

# Choosing the right neighborhood

You've decided to buy a home. You've analyzed your budget, talked to a realtor and figured out what kind of house you want. But, the most important step may have been left until last—picking the right neighborhood.

The first thing many people do when considering a move, is drive around various communities gaining a sense of which areas they like. Buyers find out how close the major highways are and if the neighbours keep their yards tidy. Most will make sure they know the location of the closest mall. But what about public transit, colleges, schools, libraries, parks, recreation centres, and fire or ambulance stations? Is the local police station close to your prospective neighborhood, or is it a 15 minute drive away?

All these factors can make or break a decision to buy a certain property.

Getting information you need can be difficult, but it can be done. Here are a few tips to help make sure you've picked the right neighbourhood, one that offers safety, convenience and access to the services you've come to expect.

1. **Contact the Town or City's Planning Department** — Municipal planning departments will have a wealth of information on hand. Some distribute brochures and booklets containing the locations of colleges, libraries, ambulance stations, hospitals, parks and transit stops. For example, the Metro Toronto Planning Department publishes a book called Key Facts. Many larger communities also have literature available. If your move is to a smaller town or region, ask for an information officer from the planning department to assist you.

2. **Call the Local Police and Fire Departments** — Ask them how many stations service the community and their locations. Also ask about response time to emergencies.

3. **Contact the Local School Boards** — Colleges are under provincial jurisdiction, but both public and separate schools are run by local school boards, so you'll have to contact them individually. Find out the locations of secondary, post-secondary or private schools then plot them on a map. Mark the routes your children will be taking and walk these routes yourself.

4. **Visit the Parks and Recreation Department** — It's not only important to know the location of recreation centres, swimming pools, ice rinks and the like, but the programs that are offered. Is there house league soccer, baseball or basketball in the community? Are swimming lessons available? What adult programs are in place? A recreation counsellor or administrator should be able to answer these questions.

5. **Buy a Community Newspaper and Read it** — A local publication can offer great insight into a community. Check the sports and entertainment sections for special events and activities.

6. **Have an Eagle Eye** — Be on the lookout for trouble spots. For example, is your street used as a shortcut for commuters? Is there a noisy nightclub nearby?

7. **Consult Your Realtor** — It pays to take advantage of your realtor's knowledge and experience. He or she may already have much of the information you need or know where to get it. With a realtor's help and advice, you can be assured of picking the best possible neighbourhood for you and your family.

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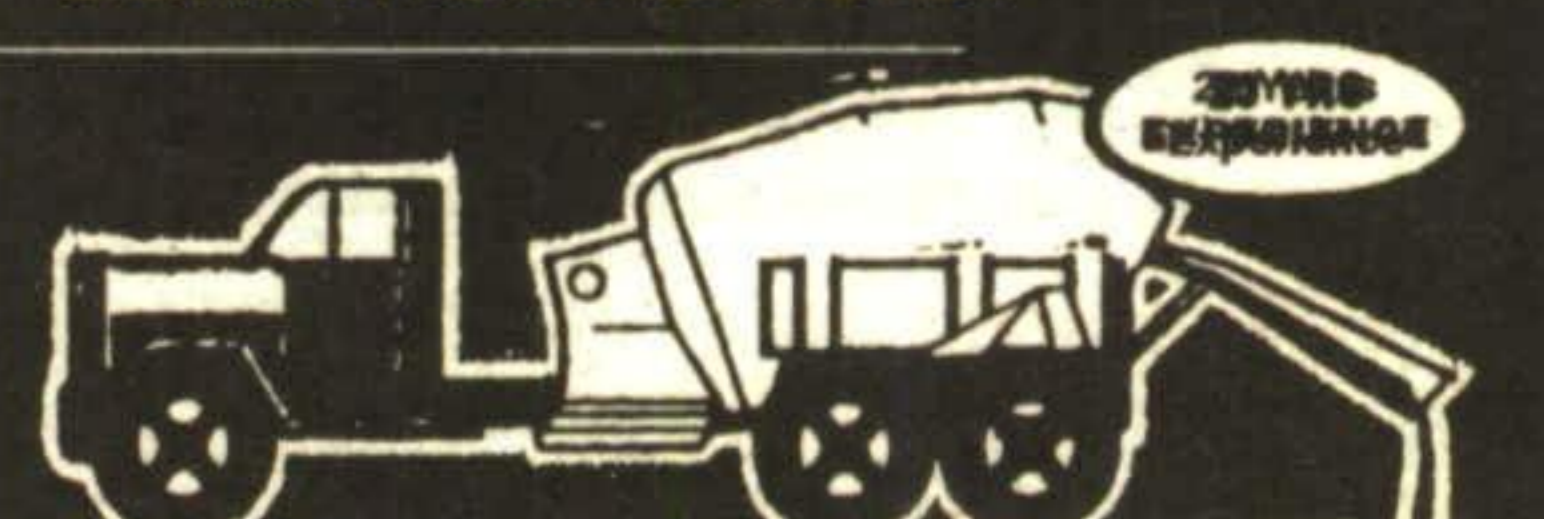
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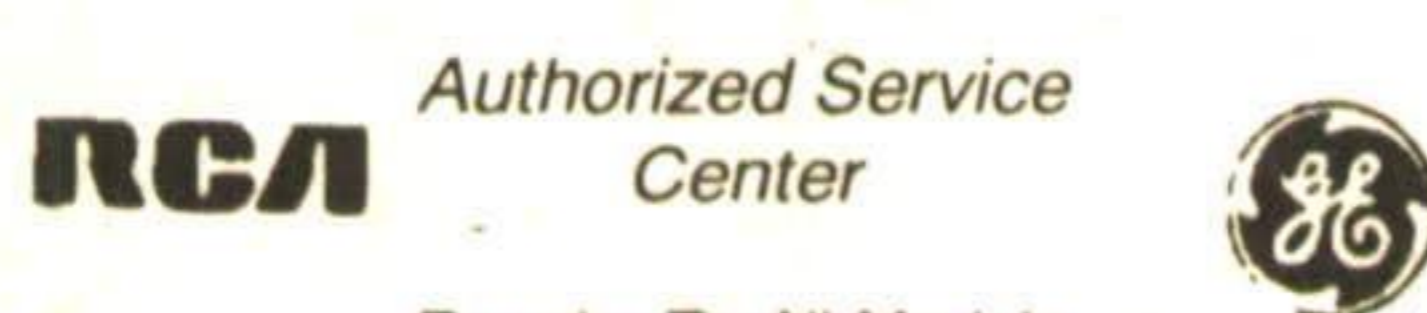
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