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KEY GROUP OF CUMMINGS & CO. REALTORS

Page 8 Severna Park resident and Realtor Jody Buck has extensive experience helping buyers and sellers with all property types, but her unique area of expertise is home renovations.



PRACTICAL ESTATE PLANNING TOOL FOR FAMILIES

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Why Maryland Homeowners Are Placing Their Homes In Trusts

A Practical Estate Planning Tool For Families



Karen M. Authement, Esq.
KMA Law Office

For many Maryland families, a home is their most valuable asset — financially and emotionally. As homeowners think about the future, more are turning to a simple but powerful estate planning tool: placing their home in a trust.

While the idea may sound complicated, the benefits are practical and can make a meaningful difference for loved ones.

Avoiding Probate

In Maryland, if a home is owned solely in an individual's name, it generally must pass through probate with the register of wills after death. Probate can involve court oversight, legal fees, and delays.

By transferring a home into a **revocable living trust**, the property can pass directly to beneficiaries without going through probate. This often means a faster, more private and less costly process for families.

Keeping Control

Placing a home in a trust does not mean giving it up. With a revocable living trust:

- You remain in full control
- You can sell or refinance at any time
- You can change or revoke the trust

In practical terms, you continue to live in and manage your home just as before.

Your Mortgage Remains The Same

A common concern is whether transferring a home into a trust affects the mortgage. In most cases, **it does not**.

Under federal law, homeowners can typically transfer their primary residence into a revocable trust without triggering the lender's due-on-sale clause, provided they remain a beneficiary and continue living in the home.

Your loan terms stay the same, and payments continue as usual. As a precaution, homeowners should still notify their lender and confirm any requirements.

Planning For Incapacity

A trust is not only useful after death — it also helps during your lifetime. If you become unable to manage your affairs, a successor trustee can step in to handle the property, including paying the mortgage, maintaining the home, or arranging a sale if needed.

This can help families avoid the time and expense of court proceedings to appoint a guardian.

Privacy And Simplicity

Unlike a will, which becomes public during probate, a trust operates privately. This keeps details about your home and its distribution out of the public record.

For those who own property in more than one state, a trust also helps avoid multiple probate proceedings, simplifying matters for heirs.

Flexibility For Families

Trusts allow homeowners to set clear instructions for what happens to the home. For example, you can:

- Allow a spouse or family member to live in the home
- Delay a sale
- Provide for multiple beneficiaries in an orderly way

This flexibility can be especially helpful in blended families or complex situations.

Taking The Next Step

Setting up a trust typically involves creating the document, transferring the deed into the trust, and updating insurance. While the process is straightforward, it should be done with guidance to ensure everything is properly handled under Maryland law.

Final Thoughts

Placing a home into a trust is not just for the wealthy — it is a practical step many Maryland homeowners are taking to simplify matters for their families. By avoiding probate, maintaining privacy, and ensuring continuity, a trust can make the transition of property much smoother.

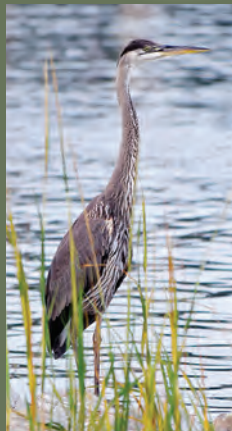
Consulting with an experienced attorney can help determine whether this approach fits your overall estate plan.

Karen M. Authement is an attorney with KMA Law Office, advising clients on estate planning, real estate, and asset protection. KMA Law Office helps individuals and families protect what they've built and plan for the future with confidence. Learn more at www.kma-law.com. ■



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Why Distribution Strategies Are Crucial To A Retirement Plan

Jason LaBarge

Financial Advisor
and President
LaBarge Financial



When it comes to thinking about retirement, most people channel their energy into funding retirement savings. That's

important, but many people forget to also consider how they will efficiently access that money, particularly for tax-deferred

accounts like 401(k)s and individual retirement accounts (IRAs). Those decisions are just as important as saving.

Imagine retirement savings as a bucket of water. The majority of your life is spent filling that bucket, but it has a hole at the bottom in the form of taxes. The longer the water sits in the bucket, the more it will leak out the bottom and cost you when it's time to drink from it.

The traditional school of thought was to wait to withdraw money from tax-deferred accounts. I recommend prioritizing those withdrawals earlier, if possible. **Here's why that is:**

Avoid Increased Taxes Later In Retirement

Tax-deferred accounts are slowly growing and increasing the amount of capital gains tax owed upon withdrawal. If you delay accessing those funds until later in retirement, you may save money in the short-term, but it could cost you more money in taxes down the line. Eventually, you will have to begin taking required minimum distributions (RMDs), which forces withdrawals starting at age 73.

Accessing funds earlier could also include transferring money into Roth accounts, which lets you pay the tax bill now and benefit from future growth in a tax-free account. At a minimum, you should prioritize withdrawals from these accounts.

Consider Your Legacy

Traditional retirement accounts can easily be transferred to your heirs upon your death; however, most non-spouses must empty the account within 10 years of your death.

That means the longer you delay settling your tax bill, the more likely your heirs are to face that liability at their own tax rate in the year they inherit it. These withdrawals add to their taxable income, potentially costing them up to 37% of their income in taxes.

If you have a brokerage account, which is a traditional non-Roth, non-401(k) investment account that holds stocks, it could be more beneficial to prioritize accessing funds from traditional retirement accounts first. While heirs would owe capital gains taxes on growth from brokerage accounts, they'd also have a step-up in basis tax provision.

What that means is when they inherit the account, they only owe capital gains taxes on the growth from the value of the investments starting on the day the owner died. This rule does not apply to other retirement accounts, making brokerage accounts more beneficial to leave for your loved ones.

The Goal Should Be To Get Through Retirement

While many people believe the goal is getting to retirement, it should be to get through retirement.

Your specific decisions depend on your unique financial situation. Just remember, evaluating distribution is the key element to retirement and retirement planning. I recommend consulting with a financial professional to create a plan and determine the best strategy for your finances. You and your family will appreciate it. ■

Jason LaBarge, financial advisor and president of LaBarge Financial
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What Does It Mean To “Rightsize” Your Home?

**Jean
Andrews
and
Christine
Joyce**



We often hear the term downsizing, but more and more,

we’re talking about rightsizing — finding a home that better fits your current lifestyle, needs and future plans.

On average, Americans move every 10–12 years. Today, the average homebuyer is around age 40, while the average seller is closer to 66, reflecting how housing needs evolve over time.

In the greater Severna Park area, we see this pattern every day. Home values remain strong, and well-prepared homes continue to attract steady interest, making thoughtful planning especially important.

For some, rightsizing means gaining space for a growing household. For others, it’s simplifying once rooms go unused. And for many, it’s planning ahead for comfort, accessibility and ease of living.

When it’s time for more space: Early in homeownership, many people need flexibility — extra bedrooms, work-from-home space, or room to gather.

When it’s time to simplify: At a certain point, more space can become more responsibility. Many homeowners look for less upkeep and a more manageable lifestyle.

Planning ahead makes a difference: Features like main-level living, minimal stairs and proximity to services become more important over time.

A practical approach: Give yourself time (twice as much as you think you need), assess your space honestly and critically, prepare your home thoughtfully, and think ahead about future needs.

Rightsizing isn’t about having more or less — it’s about having the right space for your current life.

Christine Joyce and Jean Andrews are longtime residents of the greater Severna Park area, full-time Realtors with 59 years of combined experience, and avid community volunteers. They are part of the Long and Foster Severna Park office. They can be reached at 410-507-9968, jeanandchristine@lnf.com, or www.severnaparkhometeam.com. ■



IS YOUR HOME STILL THE *Right Fit?*



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EMPTY NEST New Possibilities



NEXT CHAPTER Simplify. Enjoy. Thrive.



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Christine Joyce

ABR, AHWD, GRI, SRES, Team Leader

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www.SevernaParkHomeTeam.com



Which Is Better For Your Family In 2026?

Thinking About Moving To Severna Park Or Arnold? **Start Here**

Lauren Rice
Shawn Martin Group



If you are looking to plant roots in the Baltimore-Washington-Annapolis triangle, you have likely narrowed your search to the beautiful Broadneck peninsula and the shores of the Severn and Magothy rivers.

Severna Park or Arnold is one of the most common questions for homebuyers searching for a water-privileged lifestyle in Anne Arundel County.

While these neighboring communities share proximity and commute routes, their lifestyles feel very different. One offers established prestige and structure, while the other delivers a more relaxed, wooded, and flexible environment.

This guide breaks down housing, schools, lifestyle, commute and overall vibe so you can confidently decide which area fits your life best.

Quick Answer: Is Severna Park Or Arnold Better?

- Choose Severna Park if you want top-ranked schools, a highly structured community, and are comfortable with higher home prices.
- Choose Arnold if you want more housing options, a slightly lower price point, and a more laid-back, nature-driven feel.
- Both areas offer excellent schools, strong resale value, and access to the Chesapeake Bay lifestyle.

Living In Severna Park *The Established Icon*

Severna Park is a highly established coastal suburb known for its family-first atmosphere, strong schools and prestigious reputation.

The community is tight-knit and active, heavily anchored by youth sports like the Greater Severna Park Athletic Association (Green Hornets), which serves thousands of local kids.

While some outsiders label Severna Park as polished or intense, locals describe it as a place where people are deeply invested in their neighborhoods, schools and long-term community roots.

Popular neighborhoods include Chartwell, Berrywood and Round Bay, each known for strong community culture and water access.

Outdoor living is a major draw, with easy access to the B&A Trail and Kinder Farm Park for biking, running and family activities.

Pros of Living in Severna Park

- Top-tier public school system in Anne Arundel County
- Strong property values and long-term appreciation
- Established neighborhoods with community feel
- Access to waterfront homes and private amenities

Cons of Living in Severna Park

- Higher home prices (limited entry-level options)
- Mostly single-family homes (less variety)
- Competitive academic and sports environment
- Some neighborhoods rely on septic systems

Living In Arnold *The Laid-Back Alternative*

Located just south of Severna Park, Arnold offers a more wooded, relaxed, and flexible suburban lifestyle while still delivering access to the water and strong schools.

Arnold appeals to buyers who want value, variety and a slightly less intense pace of life.

Housing options range from waterfront estates in Ulmstead to more affordable homes and townhomes in Bay Hills, Pines on the Severn, and Shore Acres.

Arnold is also closely connected to Cape St. Claire, known for its community events and local charm.

Pros of Living in Arnold

- More diverse housing options (townhomes and single-family)
- Lower median home price than Severna Park
- Access to community beaches and boat ramps
- Closer proximity to downtown Annapolis

Cons of Living in Arnold

- Fewer centralized shopping and walkable areas
- Traffic congestion on College Parkway
- Less structured community feel compared to Severna Park

Severna Park vs. Arnold Schools *Which Are Better?*

Both areas are known for some of the best public schools in Anne Arundel County, but the environments differ slightly.

- Severna Park High School is widely considered one of the most competitive and highest-performing schools in the county.
- Broadneck High School offers similarly strong academics but is often viewed as slightly more balanced and less pressure-driven.

Key Takeaways

- Choose Severna Park schools for highly competitive, high-achievement environments.
- Choose Arnold schools for strong academics with a more balanced social atmosphere.

Lifestyle And Things To Do

Living in either Severna Park or Arnold means your weekends revolve around water, food and community. In Arnold, locals enjoy waterfront dining spots like The Point Crab House & Grill and Donnelly's Dockside. In Severna Park, favorites include Cafe Mezzanotte and Garten for date nights and social outings. You will also find local staples like Severna Park Lanes and seasonal events at Homestead Gardens that bring the community together year-round.

Commute Times: Severna Park vs. Arnold

Your daily commute can be a deciding factor when choosing between these two areas.

- **Fort Meade/National Security Agency:** 30–60 minutes from both locations
- **Baltimore:** Slightly quicker from Severna Park (27–45 minutes)
- **Annapolis:** Closer from Arnold (5 miles/10–20 minutes)
- **Washington, D.C.:** 70 to 90-plus minutes from both

Important note: Arnold residents often deal with congestion near the Severn River Bridge and Route 50 during peak travel times.

Home Prices: Severna Park vs. Arnold

- Severna Park Median Home Price: \$700,000 and up
- Arnold Median Home Price: \$590,000 and up

Severna Park tends to command a premium due to school reputation and community structure, while Arnold offers more entry points and flexibility.

Final Verdict: Which Should You Choose?

Choose Severna Park if:

- You want top-ranked schools and a structured environment
- You prefer established neighborhoods and strong community identity
- You are comfortable with higher home prices

Choose Arnold if:

- You want more housing flexibility and a lower entry point
- You prefer a laid-back, nature-driven lifestyle
- You want closer access to Annapolis and waterfront activities

Thinking About Moving to Severna Park or Arnold?

Choosing between these two communities ultimately comes down to lifestyle, budget and personality fit.

If you are considering buying or selling in Severna Park, Arnold or anywhere in Anne Arundel County, having a local expert who understands the micro-differences between neighborhoods can make all the difference.

Want help deciding which area fits you best? Let's map out your move and build a strategy tailored to your goals.

Contact the Shawn Martin Group by visiting www.mymarylandrealestate.com or by calling 410-246-2930.

NAVIGATING THE CORRIDORS: A FAMILY GUIDE TO SEVERNA PARK AND ARNOLD

GEOGRAPHICALLY ADJACENT, SEVERNA PARK AND ARNOLD OFFER DISTINCT SUBURBAN EXPERIENCES.

SEVERNA PARK: HIGH-END RESIDENTIAL PERFORMANCE & TOP-TIER SCHOOL PRESTIGE
ARNOLD: MORE DIVERSE, ACCESSIBLE & RELAXED COMMUNITY ATMOSPHERE

COMMUNITY PROFILES & ECONOMICS MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

EXCEEDS

APPROXIMATELY

\$169,000+ **\$141,639**

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ARNOLD

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ARNOLD: "CHILL" & DIVERSE
SEVERNA PARK: "ESTABLISHED" & PRESTIGIOUS

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RESIDENTIAL & COASTAL LIFESTYLE

HOUSING STOCK DIVERSITY: **ARNOLD** OFFERS 23% TOWNHOMES FOR VARIED ENTRY POINTS; **SEVERNA PARK** IS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY SINGLE-FAMILY.

THE "WATER-PRIVILEGED" REALITY: COMMUNITIES FEATURE PRIVATE BEACHES AND RAMPS; WATERFRONT PROPERTIES OFTEN CARRY A \$5,000+ "SALT TAX."

STRATEGIC COMMUTE ACCESS: BOTH LOCATIONS OFFER 30-60 MINUTE PEAK DRIVE TIMES TO FORT GEORGE G. MEADE.

FOUNDATIONAL COMMUNITY DATA COMPARISON

MEDIAN HOME VALUE
\$729,400 **\$594,500**
SEVERNA PARK **ARNOLD**

SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES
93% **69%**
SEVERNA PARK **ARNOLD**

HOMEOWNERSHIP RATE
91% **86.5%**
SEVERNA PARK **ARNOLD**

OBJECTIVE DATA FROM CENSUS/NICHE
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Raw Honesty And Expert Knowledge Set Clients At Ease

With Realtor Jody Buck

By Meredith Winter

Jody will tell you everything – even things you don’t want to hear. She will tell you the nitty gritty.”

A past client of Severna Park-based Realtor Jody Buck shared these words with friends who were house hunting and felt that they weren’t getting the information they needed from their agent.

Buck errs on the side of sharing more than a client cares to know about a property – from details about the roof and electric panel to approximate costs of renovations and contractor recommendations – so that clients can make educated decisions on what is often the biggest purchase of their life, a home.

As for those clients whom a friend referred?

“They felt like the curtain was pulled back. There were no secrets,” Buck recalled. “We talked about every scenario with this house, everything that could go wrong. We looked at all of the situations, and we really did a deep dive where they felt unbelievably comfortable writing an offer. ... They felt more relaxed, and they felt like they were making the best financial decision.”

Buck previously worked as an educator but has been a Realtor for nearly 16 years. She is the team leader of the Key Group of Cummings & Co. Realtors and has two agents who serve the Baltimore area and a transaction coordinator on her team.

As a longtime Severna Park resi-

dent, she knows the area well and has extensive experience helping buyers and sellers with all property types, from waterfront to luxury to fixer-uppers, and everything in between. But her distinguishing area of knowledge is renovations.

Prior to changing career paths, Buck had bought and sold a couple of investment properties. Her Realtor asked, “Why don’t you jump into real estate?” And that’s how it all started, she said.

What began with fully renovating a foreclosure in Federal Hill has snowballed into buying a home, living in it for a few years while renovating it, and moving on to the next one for roughly the last two decades. On the side, Buck also buys and renovates investment properties.

“I’ve always enjoyed the renovation, the design, the before and after. And just walking into a space, I can see ... how can we move this? How can we change this to make it flow better?” Buck said.

With many renovation projects has come an intimate knowledge of structural issues, major appliances, plumbing, electrical, and the potential pitfalls that come with older homes.

“Obviously my main job is real estate, helping buyers and sellers. So I’ve tried to combine those worlds a little bit,” Buck said. “If I’m showing houses to a buyer ... we’re not pointing out ‘this is a kitchen, this is a bathroom.’ We’re looking at the nitty gritty. I’m looking at the roof telling you what kind of roof it is. ... We’re looking at

mechanical systems. We’re checking ages, serial numbers for appliances. So when we walk out of a house, we have a really good idea of exactly what is probably going to come up in a home inspection.”

Buck will tell you if a home has aluminum wiring, a recalled electrical panel, or the difference between galvanized and copper plumbing.

She won’t hesitate to talk you out of buying a particular house.

“This is the biggest financial decision you’re going to probably make in your life. It’s one of the biggest. And I can’t live with myself knowing that that didn’t go well for you,” she shared. “I just want clients to have that 100% — not just happiness — but that comfort and that feeling of peace when they walk in their front door — they just really love their home. And two, they always look back and know they made the right decision.”

Clients who are selling their homes receive the same transparency from Buck because she doesn’t view it as a sale; she views it as a partnership. If a client is considering renovations prior to listing their home, she will help determine whether they will get their money back, or if they should sell the home as-is.

Whether the concern is an aging HVAC system or a cosmetic upgrade, Buck will run through numbers with clients and help them find contractors. For new builds or full-gut renovations, she has strong connections with builders including Whitehall Building & Company.



“If I’m showing houses to a buyer ... we’re looking at the nitty gritty. So when we walk out of a house, we have a really good idea of exactly what is probably going to come up in a home inspection.”

— **Jody Buck**

Buyer and seller relationships with Buck don’t end when a sale closes. She will tell you she is your “Realtor for life,” and clients take that to heart. Buck gladly fields inquiries from clients years after a sale and can refer them to professionals from her own “rolodex” of contacts.

“They text me, ‘Hey, I need a plumber,’ ‘My garbage disposal isn’t working.’ I get texts and calls all the time – anything from, ‘We want to put a fence in’ to ‘We’re thinking about a pool’ to ‘I have three outlets that don’t work. Who do you have?’ So, I’m always here,” Buck said.

Because she “lives, works and plays” in the greater Severna Park community, Buck also has great knowledge of the unique communities throughout the area. She weighs not only what her clients want in a house, but also what they want in a neighborhood, and shows them specific properties with their desired lifestyles in mind.

Unfiltered honesty and the unique level of service Buck provides through her expertise in renovations are likely two reasons that 97% of her clients turn to her when they are ready to move again.

A resident of West Severna Park, Buck is married to Severna Park High School varsity baseball coach and physical education teacher Pete Buck, and together they have two children. Riley, 16, is a Falcon sophomore, and Ryan, soon to be 15, is a freshman. As a family, they enjoy boating. Being out on the water is Buck’s “happy place.”

And her job – through unique expertise, great familiarity with the area, and a commitment to being one’s Realtor for life – is to help others in the community find their happy places, too.

To learn more about the Key Group of Cummings & Co. Realtors, call 410-804-9597 or email jody@keygroupmd.com.



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The Power Of Preparation

What Really Happens Before A Home Hits The Market



Betty Batty
Hello Home of
Compass



When people see a home hit the market, it can feel like it happened overnight. A listing goes live, photos appear, and suddenly there's buzz with

showings, open houses, maybe even multiple offers. But what most people don't see is everything that happens before that moment. Because in today's market, success rarely comes from simply listing a home — it comes from how thoughtfully it's prepared.

The most successful sales often begin months in advance.

That early window is where strategy takes shape. It's when we walk through

a home and look at it through a buyer's eyes and identify opportunities to enhance its appeal, whether that's fresh paint, lighting updates, refinishing floors, or simply rethinking how a space is used. Small, intentional changes can make a significant difference in how a home is perceived.

Staging also plays an important role in creating a sense of flow, warmth and scale that allows people to connect

Continued on page 14



Is it time for your next chapter?

Maybe you want *less maintenance*.
Maybe you're dreaming about *waking up on the water*.
Maybe life looks *different now*.
Seasons change. Needs shift.
And sometimes, so should your home.

You won't be leaving the Severna Park community - you simply begin a new chapter within it.

Whether you're considering downsizing, searching for water-front, or just beginning to explore what's next - you don't have to rush - let's just have the right conversation.

Let's Connect!

Betty Batty
Real Estate Advisor
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bettybatty.com

COMPASS

The Complete Cost Of Buying And Selling A

By Hometap

Hometap analyzed the full spectrum of costs associated with buying and selling a home, drawing on data from government sources, lenders and real estate industry research.

The listing price of a home is just the beginning. Between down payments, inspection fees, agent commissions and ongoing maintenance expenses, the actual cost of buying or selling a home can significantly exceed what most people anticipate.

For buyers and sellers alike — particularly those navigating both transactions simultaneously — understanding the full picture of expenses can make the difference between a smooth move and a financial surprise.

Using a \$400,000 home as a baseline for easy comparison, here's a breakdown of the most common costs involved in both sides of a real estate transaction.

THE UPFRONT COSTS OF BUYING A HOME

Down Payment

The down payment is the buyer's initial equity contribution. Conventional loans typically require between 5% and 20% of the purchase price, though some government-backed programs allow as little as 3% down, and Veterans Affairs loans may require no down payment at all. On a \$400,000 home, that means a buyer could need anywhere from \$12,000 to \$80,000 before factoring in any other costs.

A larger down payment reduces the outstanding mortgage balance and lowers the total interest paid over the life of the loan.

Earnest Money

Buyers typically submit an earnest money deposit — commonly 1% to 3% of the purchase price — to demonstrate serious intent, according to data from Rocket Mortgage. On a \$400,000 home, that's \$4,000 to \$12,000 held in escrow, which is later applied to the down payment or closing costs.

Home Inspection Fees

A home inspection evaluates the property's plumbing, electrical, roof, foundation and other systems. According to HomeGuide, costs for a standard single-family home typically range from \$200 to \$500, with specialized inspections (mold, radon, HVAC) potentially adding \$100 to \$400 each.



Appraisal Fees

Lenders require an independent appraisal to verify that the home's value supports the loan amount. According to Bankrate, appraisal fees generally fall between \$300 and \$500, though they vary by region and home size.

Closing Costs

Buyer closing costs — which include loan origination fees, title search and insurance, escrow, recording fees and prepaid taxes — typically run 2% to 6% of the purchase price, according to Bankrate. On a \$400,000 home, that's \$8,000 to \$24,000 at closing, on top of the down payment.

Monthly Mortgage Payment (PITI)

A standard mortgage payment includes principal, interest, taxes and insurance — often referred to as PITI. For a \$400,000 mortgage at approximately 6% interest over 30 years, the principal and interest portion alone is roughly \$2,397 per month. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has long recommended that total housing costs remain below 30% of one's gross monthly income.

Property Taxes

Property taxes vary considerably by location. According to the Tax Foundation, effective rates range from below 0.5% in some states to more than 2% in others. At a 1.5% effective rate, the annual tax bill on a \$400,000 home would be \$6,000, or \$500 per month.

Homeowners Insurance

Annual premiums depend on location, coverage level, and risk factors such as flood or fire exposure. On a \$400,000 home, insurance typically runs \$1,000 to \$3,000 per year — though premiums in high-risk areas can climb considerably higher.

Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI)

Buyers who put down less than 20% on a conventional loan are generally required to carry private mortgage insurance (PMI). PMI typically costs 0.3% to 1.5% of the original loan amount annually — between \$1,200 and \$6,000 per year on a \$400,000 loan.

Homeowners Association (HOA) Fees

Homes that are part of homeowners associations carry monthly dues that can range from \$25 to \$500 or more, depending on amenities and services covered. Some HOAs also levy special assessments — large, one-time charges that homeowners are responsible for paying, sometimes with little notice.

Maintenance and Repairs

A common rule of thumb among financial planners is to budget 1% to 4% of a home's value each year for maintenance and repairs, according to Hometap's research. For a \$400,000 home, that's \$4,000 to \$12,000 annually to cover routine upkeep such as HVAC servicing and gutter cleaning, as well as larger system replacements.

Home In 2026: Fees Most People Don't Expect

THE COSTS OF SELLING A HOME

Sellers face their own set of costs, all of which reduce net proceeds from the sale.

Real Estate Agent Commissions

Agent commissions are typically 5% to 6% of the sale price, according to Zillow — and they're split between the listing agent and the buyer's agent. On a \$400,000 sale, that's \$20,000 to \$24,000.

Home Preparation, Repairs and Staging

Many sellers invest in cosmetic updates, light repairs or landscaping before listing. Professional staging — renting furniture and décor to improve presentation — can run from \$800 to several thousand dollars per month, depending on the home's market, according to HomeAdvisor.

Prelisting inspections (roof, structural, termite) typically cost \$300 to \$800 each, according to Bankrate, but can help prevent buyer renegotiation and reduce concession requests later in the process.

Seller Closing Costs and Transaction Fees

Seller-side closing costs generally include title insurance for the buyer, transfer taxes, escrow and attorney fees, recording fees, and any agreed-upon contributions to the buyer's closing costs. These typically total 1% to 3% of the sale price.

Mortgage Payoff

Any remaining mortgage balance — plus interest accrued through the closing date — must be paid off at the time of sale. Sellers should also check whether their loan carries a prepayment penalty.

BUYING AND SELLING AT THE SAME TIME

One of the more complex financial challenges in real estate is buying a new home while still owning — or trying to sell — your current one. The overlap can create cash flow constraints, timing pressure and competing obligations.

Common challenges include carrying two mortgage payments simultaneously,

lacking the liquidity for a new down payment before the existing home sells, and submitting contingent offers that may be less competitive in active markets.

Bridge Loans

A bridge loan is a short-term financing tool that allows homeowners to borrow against the equity in their current home to fund a down payment on a new one — or to pay off an existing mortgage temporarily. Terms typically range from three to 12 months.

Home Equity Investments

A home equity investment offers an alternative approach. The homeowner receives a lump sum in exchange for a percentage of the home's future value or appreciation, depending on the company. No monthly payments are required for the life of the investment.

At settlement — which can be through a home sale, refinance, savings or loan — the investor receives a share of the home's value at that time.

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The Power Of Preparation

Continued from page 11

emotionally the moment they walk in.

And then there's timing.

Last fall, I met with clients who were planning to list their home later in the winter. They had a thoughtful list of updates they wanted to complete, so we knew we were months away from going to market. That gave us the opportunity to plan ahead and make a few strategic decisions early.

One of those decisions was to capture the exterior photography while the landscaping was still at its peak. Green grass and full trees captured the property at its very best.

That decision became incredibly important.

The week we launched, we were in the middle of an ice storm — one we won't forget — snow and ice covering the ground, trees bare, and conditions far from ideal for showcasing a home. But because we had planned ahead, the listing still told the right story from day one.

That's what preparation allows you to do — it gives you control over how your home is introduced to the market.

First impressions matter more than ever.

Most buyers see a home online before they ever step inside, and those fall photos help shape their entire perception. A well-prepared home doesn't just attract more attention; it attracts the right attention.

There's also an important distinction between listing a home and positioning it.

Listing is simply putting it on the market. Positioning is much more intentional. It's about understanding the audience, crafting the story, and presenting the home in a way that highlights its strongest features and resonates with buyers.

When a home is positioned well, everything that follows — showings, offers, negotiations — tends to fall into place more naturally.

In the end, preparation isn't just a step in the process. It is the process.

And it's often the difference between a home that simply sells and one that truly stands out.

For more information, go to www.bettybatty.com or contact real estate advisor Betty Batty at betty.batty@compass.com or by calling 301-832-7609 or 410-429-7425. ■

The Complete Cost Of Buying And Selling

Continued from page 13

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR BUYERS AND SELLERS

- Budget conservatively and estimate costs at the high end of reported ranges to build in a financial buffer.
- Negotiate where possible — agent commissions, inspection fees and some closing costs may have room for adjustment.
- Get multiple quotes from inspectors, title companies, movers and contractors before committing.
- Factor in long-term costs — property taxes, insurance increases and deferred maintenance — when evaluating overall affordability.

All cost estimates use a \$400,000 home as a consistent baseline for comparison. Actual costs vary significantly by location, market conditions, loan type and individual property characteristics.

This story was produced by Hometap and reviewed and distributed by Stacker. ■

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Navigating The Spring Real Estate Market

What Buyers And Sellers Should Know

Whether buying your first home, selling after many years, or simply exploring your options, staying informed is one of the best ways to navigate today's real estate market successfully.

**Jenna
Aliff**
Park
Modern
Realty



Spring is traditionally one of the busiest seasons in real estate, and this year is no exception. Warmer weather, longer days and the desire to move before summer often bring an increase in both buyers and sellers entering the market. With more activity comes more competition, making preparation especially important for anyone planning to buy or sell.

For buyers, understanding the local market is one of the most important first steps. Inventory levels, pricing trends and demand can vary greatly from one neighbor-

hood to the next. In some areas, homes may receive multiple offers within days, while others may offer more flexibility for negotiations. Knowing what to expect helps buyers make stronger, more confident decisions.

Timing also matters. Many buyers begin searching in the spring, hoping to settle before the next school year or summer vacations. Because of this, well-priced and well-presented homes often move quickly. Buyers who are prepared, decisive and clear on their priorities tend to have the greatest success.

For sellers, preparation starts well before the listing goes live. First impressions can strongly influence buyer interest, and small details often make a big impact. Decluttering, deep cleaning, fresh landscaping, neutral paint and minor repairs can

help a home show at its best. Buyers are often drawn to homes that feel move-in ready and well cared for.

Pricing strategy is equally important. While it may be tempting to test the market with a higher list price, overpricing can often lead to longer days on market and fewer serious showings. Reviewing recent comparable sales, current competition and neighborhood demand helps create a pricing strategy that attracts strong buyer interest from the start.

Home equity is also a major factor for many sellers this season. After several years of rising home values, many homeowners are surprised by how much equity they have built. This can create opportunities for upgrading, downsizing, relocating or simply planning for the next chapter with greater

financial flexibility.

The spring market offers strong opportunities on both sides, but success often comes down to preparation and strategy. Buyers benefit from understanding the pace of the market and acting with confidence, while sellers benefit from thoughtful presentation and realistic pricing.

Whether buying your first home, selling after many years, or simply exploring your options, staying informed is one of the best ways to navigate today's real estate market successfully.

Park Modern Realty serves Anne Arundel County and surrounding areas. Contact Realtor Jenna Aliff by emailing info@parkmodernrealty.com or calling 410-541-7022. Learn more at www.parkmodernrealty.com. ■

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