

## ***PREPARING YOUR LAND FOR MARKETING AND SALE***

*By Tom Smith*

In the residential market, most people know a lot of work will go in to preparing their home for sale; conversely, preparations are often overlooked when selling land. Homeowners clean up, paint rooms, re-do countertops, sometimes refinish floors to make the home look as nice as possible in an effort to get the best offer. My question to the landowner: what are you going to do differently when preparing your land for sale?

Consider any homes or lodges on the property. As with an urban residence, appearance is of the utmost importance; the home needs to be in the best possible condition. Ensure the exterior is clean and spend time on landscaping, most land tours begin at the house or cabin. You don't get do-overs with first impressions (this goes for the property entrance as well). It's critical the home is clean and any obvious trouble spots are taken care of before putting it on the market. Finding a mouse in the toilet (or even a dropping on a bed), or an overall dusty home will not bode well for the tone of the remaining tour.

We recommend our clients make sure any secondary buildings are also clean and organized. This includes barns, equipment sheds as well as shooting houses. The cost and effort of cleaning these places are minimal, and it will make a positive impression on a potential buyer viewing the property. If secondary buildings appear well-maintained, a buyer will assume the entire property has been well taken care of.

In the residential industry, the phrase "curb appeal" is popular. In the land world, we like to say "pasture appeal," and this is an equally important concept. While most properties we sell consist of timberland, hunting land with a lake, pond, food plots and a great family retreat, a good many are operating farms or have hay fields, pastures etc. These are the areas mechanically altered to improve productivity, so they should also be maintained so they appear well-managed.

All roads should be mowed, graded, and any trash, fallen trees, overgrown vegetation and other eyesores removed. Clients will spend most of their time on the roads during a viewing; maintenance will go a long way, showing the client the property is worth the asking price.

If feeders are used, they should be full. If not, it will appear that you have not been attentive, which can lower the value in a buyer's mind. Lakes and ponds that can be filled with water should be filled. Feed pens will need to be in presentable shape, also.

Trash dumps should be adequately maintained (surrounding areas should be policed for blow trash and critter trash trails). Hazardous items and any old appliances, vehicles, etc. should be disposed of properly. Prepare the property as if you were to consider purchasing it.

Preparation should go beyond the groundwork and also include some “background” work. An often-overlooked aspect of preparing a tract of land for sale is cleaning up any title issues. If you did not have a first-rate broker representing you at the time of purchase, there is a chance that exceptions to title insurance coverage that can be cleaned up are still on there. While these can often be fixed during the due diligence stage of a contract, there is a risk that extensive exceptions on a title commitment will cause a buyer to have unnecessary concerns.

Land that has been in the same ownership for generations may have title issues that the current generation is not even aware of. This could range from old easements, long lost cousins still on the title, lack of legal access, boundary line agreements (or need for), right of first refusal agreements, and more. Having the title run and ordering a survey can go a long way towards getting these types of issues dealt with, or at least understood, so that marketing is accurate and, once under contract, the deal has a higher likelihood of closing.

Properties that operate under permits for wildlife management, permitted water pumping, etc. should make sure all permits and reporting requirements are in order and up to date. Similarly, if a property is operating under special or agricultural valuation for ad valorem tax purposes, it is crucial to make sure any outstanding issues related to that valuation are addressed.

Working with visible neighbors to keep their properties tidy is also helpful. If they have any blinds on fence lines, it is always a good idea to see if they will move them back to their own property, which they should be doing anyway.

Another major issue that can blow up a sale is determining what will remain on the property after the sale. At the very least, a list of what will not stay should be known to your broker so he/she can point it out. If there is fine furniture or artwork not staying, it is wise to remove it prior to a showing, or you may hit an unforeseen stumbling block that can stop a sale. Even decisions about smaller things like blinds and feeders need to happen upfront. I often tell my agents that if they haven't had to buy a new shooting house, they have not been in the business very long.

Preparing land for sale is a key element in presenting the property to the market and ultimately achieving an appropriate value. This preparation involves work to improve buildings and “pasture appeal,” and background work to make sure the property is accurately presented to prospective buyers. All of these efforts are critical and can go a long way towards selling your property at the best possible price.

When you consider selling your property, call us at Tom Smith Land and Homes to see how we can assist you! We will come to your property, meet with you and make recommendations on market conditions in your area as well as the best way to market your property!

We look forward to assisting you with the sale of your land!

Expect More. Get More.