

Heating & Cooling Costs Are Important to 86% of Home Buyers, NAR Reports

I find it useful to read NAR's annual "Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers" to learn the concerns and behaviors of prospective clients. For example, I read in the 2014 report, recently released, that the percentage of buyers using the internet in their home search is now up to 92%, and that 50% of buyers use a mobile device in their home search.

Another fact which stood out for me was that heating and cooling costs are somewhat or very important to 86% of home buyers.

I was surprised that this percentage was even higher than the percentage (70%) of buyers who are that concerned about commuting costs.

Both those costs are hidden, in the sense that your mortgage company does not factor them into the cost of your new home when determining whether you can afford to buy it.

What can you do to determine the energy efficiency of a home you are considering buying?

You can ask the seller to provide his gas & electric usage for the past 12 months, which he can download from www.xcelenergy.com. In addition, there are some visual observations that you, your agent and your home inspector can make.

If it's a forced air furnace, look to see if it has a metal flue or a white plastic flue. If it has a plastic flue, it is a high efficiency furnace. High efficiency furnaces extract so much heat from the gas flame that their exhaust is cool enough to use a plastic flue. On these furnaces, you will usually see a sec-

ond white pipe. That one is for the combustion air — the oxygen needed for ignition. Older furnaces get their oxygen from the room in which the furnace sits, so there are usually two 8-inch pipes bringing outside air into the area. It's like leaving a window open in the winter.

Although a high efficiency furnace doesn't need those two pipes bringing in outside air, the gas water heater, if you have one, requires those two 8-inch pipes to remain for their combustion air.

Some homes have high efficiency water heaters that also have plastic flues, but most still draw combustion air from the room. Other homes have wall-mounted tankless water heaters which are super efficient and, like high efficiency furnaces, get their combustion air through a pipe from outside. In that case — or if you install an electric water heater — you can get rid of those 8-inch pipes.

Regardless of how efficient the furnace is, you'll want to assess the level of insulation in the house you buy. Your inspector should have an infra-red camera that can determine how well the walls and ceilings are insulated, and he'll look in the attic to see how deep the insulation is.

Crawl spaces should have plastic on the dirt floor, and the concrete foundation walls should be insulated. The sill plate (that area between the joists which are resting on the foundation) should not just have fiberglass insulation, but should also have plastic sheeting over it. Cold air flows easily

through loose fiberglass, so it is useless if not covered with plastic and if the edges of that plastic aren't sealed.

You can do all these insulation improvements after you buy a home, but it's nice to know the degree of energy efficiency of the homes you are choosing among. A good Realtor (like the EcoBrokers at Golden Real Estate) can help you know what you're getting in that regard.

Not all double-pane windows are the same. Some are made at sea level and are more prone to vapor seal leaks when installed at elevation. My favorite brand of windows is Milgard, which are manufactured at elevation (in Denver) and have the nicest latch mechanisms. (They lock by themselves when you close the window and are easily unlocked to open.)

Insulation, or course, serves to keep your house cool in the summer, not

just warm in the winter. You probably have a garage that gets extremely hot in the summer, but don't mistake that for lack of insulation. That heat is coming from parking your car in the garage with its extremely hot engine and then closing the garage door. The more you insulate the garage, the more that heat will linger. One solution to consider would be to make your next car an electric car. My garage is in the 70's even on the hottest day.

Another compelling reason to make that switch to electric cars is that your 2-car garage probably has two bombs in it. I'm referring to the gas tanks. The air in those tanks is an explosive gas vapor. When your car is in an accident, the tank could explode. We see reports of that on the news every day. It may not explode in your garage, but it could certainly fuel a fire that burns down your house.

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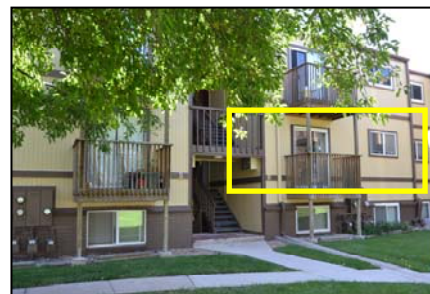


By JIM SMITH, Realtor®

This Week's Featured New Listing

A 2-Bedroom Golden Condo for \$90,000? Check It Out!

Golden Pines is Golden's most affordable complex, just 3 miles from downtown Golden, and when its units come on the market, they sell quickly. In the last 12 months, eleven units — nine of them the same 2-bedroom, 1-bath, 773-sq.-ft. model — have sold, and only one of them was active more than a week. (That one took 8 days to go under contract!) This particular unit, R-4, is a 1st floor unit, 1/2 flight up from ground level. It has a deck outside the living room. One bedroom is the "master" in that it has a direct door to the full bathroom. The other bedroom has access to the bathroom from the hallway. At \$90,000, this unit is priced to draw offers by this weekend, and we will not be holding an open house, so if you are interested call me or your agent for a private showing right away. A video tour is online at www.GoldenPinesCondo.info. The address is 16359 W. 10th Ave., #R-4.



Reminder: Assisted Living Seminar This Sunday

Last week's column (which you can read at www.JimSmithColumns.com) was about helping seniors choose the right facility when living at home no longer works for them. The free seminar will be this Sunday, August 9, at 2:30 pm (not 5 pm) at the Belmar Library, 555 S. Alison Parkway. Refreshments will be served. RSVP to Jenn Gomar at 720-675-8308.



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