

On the Home Front

Bi-monthly column by: Linda Skolnick

Six Questions Buyers Should Ask Before Making An Offer

When you are buying a home, there are many problems that the seller is obligated to disclose. For example, it is illegal to withhold information about major physical defects on the property, and according to the Residential Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction Act (U.S. Code §4852d), anyone selling a house built prior to 1978 must disclose all known lead-based paint and hazards in the house. But, these disclosures don't always paint the entire picture of the home. Here are six questions you may want to ask that can offer additional insight about the prospective home before you make a final decision.

1) Why is the seller selling the house?

This question may help you evaluate the “real value” of the property. Is there something about the house the seller does not like? If so, you may be able to adjust the purchase offer accordingly.

2) How much did the seller pay for the home?

This question can, in some instances, help the buyer negotiate a better deal—maybe even get the seller to carry part of the loan. However, it is important to remember that the purchase price is influenced by several factors, like the current market value and any improvements the seller may have made to the home. The original purchase price might not have anything to do with the current value of the house.

3) What does the seller like most and least about the property?

By asking the seller what he or she likes most and least about the property, you might get some interesting information. In a few cases, what a seller likes the most about a home might actually be something the buyer is looking to avoid. For example, if the seller describes his house as being in a “happening neighborhood,” the buyer might consider this a negative factor because the area may be too noisy or busy for his or her taste.

4) Has the seller had any problems with the home in the past?

It is also a good idea to ask the seller if he or she has had any problems with the home while living there. Has the seller had problems with a leakage from the upstairs bedroom in the past? If so, even if the leak has been corrected, the floor and walls around the bathroom might have been damaged. You should also check that these items were repaired properly.

5) Are there any nuisances or problem neighbors?

Use this answer to find out about any noisy neighbors, barking dogs, heavy airplane traffic or even planned changes to the neighborhood, such as a planned street widening. This may give you insight on why the seller is really moving.

6) How are the public schools in the area?

Because the value of a neighborhood is usually greatly influenced by the public schools in the area, finding out the buyer's perception can give you some insight about the quality of the area's schools.

Knowing all you can about a prospective home, not only helps you decide if it's the home of your dreams, but what offer to make as well.