

Prep to Sell in the Next Year

9+ Months Out

The first step is to make a list of what needs **repaired or replaced**. This is everything that isn't "right" with the house - the paint on the deck, the burner that doesn't light, carpet that needs stretched, new paint, the roof needing replaced, that leaky hose bib, the overgrown lawn, or a hole in the drywall. Make a list, decide if you can do it or need to hire someone, get quotes, and begin to schedule the repairs according to money and time. Creating an overall list may feel overwhelming, but giving yourself a year should help. A list also helps you prioritize which repairs need to happen first.

The next step is to figure out what needs **repaired or replaced**. Yep, same step but drilling down a little further. That one light switch that is flipped upside down is something you've gotten used to, but it needs to be flipped so it isn't a distraction to a buyer. The door that sticks is just part of the house, but it might put a question or hesitation in a buyer's mind about the foundation. The Broncos orange and blue paint in the living room kitchen might be just your thing, but it could become a mental obstacle for the next person. You want to go through and make a list of all the little things that make your house feel more personal than marketable, then tackle them little by little. Remember, you are getting ready for this to be someone else's house, so you want it to appeal to the broadest audience possible.

When scheduling and making repairs, think about **seasons**. Exterior paint, decks, and most of the outside work should be done in the summer and fall when the weather is more stable and agreeable, while interior jobs – paint, trim, flooring can be done year-round, even when it's cold, snowing, or raining, maybe all in the same day. Some landscaping is better done in the fall (pruning, planting grass, new trees) so it comes up nicely in the spring, while other projects (new plants, leaves, branches) are better done in the spring to make the house look amazing right now. Some high traffic areas might be better tended to right before photos as opposed to 9 months out when they are going to get walked on a bunch more. Putting in a new furnace that is more energy efficient could show considerably lower utilities, which could be a consideration for some buyers.

Consider **talking to a lender** about your finances to better prepare you for whatever your next move is. A lender can help you understand what you will qualify for now verses what you could do to better position yourself, what debts you should focus on first, or how much you will need to buy a different house or move into a rental.

6 Months Out

Begin the **decluttering** process. Most people wait way too long before decluttering which then adds a lot of stress the days and weeks before the house goes to market. Go room by room and decide what you want to **keep**, what you want to **store**, and what you can **get rid of**. With the stuff you aren't going to keep, hold a garage sale or make the kids take their boxes to their own place. Decide what you use, what is useful, and what is just taking up space. When it is time to pack you will be thrilled to have reduced the amount of stuff you have.

Think about seasons again. If you are going to sell in winter or early spring, **take pictures** several months before. You want people to see your property at its best. If it is amazing in spring, but you are selling on October, take those amazing spring pictures and have them as part of the listing.

3 Months Out

By now the house should be just about ready. Now it is time to **start packing**. I know this feels early, but trust me, 2-3 weeks while living your normal schedule and adding in packing is going to be a lot. If you plan on selling in the next 3 months, you have to start getting ready earlier than most people think. By 30 days out you should be living like you are in an Air B&B or VRBO more than your own house where you are spread out and comfy.

Interview a couple of real estate agents. Studies show that 74%-88% of homeowners go with the first agent they talk to. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but why not give yourself choices. Why not interview 2 or 3 agents and choose the one you resonate with instead of just settling for your neighbor's nephew or that guy you know from the gym. Selling a house requires a skill set. Interview 2 or 3 and choose the one that helps you see clearly, who can articulate a strategy beyond hope and a post, who can prep you for the process, and who will keep you informed.

6-8 Weeks Out

Deep clean the house and property. Make a list of each room and the things you want to clean in each, then schedule 1-2 a week. Make a list of all the outside projects and schedule them out. Maybe see if your family and friends would be willing to come over one weekend to help you tackle a bunch of things at the same time. Many hands make light work and all that wisdom.

Gather your **warranties, maintenance schedules, proof of permits**, etc. Some of these your agent can find, but to speed up the process, gather everything tied to the house you know of and have it in one place. Knowing whether the roof has 2 more years or 20 more years on the warranty is critical for pricing it right. Buyers will want to know how and when the furnace and water heater were last maintained.

Consider the value of **pre-sale inspections**. Some agents love these and some would say never do these. A pre-sale inspection is having the HVAC people come in and clean and inspect the furnace, having someone snake the sewer, and maybe walk the house to see what issues may come up. I like these because it informs you what needs to happen which can help you price the house accordingly or fix them and ask more for the house. Some agents feel like it is better to wait and let the buyer's inspector point out issues and work from there.

Month it goes to Market

Meet with your agent and talk about the best day to list the house. Once you pick a date to go active they will have a bunch of work to do getting the listing written, setting up the photographer, prepping the marketing, etc.

Your job now, if you've done everything else, is going to be tying up loose ends and making sure everything is ready to go – immaculate landscaping, uncluttered counters, staged just right. Now, it's time for your agent to begin leading the process, helping you process the data and make great decisions, and get this thing closed.

BONUS TIP

Here is a little bonus tip. The weekend your house first goes active, **plan a trip away**. Try to leave the house early Friday afternoon and plan to be gone until Sunday evening. This will make the initial showing window way easier for your agent to manage and reduce the stress on you coming and going. Take the dog and go to the mountains or visit the kids or grandkids or hit the hot springs. And when you are away, try to relax while your agent works. You've been through a lot getting everything ready and you have the tension of needing the house to get a great contract early, so take some time to just unwind and catch your breath. Hopefully, when you get back into town, your agent will have some good news for you.