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A place to live—  
analyzing family  
needs and wants

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### Quick Facts

- Most houses are built for the average family and are not tailored to specific needs.
- A family can make a housing priority list to fit their needs and wants to allow comparison of various housing alternatives.
- The size and composition of the family, as well as daily activities, will dictate what housing features are needed.
- Public, private, service and multipurpose activities should be planned in the housing needs.
- Family values will play a part in deciding on certain characteristics for a home.
- It also is necessary to consider the "resale value" of a home being purchased.
- By listing advantages and disadvantages of present housing, a family can begin to evaluate their future housing needs.

Are you and your family considering making a change in your housing situation?

Because housing has a great impact in personal and family life, and because expenditures for housing are often the single largest segment of the family budget, it is important to make a wise choice.

Whether you plan to rent or buy, to build or remodel, this Service in Action sheet can help in determining what specifications are most important in the unit that your family selects.

Because the needs of a vast population must be met and at the same time as affordable a product as possible must be provided, most houses aren't planned for a specific family; they are built for the average family. Yet each individual family is different and there is no one housing answer suited to all families. The concerns of each family member should be carefully considered as the family collectively analyzes what it needs and wants in a home.

After considering the following information, you can tailor a family housing priority list to allow comparison of various alternatives to see which fits your needs and wants most closely. It can help make the "best" compromises, if necessary, in balancing housing needs and resources.

It often is difficult for families to separate housing needs and wants. The size and composition of the family, as well as the activities performed in daily life will largely dictate what housing features are needed. Additionally, personal and family values—your "lifestyle"—will play a large part in listing your locational, physical and social requirements.

### Family Size and Composition

The number, age and sex of children (and planned additions) often are determining factors for number or size of bedrooms, importance of play facilities, and other such things.

Single-employed-parent families may have day care needs or desire facilities for live-in assistance. The presence of elderly family members may dictate one-floor living. How does the present size and composition of your family affect your housing needs?

It is important to realize that a family's needs and wants, as well as physical and financial resources, will change with time. It may be particularly important for persons now in their middle years to plan ahead for these changes so that an involuntary move is not necessary in the future.

It may be difficult, however, for the young, expanding family with limited financial capability to afford a home that will meet their needs for the next 20 years. As much as is possible, necessary or desired, think ahead to future changes in family size, health, interests, activities, time and energy availability, and how these will influence housing needs in terms of sleeping space, number of bathrooms, lawn size, etc.

### Family Activities

There is no question that most Colorado homes available today will meet our most basic needs for shelter and the activities of sleeping, eating and personal hygiene. Beyond that, family members perform many activities within the home and its surroundings. It usually is easy to classify these indoor and outdoor activities and their corresponding areas of the home as "public," "private," or "service," although there may be some overlapping activities and combined areas.

*Public activities* are those usually done with other family members (including pets) and guests, such as entertaining, family television viewing, and playing games. The "public or social zone" of the home therefore accommodates these small or large groups in the living and family room, dining area, entryways and outdoor living spaces.

*Private or personal activities* are those usually done alone or with only one other person, i.e., sleeping, bathing, dressing, reading or studying, thinking. Thus this area includes spaces where one usually can do things privately without interference: individual bedrooms, bathroom, den or study, and may include indoor and outdoor hobby areas.

*Service duties* are those involved in the maintenance and operation of the household: food preparation and service, laundry, housecleaning, sewing, bill paying and record keeping. Ideally the service area would include separate or specialized spaces with adequate work and storage facilities such as the kitchen, laundry/utility/sewing room, shop or work room and garage, but production costs of housing today often result in the inadequacy or omission of some of these.

It also is quite convenient and economical to select *multipurpose spaces* in which different types of activities can be performed at the same or different times. In fact, many people today prefer to combine the service activities of the kitchen with social aspects of family relationships, thus they choose a kitchen/family room combination.

On the back of this sheet, you have the opportunity to list the activities that your family performs (or wishes to perform) at home and to note which could be combined and which must be kept separate by time or by room.

It may be useful to estimate the amount of time spent in each room when setting priorities. For example, a separate, formal dining room may be used only a small percentage of the day, while an informal family room/eating area might get

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almost constant use. But the dining room might add to possibilities for remodeling the kitchen.

## Family Values

The things we value, such as comfort, beauty, convenience, prestige, privacy, safety and security and "peace and quiet," also will cause us to specify certain characteristics for the home. Location may be a desired value to some families—"to live in a nice neighborhood," while it may be a necessity for others to live near mass transportation or major commuter highways.

One family may need to consider economy in both initial and occupancy costs of a house, while another may prefer (and be able to afford) a prestigious house or address or both. A priority order listing of values becomes especially helpful when families must compromise if finances will not permit the acquisition of everything they want.

## Housing Features

The result of cataloging needs and wants usually takes the form of a list of housing features: number, types and sizes of rooms; lot size; desired neighborhood or location; design and construction materials; equipment, storage and furnishings needed; accessory buildings; landscaping; and physical and social amenities such as swimming pool, tennis courts, clubhouse.

You may wish to state some of these desires very specifically, such as "at least four feet of uninterrupted counterspace in the kitchen," and some rather generally, "bedroom big enough for a kingsize bed" (and doors large enough to get it through).

Organize items in priority order so that when househunting you are not distracted by a feature that is appealing, but not necessarily important to the livability of that house for your family. Perhaps you could add those charming curtains and wall paper or interesting light fixtures

to another better house, and at minimal cost.

## Resale Value

Finally, it is necessary to consider "resale value" on homes being purchased, since Americans move more often than most societies. It will be important, even though you consider this a permanent purchase, to buy a home that also will meet the needs of other people. This means avoiding extremes in terms of high or low cost compared to other homes in the area, obsolete or unworkable floor plans, generally unacceptable architectural design, or "customization" to accommodate individual needs and wants that may not be commonly found across the population, such as lowering all countertops to fit a 5-foot-tall homemaker.

## Evaluation of Present Housing

One way to start thinking about needs and wants is to consider the advantages and disadvantages of your present housing. List the advantages that would be most important to duplicate in the next housing choice, examples being, "close to job and babysitter," "low maintenance and operating costs," or "located in the right school district."

Also list the disadvantages that you wish to overcome by making a housing change: i.e., "kitchen too small," "lack of safety and security," "not enough bathrooms." (This might include an inventory of items or activities that your present housing will not accommodate.)

If the housing change has been necessitated by a job transfer, the consideration of these questions is still important, even though the disadvantages may not be the major cause for the move. The lists will help determine what you want and don't want to have again.

After completion of the "Family Housing Needs Analysis," you will be ready to construct a family housing priority list.

## Family Housing Needs Analysis

Advantages of present housing:

Disadvantages of present housing:

Family characteristics/values:

Housing feature needed/desired:

Present family size and composition:

Future expected changes:

Public activities (indoors and out):

Private activities:

Service activities:

Individual and family values:

You are now ready to construct a family housing priority list. A suggested format would be to first list the features that you feel are absolutely necessary and upon which no compromise can be made. Then list the remaining features desired in the order of their importance to the family as a

whole. Now use the list to help you stay on the "right track" in selecting the best home for your particular situation.

See also other Service in Action sheets in this homebuying series, 9.908, 9.909, 9.910, 9.911 and 9.912.