

THE TOPAZ GROUP

Seller's Guide

WHAT IT COSTS, WHAT IT'S WORTH,
AND WHEN TO GO

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VIRGINIA · MARYLAND · WASHINGTON DC

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What your home is actually worth

An online estimate runs an algorithm over public records. It has never seen your kitchen, it doesn't know you back to trees, and it can't tell what the last sale on your street really netted after concessions.

01

You get a range, not a number

Anyone handing you a single figure without walking the house is guessing at the last twenty thousand dollars of it. A range with reasoning behind it is more useful than a confident number that turns out to be wrong.

02

Built from what closed, not what listed

Asking prices tell you what sellers hoped for. Closed prices tell you what buyers paid. I use settled sales, adjusted for what makes yours different, and I show you the ones I used.

03

Concessions change the real number

A home that sells at full asking price with a twelve thousand dollar credit did not sell at full asking price. Public sites report the headline. I'll show you the net.

04

The last mile takes a walkthrough

Finishes, light, layout and condition move a number more than square footage does. Twenty minutes in the house is the difference between a range and a price.

When to list

Timing moves the number more than most sellers expect, and the difference is measurable rather than a feeling about spring.

01

Spring buyers are more motivated, and it shows

Across recent years in this market, spring contracts have closed at roughly 100.6% of list with no concessions. Summer contracts have come in nearer 98.7%, after concessions, and taken longer to get there. On a \$650,000 home that gap is real money.

02

Two markets run at the same time

Homes priced correctly go under contract inside two weeks. Homes that aren't sit for five or six. There is very little in between, and which side you land on is mostly decided before the sign goes up.

03

Inventory matters more than the season

Four similar homes on your street at once is a worse problem than listing in July. Part of my job is telling you what your competition is about to look like.

04

Sometimes the answer is wait

If the timing is wrong I'll say so, even when that costs me the listing. Nothing is more expensive than a home that sat, got stale, and then sold under what it would have.

What to fix, what to leave alone

The instinct is to renovate before listing. Usually that's wrong. Most of what returns money is cheap, and most of what's expensive doesn't come back.

USUALLY WORTH DOING

Paint

The single best return there is. Neutral, current, and every wall.

Deep clean and declutter

Buyers read clutter as deferred maintenance. Half your closet contents into storage.

Light

Higher wattage bulbs, matched colour temperature, every fixture working.

The obvious repairs

Running toilet, sticking door, cracked switch plate. Individually trivial, collectively they say the house was not looked after.

Landscaping

Mulch, edging, trimmed shrubs. It's the first photograph and the first impression.

USUALLY NOT

Kitchen remodel

Rarely returns what it costs, and takes months you may not have.

Bathroom remodel

Same problem. A buyer with different taste renovates again anyway.

Roof or HVAC, if functional

Handle it as a credit in negotiation instead of paying for it up front.

Anything highly personal

Wallpaper, bold colour, custom built-ins. You'll pay to install what the next buyer removes.

Permits you can't finish in time

An open permit is worse at settlement than an unpermitted improvement you disclose.

The question isn't what would make the house nicer. It's what a buyer will pay more for than it costs you.

What it costs to sell

The sale price is not what you walk away with. Here is everything that comes out of it, so the number at settlement isn't a surprise.

COMES OUT AT SETTLEMENT

01

Your mortgage payoff

Not your balance. Payoff includes interest through the settlement date and any fees, so it's usually a little higher than your statement.

02

Brokerage compensation

Negotiable, agreed in writing before we list. Since 2024 what a seller offers a buyer's agent is separately negotiated rather than assumed.

03

Virginia grantor tax

A state transfer tax based on sale price, with an additional regional tax in Northern Virginia. Rates change, so I'll give you current figures on your net sheet.

OFTEN, BUT NOT ALWAYS

04

Buyer closing cost credit

Common in slower months. It reduces your net without reducing the headline price, which is why the headline can mislead.

05

Repairs after inspection

Either work completed or a credit at closing. A credit is usually cleaner, because you're not managing contractors on a deadline.

06

Association disclosure packet

If you're in an HOA or condo you must provide one, and it costs money. See the next page.

I'll build you a net sheet before we list, not after you're under contract. You should know the number you're deciding about.

The first two weeks decide it

A listing gets one run at a fresh audience. Everyone with a saved search in your price band sees it in the first days. That attention does not come back.

Days 1 to 10, the real window

Most homes that sell quickly go under contract here. Showings are highest, buyers are comparing you against everything else new, and interest is at its peak.

Priced above the market

You get shown to a band of buyers who are also seeing better value elsewhere, and they use your home to justify buying the other one. That is the actual cost of testing a high price.

Days 20 to 45, the quiet

Traffic falls off. Buyers who saw it early have moved on. The ones arriving now open with why has this been sitting.

The price cut that doesn't work

Cutting after a month rarely recovers the first-week audience. You are now negotiating from a position of visible weakness, and buyers know it.

Priced correctly from day one

Multiple parties looking at the same time is what creates competition. That is the whole mechanism, and it only exists in the first window.

Getting the house ready

Almost every buyer sees the photographs before they see the house, and decides from them whether to come at all.

01

Photography happens after the work, not before

One shot at the first impression. Everything staged, cleaned and lit before the photographer arrives, not most of it.

02

Depersonalise, don't sterilise

Family photographs and the contents of the fridge door come down. The house should still look lived in, because a home that looks staged reads as a flip.

03

Storage counts as space

Buyers open closets and look in the garage. Half-empty storage reads as generous. Full storage reads as a house that's too small.

04

Smell decides more than people admit

Pets, cooking, damp. You cannot smell your own house. Ask somebody who doesn't live there to tell you honestly.

05

Leave for showings, and take the dog

Buyers won't say what they think in front of you, and what they say to their agent is the feedback we need.

06

Keep it showable longer than feels reasonable

The offer often comes from the showing you almost turned down.

The packet nobody expects

If your home is in an association, Virginia requires you to give the buyer a disclosure packet. It is the single most common cause of a delayed settlement, and it surprises nearly every seller.

01

You order it, and you pay for it

The association or its management company prepares it. There is a fee, and you are the one who pays it.

02

It takes time you have to plan for

The association is allowed a set window to produce it, and management companies use it. Ordering the week you go under contract is how settlements slip.

03

The buyer gets a review period

Once delivered, the buyer has a statutory window to review and, in some circumstances, to cancel. The clock does not start until the packet is actually delivered.

04

It exposes anything unresolved

Open violations, unpaid assessments, or a deck a previous owner built without approval. None of that disappears at settlement, and it is far better found now than during a contract with a date on it.

05

Order it early. Really early.

The cheapest thing you can do to protect your settlement date is order this before you list rather than after you're under contract.

An offer is more than a price

The highest number is not always the best offer, and the difference between two offers is often worth more than the gap between their prices.

01

Price

What you're offered, before anything else adjusts it.

02

Financing

Cash, conventional, FHA or VA. Each carries a different risk of not reaching settlement.

03

Earnest money

A larger deposit signals seriousness. It's also what you're protected by if they walk.

04

Contingencies

Inspection, financing and appraisal. Fewer means more certainty and more risk for them.

05

Settlement date

Matching your timeline can be worth thousands to you. Ask for what you actually need.

06

Credits and concessions

A full price offer with a large credit nets less than a lower offer with none.

I'll show you what each offer actually nets you, side by side, before you decide. The headline price is the least useful number on the page.

Inspection and appraisal

Two things happen after you accept, and both can reopen a negotiation you thought was finished.

01

Every house has a list

A clean report doesn't exist. The question is never whether there are findings, it's which are expensive, which are safety items, and which are just a house being a house.

02

You can negotiate, repair, credit or decline

A credit at closing is usually cleaner than repairs, because you're not managing contractors against a settlement date.

03

The appraisal is the lender's number, not the buyer's

It exists to protect the lender. If it comes in low, the gap has to be covered by the buyer, by a price adjustment, or by the deal falling apart.

04

A low appraisal is not automatically the end

There is a reconsideration process, and comparable sales can be submitted. It works sometimes and it's worth trying.

05

This is where preparation pays

Sellers who fixed the obvious things and disclosed honestly have short inspection negotiations. Sellers who didn't have long ones.

The last two weeks

By this point the decisions are made. What's left is logistics, and the goal is a boring fortnight.

● **Order the payoff**

Your lender issues a figure good through a specific date. If settlement moves, it has to be reordered.

● **Utilities and mail**

Schedule the transfer for the day after settlement, not the day of. Forward your mail a week ahead.

● **Anything you agreed to repair**

Get it done and keep the receipts. The buyer will look at the final walkthrough.

● **The final walkthrough**

Usually the day before. The buyer confirms the house is in the condition agreed and that repairs were done.

● **What you leave behind**

Anything conveyed stays. Take everything else, including what's in the attic and behind the shed.

● **Settlement**

You sign, funds transfer, keys change hands. Bring photo ID and know how your proceeds are being sent.

Questions sellers actually ask

01 Should I sell before I buy?

Depends on your equity and your tolerance for uncertainty. Selling first is financially safer and logistically harder. There are bridge options. We should talk through your actual numbers rather than the general rule.

02 What if it doesn't sell?

Then something is wrong with price, presentation or timing, and it is nearly always price. We'll have agreed in advance what we do at two weeks and at four.

03 How is your commission structured?

Negotiable and agreed in writing before we list. Since 2024, what you offer a buyer's agent is a separate decision. I'll walk you through the options and what each does to your net.

04 Do I have to be out by settlement?

Usually yes, though a post-settlement occupancy agreement is possible. It has to be negotiated in the contract, not requested afterwards.

05 What do I legally have to disclose?

Virginia is largely a buyer-beware state, but that is not a licence to conceal. Known material defects get disclosed. Honest disclosure prevents far more problems than it causes.

06 How long does the whole thing take?

Two to four weeks of preparation, then however long it takes to go under contract, then thirty to forty five days to settlement.

Ready when you are.

Whether you're listing next month or thinking about next spring, the first conversation is thirty minutes and costs nothing. Bring the questions you think are too basic to ask. Those are usually the good ones.

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