

# 'Real estate won't stop': local realtors navigate market during outbreak

*Sarah Sobanski*

There are people who need to buy and sell their houses — even in the wake of a global pandemic.

Heads of the Kawartha Lakes Real Estate Association (KLREA) and Peterborough and The Kawarthas Association of Realtors (PKAR) both say there are people who have no choice but to move during this time — and realtors are doing their best to minimize their contributions to the spread of COVID-19.

Real estate agent services are an essential service. That's according to a [list of essential services](#) sent out by the province March 23, after Premier Doug Ford announced all non-essential businesses must close as of midnight on March 24 to help stop the outbreak.

Make no mistake, the market has slowed considerably. PKAR president Chiarina Payne says realtors aren't seeing much coming onto the market right now. Many of her colleagues are self-isolating and suspending listings by homeowners who don't want people in and out of their homes right now.

For those homes that do need to be up on the market, she adds, realtors are taking safety precautions.

“If there's people going out, they've got their hand sanitizer, their wipes, their gloves, some are using masks,” she says.

[The Ontario Real Estate Association \(OREA\) is urging all realtors to stop face-to-face business including open houses and in-person showings especially in tenant-occupied homes.](#)

Payne confirms PKAR realtors will no longer be taking part in in-person showings.

KLREA president-elect Eugene McDonald says his board is recommending realtors follow OREA's lead, but as realtors operate as independent contractors, it doesn't have the power to dictate to association members.

Stepping back from face-to-face business, realtors are turning more than ever to technology to conduct their business. Payne says realtors have a number of tools at their disposal including showing homes through virtual tours.

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McDonald says often clients will use virtual tours to eliminate houses they don't want to see. A virtual tour can range from an agent doing a walkthrough with their smartphone to having a professional company come in with recording equipment.

“We’re not out of the business, we’ve just restricted the business and we’ve definitely changed the way we do business,” says McDonald. He adds realtors are also video conferencing with clients.

Other real estate businesses, such as appraisers, inspectors and lawyers, are also taking precautions, he says. Many are postponing business, making it “very difficult” to get someone in for the general process of buying and selling a home.

“Real estate won’t stop,” he says. “I don’t think it can.”

Some appraisers are doing "drive-by" estimates, based on the outside of the home instead of going through it. Lawyers are completing documents and signings electronically. Keys are being given through mechanical lockboxes on doorknobs of the homes.

“You’ll find that those people who have to do the home inspection are limiting the time in the home and observing social distancing,” Payne says. She adds contracts can be drawn up with conditions that the buyer see a house before everything is final.

“I think most realtors have done an abundance of caution in this situation,” McDonald says. “It’s not something we take lightly.”

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