

## Find the Neighborhood That's Right For You

Having a dream home in the wrong neighborhood can quickly become a nightmare. The community that you choose to call home can make a big difference in your quality of life.

Finding one that fits your family's lifestyle and needs is just as important a factor as square footage and number of bedrooms. When searching for your next home, think about finding the right neighborhood first.

Create a checklist of things that are important to you in your new community. Here are some suggestions that may help narrow down the choices. The first three may seem obvious, but definitely bear repeating:

- **Quality of the school system.** Standard & Poor's hosts a Web site at [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com) which allows parents to research and compare schools within a city and state.
- **Crime rate.** Make sure you know how safe your family members and home are with a crime rate comparison. Visit [www.BestPlaces.net](http://www.BestPlaces.net) which rates a location on a scale of 1 to 10 on both violent and property crimes — the lower the number, the better.
- **Getting to work.** If you want to spend less time getting to and from work and more time at home, consider a location much closer to your workplace.
- **Property taxes and homeowners' association (HOA) fees.** When you are buying a house, you aren't just investing in the cost of the house. Depending on what city or county the neighborhood resides in, the property taxes you pay may vary.

Also, many neighborhoods have HOA fees that help pay to maintain common areas, such as a pool or nearby park. Make sure you are educated on what your

future obligations will be on a monthly or yearly basis when you look at your budget.

- **Average housing costs and history.** Look at the median or average cost of homes in a given neighborhood. This will help you to determine what you can expect a house might cost for that community. Also, be sure to look at the history of the community to make sure the values of the homes have grown so that you are investing in a community that will pay off for you in the long run.
- **Age of development.** Determine what kind of neighborhood you are most comfortable living in. If you are a younger family newer developments may provide the chance to meet other families that share your life experiences and interests. More established communities, on the other hand, will likely have more mature landscaping and bigger lot sizes.
- **Neighborhood amenities.** If you have children you might be most interested in one that has a community swimming pool or playground. Empty-nesters might prefer a clubhouse that provides social activities which will allow them to connect with others. Individuals who are in retirement age may be more interested in maintenance-free living which includes lifestyle amenities such as a golf course.