

Seller To-Do List

*Selling a home? There are several things you should do if you want to get maximum value for your property -- while keeping it as safe and secure as possible. Use this checklist to help get your home market-ready. This checklist is provided by Craig Blackmon, an innovative real estate attorney and broker in Seattle. He's helped hundreds of sellers through the selling process. He is not your attorney (unless you sign his fee agreement). He provides this checklist free of charge and without any warranty or guarantee whatsoever. **Use this checklist at your own discretion and risk.***

Consider a pre-listing inspection: Identify the issues? Or is ignorance bliss?

In today's competitive marketplace, sellers are at an advantage, and buyers are willing to overlook some flaws. However, almost every buyer will still complete an inspection, either before the offer or during the purchase, after the home is under contract. Every house has warts, so every inspection will reveal at least a few issues. You may benefit from identifying and correcting at least some of those issues in order to prevent the failure of a contract or renegotiation of it after the buyer's inspection. On the other hand, when you sell a house the law requires you to tell the buyer about its defects. Sellers must complete a state-required [Seller Disclosure Statement](#) that addresses many specific aspects of the home. If you do a pre-inspection, *you will likely need to either fix the issues identified or disclose them to a buyer.* So you may want to keep your head blissfully buried in the sand about the condition of the home. This is a great issue to discuss with an attorney, particularly if you're selling For Sale By Owner.

Title: Make sure you have good ownership, or take steps to protect yourself.

When you sell a home, you transfer ownership (or "[title](#)," the legal word for owning property) by signing a legal document, a "[deed](#)." In most instances you will use a Statutory Warranty Deed, the type of deed that provides the most protection for the buyer. So you will likely promise the buyer that you have full legal ownership of the property.

The problem? You may not have clear title (or "good ownership") to your entire parcel. In older neighborhoods in particular, a fence or other improvement may not be on the boundary. Rather than between your parcel and the neighbor's, it may be on your parcel entirely. If so, you may have lost title to a portion of your property (on the far side of the fence) by way of [adverse possession](#). Oops. You will be liable to the buyer after closing. This is another issue that you should discuss with an attorney before putting the home on the market. You'll be able to take the steps necessary to protect yourself (like adding unique terms to the offer).

Exterior maintenance: First impressions are everything.

All homes need some amount of maintenance and a little can go a long way in terms of how a buyer perceives the overall condition of yours. Below is a list of common maintenance items that should be completed prior to listing:

- **Exterior paint:** Is the exterior paint in good condition? While a new paint job is typically not necessary, touching up any chipping or faded areas is always a good move. Choose neutral colors if repainting.
- **Yard work:** Buyers like things neat and clean but that doesn't mean a major gardening project is in order. Simply removing weeds, trimming existing plantings, and covering any unfinished areas with fresh mulch can make a yard look pristine. If you'd like some added flourish, a few containers with store bought flowers placed strategically around the yard can take the place of expensive planned gardens.
- **Make a great 1st impression:** A few pots of flowers or winter arrangements strategically placed by the front door and/or garage is an affordable way to make a good first impression. Check your local hardware store.

- **Sweeping & pressure washing:** Dead leaves and moss are a part of life in the Northwest, but they don't need to be a part of your home listing. Sweep all walkways, decks, and outdoor areas and consider pressure washing to remove any slime, moss, or other buildup. But don't pressure wash a roof, you may damage it.
- **Window washing:** If your windows have not been washed recently, now is the time.

□ Interior finishes: Can the buyer imagine themselves in your home?

Buyers need to be able to imagine themselves living in your home. Professionally staged homes can be perceived as being more valuable by buyers and sell for a higher overall price. Talk to your realtor for more information on professional staging. If you choose to do-it-yourself, keep in mind:

- **Paint:** Interior paint should always be in good repair and recent. New interior paint is one of the cheapest things a seller can do to give their home a facelift. Color-wise, neutrals are most appealing (but don't always need to be taupe. Grays, blues, and browns can add ambiance without being overbearing). Choosing paint color and sheen can be tricky so don't hesitate to solicit professional advice. Remove wall-borders/decals.
- **Personal objects:** Because buyers need to be able to imagine themselves living in your home, try to remove as much personal stuff as possible. Take down all photos, figurines, and collections. Try to keep personal items in bathrooms, kitchens, and closets to an absolute minimum.
- **Furnishings:** A beautifully staged home always shows best, but when it comes to furniture, less is often more. A few furnishings in each room are plenty. Furnishings should be clean, in-style, and in good repair. Avoid oversized furnishings - too much or very large furniture can make a home feel cramped and smaller than it is.
- **Deep clean:** Once you have de-cluttered and put personal belongings away, the last thing your house needs is a good deep clean! Yelp can be a great source for a well-reviewed cleaning service.

□ Security

If you are selling on the open market, strangers will be entering your home. Although they may be escorted by you or a realtor, it can be counterproductive to follow and watch them (it's hard for buyers to imagine themselves living in the home if it comes with a new shadow). Holding an open house means a dozen prospective buyers or more could be in your home at once. Almost all homebuyers are genuinely interested, but bad apples remain. Here are a few steps you can take to ensure the security of your property as much as possible:

- **Jewelry and small valuables:** Remove any jewelry, small valuables, collectibles, valuable electronics, etc. Anything valuable that is small enough to be put in a handbag or pocket is best removed.
- **Weapons:** If you own any weapons (guns, knives, etc.) remove these from the house prior to listing.
- **Prescriptions:** Remove any and all prescriptions from your home. Drugs are the most common target for thieves (who are often drug addicts as well).
- **Avoid obvious hiding places:** Unfortunately, criminals know all the obvious hiding spots, including the ones we think are clever, so it's best to remove these items altogether. But if that's not feasible, at an absolute minimum hide them very well (buried deep in a stack of boxes in the garage) and not in a place easily found (like on top of your socks in the sock drawer).

Good luck in selling your home! It is commonly understood that you should hire an attorney to assist when selling "For Sale By Owner" or FSBO. Give Craig a call, he's been helping FSBO sellers since 2005.