your account. Please provide us with your bank account information if you choose to have your funds wired.

7. Reimbursements

All bills for inspections, repairs or other items to be paid at closing must be provided to us prior to closing.

AVOID COMMON CLOSING DELAYS:

- ▶ If you will not be present at closing to sign documents and intend to use a power of attorney, you must provide the original power of attorney to your closing officer prior to closing for approval and recording of the document. (The lender will also need to approve the power of attorney.) On the day of closing, we will need to contact you and verify that you have not revoked the power of attorney.
- ▶ If you are unable to attend the closing and will sign the papers by overnight mail, please provide Stewart Title with the forwarding address, including ZIP code. Also, please provide us with a contact number in case we need to reach you. You will need to sign the papers in front of a notary. We will provide you with a return overnight mail packet. Please send the signed and notarized closing papers back to us the same day you receive them.

How to Review the Closing Disclosure For the Seller



When a seller is reviewing their Closing Disclosure, it can be confusing since they do not review them daily like title companies, lenders and real estate professionals do. It is generally a two page document that is very important to the transaction. Below is an explanation of each page in this document.

Page 1:

This page summarizes the seller's transaction. It is a summary of all funds due to the seller, less any amounts they were required to pay at closing. It also includes a contact list for the parties participating in the transaction.

Page 2:

This page itemizes all individual charges to the seller from the transaction. The top half of the page is dedicated to those fees that are charged because the buyer is obtaining a loan. These are called loan charges. Each section includes the individual charges that are being made at closing in alphabetical order. The bottom half of the page is dedicated to those fees that are charged from the transaction occurring. These fees are also separated by type and alphabetized. These are called other charges.

This document is prepared and delivered to the seller by the title company. It must be available for the seller's review one day prior to closing.

Sold!

A Contract Is Accepted, Now What?

You've found a house, or a buyer has found yours, and everyone has agreed on a price. So what happens between now and the time you or another party legally owns it? At Stewart Title, we understand the home-buying process can be a little confusing. So we've put together this information to help you better understand what happens after the sold sign is posted.



EARNEST MONEY/OPTION FEE

Earnest money is a deposit made by the purchaser as a sign of good intent to purchase the property. Once the earnest money is received, along with an agreement to transfer the title, the process can begin. The buyer then submits a loan application and approval is usually subject to a credit check, an appraisal and sometimes a survey of the property. Option fee is also deposited at this time.



TITLE SEARCH

To begin the title search, copies of documents are gathered from various public records. Deeds, deeds of trust, bankruptcy, heirship and divorce, and various assessments and matters of probate are addressed.



EXAMINATION

The title company now verifies the legal owner, any encumbrances on the land and any debts that may be owed by the owner.



TAX CHECK

The title company determines what taxes are owed on the property and contacts the various assessor-collectors.



DOCUMENT PREPARATION

Appropriate forms are then prepared for the transfer of title and settlement, or the formal transfer of ownership (commonly referred to as the closing).



SETTLEMENT

An escrow officer oversees the closing of the transaction. The seller signs the deed, the buyer signs a new mortgage, the old loan is paid off and the new loan is established. The seller, real estate agents, attorneys, surveyors, title company and other performing parties for the buyer and seller are paid. Additionally, title insurance policies will then be issued to you and your lender.



RECORDING OF LEGAL DOCUMENTS

All final documents are recorded with the county to show transfer of ownership.



stewart.com/austin

What to Do After the Closing

Seller:

- Stop any auto drafts for your mortgage payment(s).
- Expect your escrow refund from your mortgage company within 30 days.
- Cancel your homeowners insurance after you have been notified that the transaction is funded.
- The Original Note and Deed of Trust are marked paid; keep them in a safe place.
- The Release of Lien(s) are forwarded to Stewart Title of Austin for recording.

Buyer:

- Check for the County Appraisal District notice of value (before May).
- File for Homestead Exemption between January and April. Do not pay for this service – companies will offer.
- The county will ask how much you paid for the property. The original Warranty Deed will come to you in the mail; file it in a safe place. A company will offer to provide this to you for \$70.00. Don't do it. If you can't find your deed, contact us for a free copy.
- Check the county tax records to make sure your name is reflected as the owner by October. If not, call the appraisal district and provide the document number on the top right of your Warranty Deed.

Refinance:

- Stop any auto drafts for your mortgage payment(s).
- Expect your escrow refund from your mortgage company within 30 days.
- The Original Note and Deed of Trust are marked paid; keep them in a safe place.
- The Release of Lien(s) are forwarded to Stewart Title of Austin for recording.



What is a Mud?

Everything You Need to Know

A Municipal Utility District, or MUD, is a special purpose district that provides electricity, water, sewage, drainage, flood control and other services to properties within the MUD's boundaries. MUDs are also encouraged to establish and maintain parks, recreational facilities and common elements for their residents.

How is a MUD created and how does it work?

Property owners that reside within a desired district or land developers can petition the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to create a MUD, following the process described in the Texas Water Code. Residents within the political subdivision may vote to establish the MUD, which is represented by a board of directors, elected by the constituents. The board will establish all necessary policies in the interest of its residents and customers. The board also has the authority to adopt and enforce all necessary taxes, fees and charges deemed necessary to provide services. A MUD differs from a Public Utility District, or PUD, in that PUDs are generally created by the local government.

What is the tax rate for a MUD?

Much like all tax rates, the tax rate for a MUD varies on the individual needs of each district.

How do I know if I'm in a MUD?

A copy of the most recent tax bill for your property should show a breakdown of each of the taxing districts.



What is a PID?

Public Improvement District

A Public Improvement District is a special district created by a City or County under the authority of Chapter 372 of the Texas Local Code. The statute allows for a city or county to levy a special assessment against properties within the District to pay for improvements to the properties in the District.

HB 1543 (effective September 1, 2021)

This bill requires sellers to provide a new notice to buyers when selling property located within a public improvement district (PID) and applies to all property types. The notice requires the seller to provide specific information about the district, including:

- Property address;
- Name of the PID;
- Name of the county or municipality levying an assessment;
- Statute the PID was created under, which will be either Subchapter A, Chapter 372 of the Local Government Code, or Chapter 382 of that same code.

If the seller fails to provide the notice, the buyer may terminate the contract or file a lawsuit for damages once the transaction closes.

TREC has created an Addendum Containing Notice of Obligation to Pay Improvement District Assessment that you can attach to your contracts. The Addendum must be signed by both Buyers and Sellers and must be completed at, or before, contract execution. To be directed to the TREC form, go to the following: <https://bit.ly/trec-pid>.

Is Your Neighborhood a "PID"?

Check your County Tax Assessor websites often for updated PID listings.

County Appraisal Districts

Bastrop	512.303.1930	bastropcad.org
Burnet	512.756.8291	burnet-cad.org
Hays	512.268.2522	hayscad.com
Travis	512.834.9317	traviscad.org
Williamson	512.930.3787	wcad.org



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SELLING A HOME

Checklist for Repairs and Cleaning

A home that is clean and tidy, and maximizes space will sell faster and at a higher price. Keep in mind that a small investment in time and money could make your home much more attractive to buyers.

Exterior	OK As Is	Needs Work
Does the house need fresh paint?		
Are holes and cracks visible?		
Are sidewalks, porches and decks swept and in good shape?		
Is it inviting?		
Do the windows and door screens need to be replaced?		
Does the house trim need repair or paint?		
Are gutters and downspouts secure and clean?		
Landscape	OK As Is	Needs Work
Are shrubs and trees trimmed?		
Is the lawn fertilized?		
Are flowers planted?		
Is the lawn mowed and edged?		
Has the lawn been weeded?		
Kitchen	OK As Is	Needs Work
Are the appliances clean and working?		
Are cabinets neat and in good condition?		
Are countertops clean and uncluttered?		
Does the tile need regrouting?		
Does the sink need recaulking, chips repaired or stains removed?		
Do the faucets leak?		
Is the oven clean?		
Is the gas igniter working properly? (Be sure to leave the key.)		
Bathroom	OK As Is	Needs Work
Do the faucets leak?		
Does the tub need recaulking?		
Do the shower tiles need new grout?		
Are the shower doors clean?		
Is the floor in good condition?		
Roof	OK As Is	Needs Work
Are there any leaks or unlevel areas?		
Are shingles or tiles missing?		
Does the roof have any unlevel areas?		

Garage	OK As Is	Needs Work
Are the floors swept and stain-free?		
Are all items stacked against walls to maximize floor space?		
Is the garage door opener operating correctly?		
Is the garage organized, neat and well lit?		
Attic	OK As Is	Needs Work
Is the attic organized and clean?		
Are the stairs in good condition?		
Is the attic well lit?		
Are there any signs of insects or rodents?		
Overall	OK As Is	Needs Work
Can items be removed in order to make the home appear larger?		
Do the walls and woodwork need new paint?		
Do the walls have holes or cracks?		
Does the wallpaper need replacing?		
Are both sides of the windows clean?		
Are the floors clean and polished?		
Are there any stains or damage from water leaks?		
Is the carpet clean, flat and stain-free?		
Are the window treatments clean and properly working?		
Do squeaky hinges need oil?		
Are the ceiling fans and vents clean?		
Do the windows open and close easily?		
Has the house been deep cleaned?		
Do any of the doors stick?		
Do all the locks work properly and have keys?		
Do the doors seal properly?		
Are all lights working?		



MOVING Checklist

8 WEEKS OUT

- Create a realistic moving budget. Remember the small things like tape, boxes, etc.
- Request time off work for moving day.
- Get started on any home renovations, such as painting or major repairs.
- Purge time! Systematically go through every room of the house and get rid of items you know you won't keep.
- Decide how much of your current furniture you will keep and begin the process of selling or donating unwanted items.
- If you have school-age children, contact their new school(s) for registration information.



6 WEEKS OUT

- Get the measurements of all rooms and doorways in your new home to confirm all of your current furniture will fit correctly.
- If you are moving yourself, estimate how many boxes you will need, then determine the size of the truck required by calculating the cubic feet of the boxes, plus the large furniture pieces.
- Create a list of all family members, friends, and colleagues who will need your new address and share it with them via email.
- Contact your doctor, dentist, and veterinarian to get copies of and transfer all records to your new healthcare providers.



4 WEEKS OUT

- Clean or repair furniture, curtains, or carpets.
- Hold a garage sale. Donate any unsold items.
- Arrange for storage, if needed.
- Arrange to have utilities and services canceled at your old home after you've moved and schedule them for setup at your new home.
- If movers are not doing your packing, begin gathering packing materials, including:



- Boxes
- Bubble Wrap
- Packing Tape
- Markers
- Adhesive Labels
- Old Newspapers
- Scissors
- Box Cutters

3 WEEKS OUT

- Begin packing items you won't need between now and the move.
- Submit a Change of Address form with USPS.
- Make any special arrangements to move pets.
- Transfer your prescriptions.
- Have your car checked and serviced for the trip if you're moving far away.
- Change your address with important service providers, such as the bank, credit card companies, and subscription holders.
- Arrange for a babysitter on moving day if you have small children.



1 WEEK OUT

- Unplug, disassemble, and clean appliances.
- Ensure all essential utilities like gas, electricity, and water are ready at your new home.
- Empty your safe deposit box if you have one.
- Set aside valuables and essential legal documents to take with you.
- Pack first-day essentials such as toilet paper, chargers, and toiletries in a box to take with you.
- Defrost the freezer.



IT'S MOVING DAY!

- Collect all keys and ensure all doors and windows are locked.
- Do a final check of closets, cupboards, drawers, the attic, and other places where things may have been forgotten.
- Remove all trash and recycling.
- Confirm all major appliances are disconnected.
- Read the terms and conditions in your mover's agreement before signing. Keep the agreement in a safe place until your goods are delivered, charges are paid and any claims are settled.





Showing Your Home

Your home needs to be ready to show at all times. In addition to the steps you've already taken to get it ready to go on the market, here are some extra tips to help make the best possible impression at showing.

- ▶ Keep every room neat and tidy, and make all the beds.
- ▶ Put dirty dishes in the dishwasher, or wash and stack them neatly in the sink.
- ▶ Eliminate pet smells, clean carpets and drapes, empty trash often and refrain from cooking strong-smelling foods.
- ▶ Introduce good smells, such as flowers, potpourri and air fresheners. Baking a pie or cookies is another clever tactic.
- ▶ Let in light. Brightness improves a home's atmosphere.
- ▶ Make sure the temperature is comfortable.
- ▶ Set the dining room table to create a homey environment.
- ▶ Hire a cleaning service once a week to keep the house in show condition.

- ▶ Leave the house during a showing so that the buyers can feel free to ask the real estate agent candid questions.
- ▶ Turn off radios and televisions.
- ▶ Keep pets out of the way.

15-minute, Pre-showing Checklist

When your real estate agent calls and says a potential buyer is *en route*, here is a quick checklist to make sure you're ready.

Bedrooms, Living Room and Dining Area

- Turn on lights
- Open curtains
- Make beds
- Remove random items from tables and floors

Kitchen

- Put dirty dishes in the dishwasher
- Empty the trash
- Clear and wipe down counters

Bathrooms

- Flush toilets
- Shine fixtures
- Hang towels neatly
- Empty trash
- Wipe counters

Exterior

- Close garage door
- Pick up yard debris and trash



Boost Your Home's Value Through Affordable

Home Improvement Projects



10 Ways to Add Value to Your Home Without Breaking Your Bank

Projects that can make life in a current home more enjoyable in the short-term and pay big dividends for the homeowners when the time comes to sell the home.

1. Create or Update a Home Office Space

People are working out of the home more and more these days. A home office space is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Convert an attic, unused den or old office into an inviting work sanctuary with windows, a fresh coat of paint and built-in shelving. You'll be sure to reap the rewards.

2. Increase the Amount of Usable Space

Any time you can add square footage and living space to your home, it's a win. Build an attractive sunroom or deck onto the back of the house. The creation of more living space makes life more enjoyable for a current homeowner and adds an appealing selling feature for the future. Projects that increase value center around creating flex rooms such as mother-in-law suites, upstairs laundry rooms or playrooms.

3. Make Necessary Home Updates

Let a future buyer know that you have taken really good care of the house. Make updates as necessary to the following:

- ▶ Replace outdated carpet with low-maintenance flooring, such as hardwood or tile. This will appeal to buyers of all ages.
- ▶ Replace or repair a shabby roof. If the roof is plain, flat and turning green in the corners, people will look at it and see major problems that could affect the inside of the house.
- ▶ Replace old windows. In the average house, 30% of its energy is lost through windows. Installing new windows will save money on energy bills, freshen up the look of the house and possibly give it that cutting edge needed to sell.
- ▶ Think about small changes you can make that won't require spending a ton of money. Remove outdated wallpaper and paint the wall a neutral color. Replace existing items like appliances and hardware. Add new light fixtures and you've got a great-looking, updated space!
- ▶ Refresh old siding. People usually judge a book by its cover, so old siding sets the tone for expectations of what potential buyers will find inside the house.

4. Liven Your Landscape

Create a place to entertain outside. Build a deck or patio area with decorative flooring and comfortable furniture. Add nighttime ambiance with elegant lighting. Plant drought-tolerant plants and add a splash of color using brightly colored, seasonal flowers. For your own enjoyment, install a hammock or chaise loungers for basking in the sun or shaded relaxation. How could a buyer resist a paradise outside their own back door?

5. Remodel an Outdated Kitchen

Studies have shown that more activity takes place in the kitchen than any other room in the house. Remodeling the kitchen will not only personalize a home, it will also increase the value of it if the remodeling is done well and correctly. Consider adding recessed lighting, quartz for the counter tops, or re-finish the cabinet fronts. New stainless appliances and new flooring also help provide an updated vibe.

6. Renovate an Existing Bathroom

Update an outdated bathroom by creating his-and-her areas with separate sinks or add a skylight to bring in valuable natural light. An updated bathtub and tile are also good ideas. Breathe new life into the space by installing new fixtures, linens and accessories.

7. Add a Splash of Color

Adding a fresh coat of paint is an easy, inexpensive way to dramatically change the look of your home. Don't be afraid to hire a color specialist or professional painter if you're not confident in your taste and skill. It's best to stick to neutral colors to appeal to the majority of potential buyers

8. Spruce Up the Garage

Create a work area in the garage. Adding a work bench to the garage provides a space to store and organize tools, along with an area to work on special home improvement projects. To add more storage space, install a simple hanging storage wall system. Paint the walls and maybe even the floor. Be proud of your garage and show it off as a very usable space in the home.

9. Pay Attention to Exterior Mildew

Remove mildew from your home's exterior and prevent it from coming back. Start by using a garden sprayer and a mildewcide, which kills mildew without harming your siding, shrubs or grass. Once the mildew is dead, prevent it from coming back by using a mold and mildew proof paint.

10. Bump Out to a Bay or Bow Window

Bay and bow windows add instant visual interior and exterior appeal to homes. The extended area adds space for a window seat while bringing more light into the room.

Remodeling Cost vs. Value

Get the most up-to-date information about the relationship between remodeling costs and resale value.

The website below compares national and regional averages for 21 popular remodeling projects. You can also download a PDF with project data for 149 U.S. markets.

remodeling.hw.net/cost-vs-value/2018

6 Affordable Upgrades for a More Energy-Efficient Home

Save money and improve home performance using an effective strategy. First, target your home's envelope: walls, attic, windows and doors. Then, improve the energy efficiency of systems, such as heating, cooling, lighting and appliances. Schedule an energy audit for more expert advice on your home as a whole. To access a list of certified ECAD auditors in your area, visit bit.ly/2QIzwaq.

Make sure your walls and attic are well insulated.

Effective insulation slows the rate that heat flows out of the house in winter or into the house in summer, so less energy is required to heat or cool the house.

Upgrade or replace windows.

According to energystar.gov, replacing windows will save 7-24% of your heating and air conditioning bills.

Plant shade trees and shrubs around your house.

In summer, the foliage blocks infrared radiation that would warm the house, while in winter, the bare branches let this radiation through.

Replace incandescent bulbs with light-emitting diodes (LEDs) or compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs).

CFLs can save 75% of the electricity used by incandescents. Most people don't think about the fact that the electricity to run a light bulb costs much more than the bulb itself. A new CFL costs around \$2 but it lasts 10,000 hours and uses only about 27 watts to generate as much light as a 50-cent, 100-watt incandescent bulb that lasts around 1,000 hours. LEDs offer a longer bulb life with similar utility savings.

Comparison Between Traditional Incandescents, CFLs and LEDs			
	60W Incandescent	15W CFL	12W LED
Energy \$ Saved (%)	-	~75%	~75-80%
Annual Energy Cost*	\$4.80	\$1.20	\$1.00
Bulb Life	1000 hours	10,000 hours	25,000 hours

*Based on 2 hrs/day of usage at an electricity rate of 11 cents per kilowatt-hour.

Source: energy.gov

"Home improvement projects always equate to increasing the value of your house. Whether you're replacing an old dishwasher with a newer, energy-efficient model or simply adding crown moulding to a bedroom, every activity you do means you're investing in the future of your home."

- Don Zeman, *Homefront with Don Zeman*

Replace old thermostats with a programmable option.

This appeals to millennials, who appreciate the ease of a product that allows them to control the climate on their smartphone.

Take advantage of home improvement tax incentives.

For details, visit energy.gov/savings/search.

Source: U.S. Green Building Council's Green Home Guide greenhomeguide.com



Home Improvement Myths

"Any Remodel is a Good One" - Some people think that any improvement is a good one but not all home improvements are created equal. When making renovations, keep in mind that you might want to sell the place one day and a potential buyer may not have the same hobbies and taste as you. For example, adding a concert hall to a ranch-style home could be considered an overly customized remodel when selling the home. Unless the next homeowner is also a musician, he or she may not want such a dedicated space in the house.

"I Can Do It All Myself" - Doing it yourself may possibly save money but you need to know your limits. Don't be afraid to ask for help. There are certain low-risk projects that are very simple to tackle on your own but there are many others for which you need a professional. Call around, get estimates and always consider what your time is worth.

"Pools Add Value" - Many people think that adding a swimming pool or hot tub is a money-maker when selling a house. That's not always the case. In some regions, adding a pool can be a scary proposition due to climate conditions and liability issues. Pools and hot tubs can also become a time-consuming money pit. Often, the pros of adding this luxury are outweighed by the cons due to the large amount of maintenance required in the off-season.

"Follow the Latest Design Trends" - Many homeowners think it's a good idea to follow the latest design trends. This is not always true, as decorating trends come and go. Instead, go for a more timeless feel. Neutral colors or palettes will appeal to far more people when it comes time to sell.

Source: HGTV Online, hgtv.com

SECURING YOUR SAFETY

WHEN SELLING YOUR HOME



WHY IT MATTERS

With all the excitement involved in selling a home, it's easy to overlook another important matter: safety. Thefts and attacks, while not common occurrences, do happen. The following tips will help ensure the safety of your home and your family throughout the selling process:

STEPS TO SAFE SELLING EXPERIENCE

- 1 Ask your real estate agent to check visitors' identities.** Make it clear that you do not want anyone in your home whose identity has not been confirmed.
- 2 Remove or secure in a safe all items to which visitors should not have access.** This includes keys, jewelry and electronics; credit cards, cash, bills and anything featuring your social security number; weapons, such as firearms and knives; family photos or anything labeled with a name; and calendars and reminders
- 3 Be smart with open houses.** Request that all visitors sign a guest book and enter and leave through only one door. Ask the agent to accompany visitors who wish to view the garage or back yard and to make sure windows and doors remain locked.
- 4 Handle unexpected visitors with caution.** If a visitor shows up without an appointment, do not open the door under any circumstance. Kindly ask that he or she call the agent to make an appointment for another time.
- 5 Beware of any stranger claiming to be a buyer's agent.** If a person claiming to be a buyer's agent shows up unannounced, contact your agent to confirm the appointment, and then ask them to open the lockbox on your door. Only agents have access to lockboxes.

When selling your home, never allow your desire to be polite or to sell your home put you at risk. Taking a few precautionary steps will help ensure the great home-selling experience you deserve.

For more information on personal safety during the home-selling process, visit stewart.com/safety

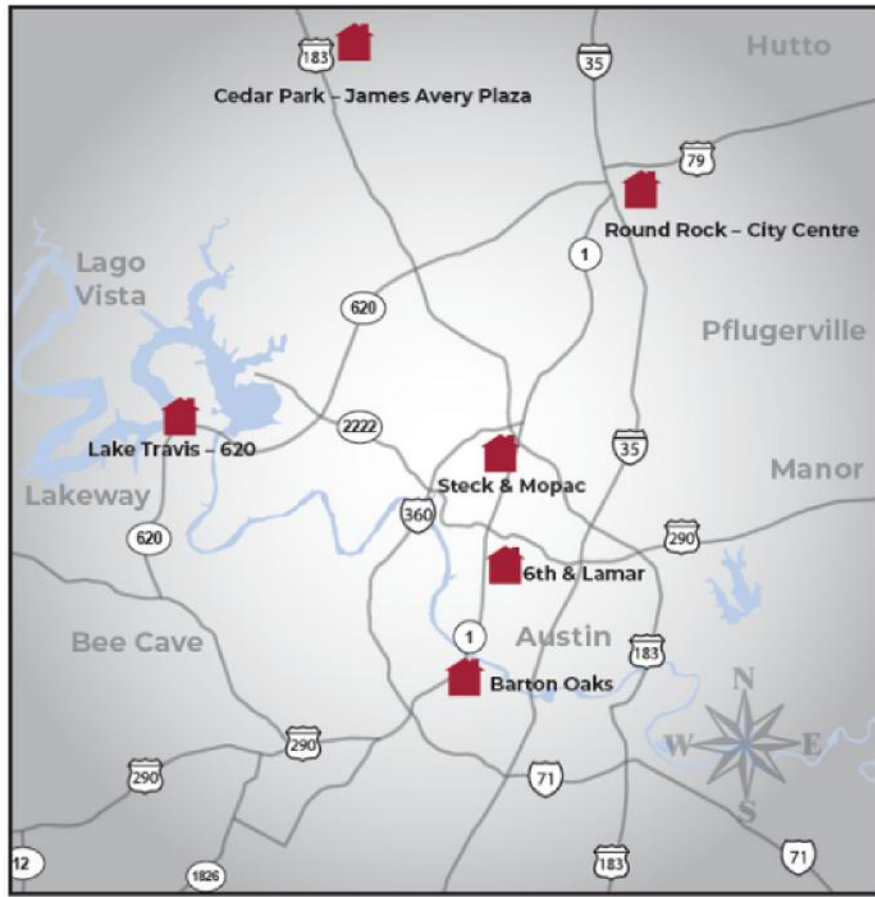
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