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REAL ESTATE

FREE GUIDE

Getting a Mountain Property Ready to Sell

Getting a cabin, second home or acreage near Leavenworth ready for the market: the paperwork buyers will ask for, the repairs that pay off, and how to make it show well, even from a distance.

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Start here: answer the buyer's questions before they ask

Buyers of mountain property come in with a list of worries: the well, the septic, the road in winter, wildfire insurance, whether that addition was permitted. Every one of those is a question you can answer before you list.

The homes that sell smoothly here are the ones where the answers are already on the table: the records gathered, the small problems fixed, and the place clean and photographed in good light. That's what this guide walks through.

You don't need to do all of it, and you don't need to be here to do it. Start with the paperwork; it costs almost nothing and saves the most trouble.

Paperwork first

Gather these before you list. Most are free or close to it, and having them ready makes buyers more confident and keeps the deal moving.

- **Septic.** The seller provides the septic inspection. If you're out of town, I handle it start to finish: scheduling the inspector, having the tank dug up if needed, and getting everything put back. You get the invoice and the report. The county health district also keeps records of the system's design and permits; ask for the as-built drawing if you don't have it. Pumping records help too.
- **Well.** The well log (drilling record), any past water tests, and anything you know about flow or treatment equipment. If the well is shared, find the shared well agreement. And consider a fresh water test for nitrates and bacteria before you list: it usually costs under $100, most buyers will

want one anyway, and if there's a problem it's far better to find out now than in the middle of escrow.

- **Permits.** Building permits for any additions, garages, decks, conversions or major remodels. If something was built without one, tell me early. It's much easier to plan around than to discover in the middle of a deal.
- **Access.** Any road maintenance agreement or easement, and who plows. On a private road, buyers and lenders will ask how it's maintained.
- **HOA or association details,** if there is one: the dues and how often you pay them, the rules, and most important, what you get for the money, like road maintenance, snow removal, water or common areas. Also ask whether there's a transfer fee when the home sells. Buyers often ask the seller to pay it, but like most things, it's negotiable.
- **The seller disclosure statement.** In Washington, sellers of most homes fill out a disclosure form covering the property's condition, water, septic, permits and more. Answer it honestly and completely; the paperwork above makes that easy.
- **Utilities and costs.** Your electric provider and typical bills, propane or wood heat, internet options, and your current insurance carrier. Buyers ask, and real numbers beat guesses.

If the place has been a short-term rental, also note when you'll stop taking bookings and which reservations are still on the calendar.

The house: what's worth doing

Buyers' inspectors write down everything, and a long list of small items makes a good house look neglected. These usually pay for themselves:

- **The small stuff.** Leaky faucets, running toilets, dead bulbs, sticky doors and windows, loose handrails, missing outlet covers. Cheap to fix, expensive to negotiate.
- **Safety items.** Working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and a seismic strap on the water heater (lenders generally want all three), solid deck and stair railings, and nothing an inspector will flag as a hazard.
- **Heat and chimney.** Service the furnace or heat pump. If there's a wood stove or fireplace, have the chimney cleaned and inspected. It's a couple hundred dollars, almost nobody does it, and nearly every buyer asks about it.
- **Roof and gutters.** Clear needles and debris, and fix anything loose. A clean roof photographs better and inspects better.
- **Paint touch-ups.** Scuffed walls and trim in neutral colors. Not a full repaint unless it really needs it.
- **A deep clean and a declutter.** The cheapest improvement there is, and the one buyers notice first.

What usually isn't worth the money

- **Big remodels before selling.** A new kitchen or bathroom rarely returns what it costs, and buyers often want to choose their own finishes.
- **New flooring everywhere,** unless what's there is damaged.
- **High-end upgrades** that go beyond what similar homes nearby have.
- **Projects you can't finish well before listing.** A half-done project looks worse than the old version.

Every property is different, so I'll tell you the top few things that would matter for yours, and which ones to skip.

What about a pre-listing inspection? It's a case-by-case call. On a home in good condition it's often a very wise move: it answers buyers' questions before they ask and makes for a smoother deal. If you already know there's a list of issues, it can create more to disclose than it's worth. I'll help you decide which camp your home is in.

Outside: the first impression and the insurance question

- **Curb appeal.** The first look at the house sets the tone for everything after it. Fresh bark or mulch, trimmed shrubs, a clean entry and a few plants by the door are some of the best money you can spend; in my experience landscaping returns two to four times what it costs.
- **Outdoor living space.** If you have a deck, patio, hot tub or fire pit, clean it up and set it up so buyers can picture themselves using it.
- **Defensible space.** Clear dry brush, needles and dead branches from around the house, limb up the trees near it, and move firewood stacks away from the walls. It looks cared for, and it matters for the insurance quote a buyer will get. INSURE covers why.
- **The drive in.** Make the address easy to find, fix obvious potholes, and make sure a buyer's agent can open any gate (share the code with your agent).
- **Clear the clutter outside.** Old vehicles, building materials, burn piles and overflowing sheds read as work a buyer will have to do.
- **Outbuildings.** Garages, shops and sheds are selling points here. Tidy them so buyers can see the space.

In winter, keep the driveway plowed and the walkway shoveled and sanded, keep the heat on, and clear heavy snow off decks and roofs where it's safe to. A buyer who can't get up the drive won't see the house.

In summer, mow, pull weeds, and water what's planted. Summer listing photos sell the lifestyle, so the yard and the deck are worth a little time.

Photos, video and showing day

Most buyers see your home on a screen first, and out-of-town buyers may decide whether to make the drive from the photos and video alone. Media day matters more than almost anything else on this list.

Before media day:

- Deep clean, declutter, and put away personal photos, paperwork and toiletries.
- Open every blind, turn on every light, and replace any dead bulbs, with matching bulbs in each room (no mixing white and yellow).
- Make the beds, set out a few clean towels, and clear the counters.
- Move cars, trash cans and toys out of the driveway and yard. Cover or put away a roll-out barbecue; they photograph terribly. (A built-in outdoor kitchen is a different story.)
- Clear snow from the walk and the deck in winter; water and tidy the yard in summer.
- If it's a rental, block off a day on the calendar for the shoot, right after a cleaning.

A good media day here usually means professional photos, a few drone shots that show the setting and the land, twilight versions of the best exterior shots (done in editing, so there's no second trip at dusk), and a short walkthrough video that helps out-of-town buyers understand the layout before they drive over.

On showing days:

- Lights on, thermostat comfortable, and the place smelling clean (skip heavy air fresheners).
- Put away valuables, medications and anything private.
- Pets out of the house if at all possible.
- Be gone. Buyers relax and stay longer when the owner isn't there.

The short checklist

- [ ] Septic inspection scheduled; septic and pumping records found
- [ ] Fresh water test done (nitrates and bacteria); well log found
- [ ] Permits for additions and remodels found (or the gaps flagged to me)
- [ ] Road agreement and HOA details gathered
- [ ] Seller disclosure statement started
- [ ] Small repairs and safety items fixed (detectors, water heater strap); chimney cleaned and inspected
- [ ] Roof and gutters cleared; curb appeal, outdoor space and defensible space done
- [ ] Deep clean and declutter done
- [ ] Rental bookings wound down (if a rental)

- [ ] Media day scheduled

How I help

You don't have to do this list yourself, or be here for it. I walk the property and send you a short list of what matters for yours, in order. Then I line up the people: the septic inspector, the water test, a handyman, the cleaner and media day. Because I manage short-term rentals here, I already work with local vendors every week.

If you're not sure where your home stands, start with VALUE, which explains how I'd price it. If you're selling from out of town, SELL walks through the whole process. Message me either word and I'll send it.

Text or call (509) 652-2023, or email hello@justinhorvath.com.

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