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67 First Street Collingwood, ON L9Y 1A2

Office: 705.445.8500 x 251 Fax: 705.445.0589

**Heather Stitt**

Broker

Direct: 705.888.1974

Email: [realestate@heatherstitt.com](mailto:realestate@heatherstitt.com)



## Buying: Choosing the right neighbourhood

Before you make a decision, think of your lifestyle and how location would enhance or detract from it.

When buying a home, the neighbourhood you select will not only play a pivotal role in your family's life, but in the resale value of the property.

One person's ideal neighbourhood however may vary greatly from another's. But, regardless, there are some needs and wants that generally do not change. The distance from your new home to schools, churches and shopping, for example, will not only affect how you and your family settle into your new home, it will also draw or turn off a prospective buyer.

A good first step is to enlist the services of a REALTOR who works in the area you are thinking of moving. REALTORS are very familiar with the communities in which they work and can answer many of the questions you will develop during your search.

Never buy in an unfamiliar community or neighbourhood unless you have spent some time there both during the week and on weekends, day and night. Drive and walk around. Talk to store owners and people you meet on the street. Ask what they think of the neighbourhood.

If there are vacant tracts of land where you plan to buy, check with local authorities to see what the proposed land use might be. The last thing most homeowners want is the development of a mall or a high-rise office building across the road from their newly-purchased property.

Don't let particular things in a home that appeal to you override its location and potential subsequent resale value. When analyzing a potential property, ask yourself if you can imagine living -- not just in this home -- but in this neighbourhood for quite a long time.

Remember that someday you may have to sell your home to someone else and things that may not be important to you -- such as distance to schools, shopping, doctors and work -- may be important to other buyers. It's great to be located near parks and recreational facilities, but few homeowners appreciate the high cast of tennis court lights beaming into their back yard. If the home you are considering backs onto such property, drive around the area and see how often the baseball diamonds, soccer fields, swimming pools and skating rinks are being used and when.

In addition to finding the right neighbourhood, consider the immediate homes around the particular property you want to buy. Are they well maintained and worth the same or more than the home you are considering? Is the location a quiet area or a major traffic thoroughfare? What kind of privacy does the backyard provide? Does it get the morning or afternoon sun?

Homes located further away from the centre of an urban area are generally cheaper. Are you prepared to invest the time and money it takes to commute and how long of a commute are you prepared to commit to? Is there public transit and good access to major highways nearby? If you have kids in school, what kinds of schools and services are available? Will your kids have to be bused to their school? If a school is close by, will they have to cross any major intersections?

Finding malls, grocery and specialty stores in urban, residential areas is rarely a problem. But in neighbourhoods further away from urban areas, you may need to drive to the nearest convenience store. And getting to the local grocery store, pharmacy and other support services may require an even longer trek. More serious concerns are having such things as gas stations, airports, railway tracks, commercial developments, major highways and cemeteries very close by.

Finally, if your heart is set on finding that one-of-a-kind 150-year old Georgian home, you're not going to find it in a newer development. If you want large bedrooms and bathrooms, narrowing your search to an older part of town where homes are generally smaller, may prove disappointing.

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Source: Ontario Real Estate Association

