

# LETTER TO BUYERS AND SELLERS - BEST PRACTICE FOR SMOOTH TRANSACTIONS

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**We ask parties to live by the golden rule when making or receiving an offer.  
*Treat the other side the way you would want to be treated.***

Advice to sellers: if you receive an offer, respond to it in a timely manner. Work with the “bird in the hand.” Buyers understandably get upset if they feel their offer is being leveraged for another offer that may or may not materialize. This alienates a potentially good buyer and gets negotiations off to a bad start.

Advice to buyers: make offers in good faith. If you find yourself in a position of multiple offers, or if you feel the only way to put a house under agreement when it is new to the market is to pay top price, then don't try to renegotiate the price after a home inspection. Only offer a price that you feel comfortable with and always assume that the house will need work and budget accordingly. All houses need work. Please be patient after submitting an offer. We often have to wait to get in touch with the seller who may need to talk to an attorney, spouse, partner or extended family. Expect a long delay if the owner is an estate or bank. We will do our best to explain the circumstances and respond to you as soon as we can. There are many reasons a response may not be immediately available - please try to understand. We know waiting can be anguishing.

## **The Purpose of a Home Inspection: Rules of the Road for Buyers and Sellers**

Everyone needs to keep in mind that most of the housing stock we have here in Metro Boston and surrounding communities is USED. The purpose of a home inspection is to inform a buyer about what he or she is buying, not to renegotiate the sale price of a property. When potential Buyers are MAKING AN OFFER THEY SHOULD BUDGET TO SPEND THEIR OWN FUNDS TOWARD THE REPAIRS SUGGESTED BY THE HOME INSPECTOR. It would not be unusual for that sum to add up to many thousands of dollars. We ask all buyers to take this into consideration when they make their offer so that they don't feel they overpaid if they discover things that need to be fixed in the house. No house is perfect no matter how well cared for. We as Realtors have priced a property taking into consideration its location, size, configuration, number of rooms, bedrooms and bathrooms, lot size and general condition. Buyers are always taken by surprise by the costs of maintenance and repairs to a house and want to renegotiate the price after home inspection. We ask that you don't shop in a price range that stretches your household budget so much you cannot assume the maintenance of a house. Do you have access to thousands and thousands of dollars over the next 5-10 years to take care of the items your home inspector will inevitably find? If not, you may not be a good match for a used house. So, except for some very expensive item that needs immediate repair that you could never have known about without an inspection, we expect the buyer to assume the house and its issues at closing. That is normal. We keep hearing from buyers, “I knew I'd have to do some work, but I just can't afford to go forward without a price adjustment.” So we ask you to take this very real issue into consideration now, before you make an offer on a house you can't afford.

It is the job of all home inspectors to highlight maintenance issues, look for pests and insects, point out needed repairs, assess structural condition and scrutinize major systems like plumbing, electric, heat and roof. Every home inspection, even in the best maintained home, turns up multiple issues. Commonly we find that a chimney or wall needs re-pointing, that fireplaces aren't lined, (new building codes require linings - however old fireplaces are often triple bricked which may in fact be a better, but more expensive way to build a chimney than today's current code requires). It is not uncommon for some electrical wire to be loose or not properly boxed or for homes to have knob and tube wiring. **Expect to have to upgrade electrical service;** today's buyers have needs for computers and equipment that many of our sellers never faced. We see that ropes in windows are broken, that older kitchens and baths do not have GFI outlets and that lots of physical things that currently exist do not meet updated building codes. Our older housing stock has older waste pipes, water services, heating systems, roofs, exterior shingles and gutters, fascia boards and plumbing. It is typical for roofs to be installed without vents, and insulation not to be in keeping with your home inspector's recommendations. Powder Post Beetles and termites have left their damage scars in virtually all basements in older homes. When a basement is finished, a home inspector will tell you that he can't determine what is going on in the sills and joists behind the covered walls, so take that into consideration now when you make your offer. We don't want you backing out of the deal later because you don't know what is covered up in the finished basement. Another very common issue in our 19<sup>th</sup> c. homes is settling and sloping. Some home inspectors will sound the alarm of structural problems when floors tip. If you see tree trunk columns in the basement, know that a home inspector will suggest you put in steel columns in concrete footings (at about \$1500 apiece - the seller has lived without steel columns - so this is a buyer's expense - budget accordingly.) In the homes we own, we think of the slanting floors as part of the charm. If you don't want that charm, don't make an offer on a home with floors that aren't level. Buyers should not expect sellers to upgrade a house for them. Every buyer should expect most, if not all, of these things in our beautiful older housing stock.

We ask everyone to further understand that every home inspector has his own opinion as to the proper maintenance of a home. Please remember that the issues that are brought up by the home inspector have probably not been a concern to the current homeowner. (The house is functioning fine from their perspective and they may like their old fuses... and the corrosion on the pipe feeding the laundry has never leaked... they are used to the windows that won't stay up...they've been having fires in their fireplaces for years, ...etc.)

Please do not expect a seller to negotiate on something visible to the eye: tree roots uprooting sidewalks, tree limbs or trees too close to the house, cracked tile in the bathroom or cracked windows, rotting bulkhead doors, gutters that are broken or disconnected, etc. We expect that you have carefully seen the property and that problems that are in plain view have been taken into consideration when you make an offer. Also, expect a home inspector to recommend maintenance items like servicing the heating system or cleaning the gutters. The purpose of the home inspection is not to compensate a buyer for the perfect house, but to make them aware of the items they will need to address when they buy the home. Again, these are buyer's expenses and should be anticipated.

Just because a home inspector recommends a lightening rod, updated electrical system, vinyl siding, new storms and screens, GFI outlets or lining the chimney, does not mean that the seller should be responsible for these or any other improvements for the new buyer. (We have witnessed home inspectors recommending things that we feel would hurt the value of a property!) A significant sea change has occurred in the way pest control companies look at homes for pest problems, most notably termites.

Until recently pest companies only recommended treatment if there were signs of active termites in the house. Today, many pest companies, concerned about liability, are recommending treatments for every home they come out to review. Rotting wood near the ground, termite activity in landscape timbers and under rocks near the foundation and termite damage in porches and sills are common, and most companies are recommending treatment even if the damage is a century old. It is also the policy of many chemical companies not to distinguish between old and active termite damage. It is the policy of many companies to always recommend treatment if there is any evidence of damage, past or present. Because it is evident that some termite or wood boring insect damage is present in almost every property that we list we would like to set a standard for negotiations. We believe it is a seller's responsibility to treat for termite damage if, *and only if*, termite mud tubes are found to be present in the structure of the main house or an attached garage or if there is evidence of "swarming". This is the industry standard for active termites. We also believe that all buyers who elect to have a pest inspection should be prepared to follow up on the recommended treatment of the pest control company after they purchase their house if mud tubes or swarming are not present. Sheds and detached garages are not considered the main house and are very attractive to pests. Buyers should be prepared to treat those structures when they purchase a home as normal home maintenance and not expect the seller to compensate them for such.

### ADVICE FOR BUYERS

If you want to make the terms of your offer more favorable to a seller you should agree to do your home inspection within three days of an accepted offer and sign a purchase and sale as soon thereafter as possible. Sellers cannot accept other offers while you have it under agreement, and they lose valuable marketing time not knowing whether or not their deal is solid. A deal is solid when there is a fully executed Purchase and Sale and if the bank has issued a commitment letter. Also, please disclose to seller in writing if you will be using a government loan (FHA or VA) when you make your offer. Under no circumstance will the seller consider an offer contingent on the closing of the buyer's property. Every transaction has inherent risk for both parties. A buyer who attempts to eliminate all risk on their end creates high risk for the seller which is simply unacceptable. A buyer cannot expect the seller to assume all the risk. Consult a real estate attorney.

**WARNING - It is our experience that many banks/mortgage companies are very eager for your loan and will promise you the moon but are having difficulty delivering on their promises. (Read: the loan you get at closing isn't the one you thought you were getting.)** In addition to causing delay with some financing, there are a lot of bank/mortgage operations that are using attorneys, appraisers, surveyors and title examiners who do not complete their work in time to meet the financing deadline. Unfortunately, many buyers who are purchasing homes we have listed have experienced carelessness, oversights and ineptness with the bank they have chosen and are unable to close on time. New TRID regulations are challenging. The buyer's deposit (five percent of a sale price) is at risk if they are unable to perform or close on the date required by their contract. It is not unreasonable for the seller to want a large sum of money to agree to extend the closing in order to bridge their next purchase or to compensate them for not closing on time. We are happy to provide a long list of reliable lenders, but if a buyer chooses to work with someone else and the closing is delayed, we will consider the buyer forewarned, and will be less likely to be sympathetic when trouble arises from a bank that is not on our list of reliable lenders. Buyers can also request that a local attorney be used to do the conveyancing which tends to streamline the process. Buyers may, of course, use the bank of their choosing but it is our goal for every transaction to go smoothly. We have learned that the people we rely upon will do a good job for their clients, the buyer (s). This warning is simply to prevent any misery in the buyer's life. We would be glad to furnish names of people who wish they had taken this advice.