

# 4D REAL ESTATE

## Do second mortgage homework

Prior to taking out a second mortgage for home improvements, it is advisable to ask several quality questions.

If you are a homeowner you are probably being inundated with home improvement solicitations. Beware of home improvement offers that may not improve your home's value.



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HAWKINS

Before considering any home enhancements on your property it may first be a beneficial idea to consider the recovery value of the contemplated investment. Take this into advisement before pouring unnecessary monies into a home.

Not all home upgrades have good recovery value. Luxury enhancements (i.e. pools, tennis courts, lighting systems etc) do not add additional real estate value to a home. It's important to understand that certain perceived improvement expenditures may not be recovered in the event of a sale.

Some home additions (bathrooms, bedrooms, heated rooms) may add additional value to your home if the neighborhood's comparative market prices can substantiate such home improvements.

Too often homeowners make home improvements that price their homes out of their community's market value. Before making any unnecessary home improvements, contact your local realtor to find out if the contemplated improvements will increase or decrease your home's property value. Most realtors will provide this information free of charge.

Never confuse home improvements with home repairs. Required home repairs, which are considered necessary to maintain a property's appearance and value, are always recommended. A failure to make certain home repairs in a timely fashion could easily result into additional property damages and losses of a home's appraisal value.

You don't want to be surprised that the fence you just installed did not add any more monetary value, as you may have expected. Vinyl siding also does not add a tremendous monetary value to a home. The luxury and enjoyment of a pool, does not have any appraisal value at the sale of a home, despite popular belief.

If you desire additional space, it may be advisable to purchase a larger home instead of making any home additions or renovations. Remember to take into consideration your area's market value prior to making any home enhancements.

Most home improvement companies will make it sound very reasonable to get a home improvement loan. When contemplating any home improvements always consider the recovery value. Then ask the question, do these enhancements make financial sense?

Most home improvement loans (second mortgages) are approved at a significantly higher market interest rate, even in this market of low interest rates.

You may not be aware that most home improvement loans could result into another lien on your property. This lien has the potential to tie up

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High-end upgrades to appliances and fixtures are among the options available to new homeowners.

### OPTIONS AROUND

## Check hottest trend in new homes

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If you're in the market for a new home and planning to build, you'll be pleasantly surprised by all the options available to you.

These days, builders are offering all kinds of incentives to get customers through the door. Among them: free upgrades to higher-end appliances; decorative lighting fixtures; and the option of getting wood, tile, carpet, or a combination of the three installed at no extra cost.

But perhaps the most popular incentive is the offer to pre-wire the

home for convenience and entertainment. Today's new home construction incorporates three levels of A/V built-ins: whole house audio; home automation; and home theater.

Whole house audio includes wiring for a speaker or speakers in every room for music and intercom; home automation involves connecting all systems in the house to a central computer that can do everything from turning lights on and off to preheating the oven when you're on your way home from work; but perhaps the most popular addition to new home

construction these days is putting in a home theater.

The options in this arena are endless so it will require careful planning to make sure you get exactly what you want. The most important thing to decide before the wiring begins would be all the places you want a TV to go. In the kitchen, that may be under a cabinet to save counter space. In the bedroom, family room or even the bathroom, it may be the wall to save floor space.

"If you'll be hanging a flat panel TV in your home it's important to let your

contractor know ahead of time. They are thin, sleek and classy looking but they are also quite heavy and need to be securely fastened to the wall," says Keith Pribyl of Sanus Systems, a St. Paul, Minnesota-based company that designs and builds a broad variety of audio/video furnishings, mounts and accessories.

Deciding the location and size of your flat panel TV prior to building allows the contractor to place wall studs where they are needed, assuring the walls are strengthened for their

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## Designer tips for creating curb appeal on budget

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If improving your home's curb appeal tops your list of projects to do around the house, take note: creating curb appeal doesn't have to be extensive or expensive.

For instance, replacing old, worn-out garage doors with something dressier like a carriage-house style door can change the look of a home, almost more than any other improvement to the exterior — especially one with a front-facing garage. And the project takes less than a day to complete.

Celebrity designer Chayse Daocda from the hit TLC home improvement series, "While You Were Out" has built her reputation on helping homeowners refresh worn-out spaces. Here are her suggestions for minor cosmetic changes that yield

big impact on a home's exterior appearance on a not-so-extreme budget.

Top 10 things you can do to add curb appeal:

1. Paint your house. This may be an obvious one, so I have to get it out of the way first. Even so, not enough people do it. Most houses need it anyway. Go crazy, do what you have always wanted. Many tones of the same hue can really add dimension to the house. And remember, decorative moldings on older houses give license to use more than one color. Good prep work, like sanding off worn and chipping areas and priming, can make an exterior paint job last a lot longer and look better.

2. Change out-dated light fixtures — or add lights if you don't have some already. Light up your doorways and

walkways. Better to have more lights at lower wattages than one, very bright one.

3. Add landscaping. Consult your local nursery for plants and shrubs that work best in your area. If you're an urban dweller, don't let cement stop you — add potted planters. The right landscaping around a property will make all the difference in the world.

4. Replace a worn-out garage door with a new, decorative model. This will have a big impact especially if you have a front-facing garage. Manufacturers offer many designs and decorative accessories so it's easy to find a door that will complement the architecture of your home.

5. Illuminate your landscape. This will completely



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Replacing plain garage doors with wooden carriage house doors like these from Clopay adds instant warmth and character to this new home. The doors look like they swing open, but they move up and down with an automatic opener.

change the look of your property at night. Angle low lights to point up at trees and

bushes and point down along a pathway for safety. Keep it

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The Newport Arbor from New England Arbors provides a charming entry point into this yard.

## Add charm, style to yard

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This is the time of year that gardeners love. Seed and plant catalogs have arrived, and chilly winter nights can be spent planning what the yard and garden will look like this spring and summer. Don't forget to include plans for hardscaping, the non-plant accents that give your yard its backbone.

"The latest trend in landscaping is to create 'outdoor rooms,' areas set off by various design elements that provide a place to entertain, or just a place to sit and enjoy the garden," says Ken Machan, co-founder and president of New England Arbors, a company that specializes in beautiful arbors. "Landscaping not only increases your enjoyment of your outdoor spaces, but it can add as much as 15 percent to the resale value of your property."

The easiest way to achieve the effect of strolling from one outdoor room to another

is with additions like arbors, benches and trellises. They not only help define the space, but also add a distinct design element to the yard. Some arbors can even be wired for lighting and sound to add even more personality to the landscape.

"Arbors help create traffic patterns by leading people to features like a footpath or a comfortable bench. They're also perfect for establishing a grand entryway to your yard, with or without a surrounding fence," says Machan. A well-placed arbor is also the perfect anchor for climbing plants of all kinds, from flowering vines to roses.

Creating outdoor rooms allows you to use more of your yard, expanding your outdoor space beyond your deck or patio and into the surrounding area. When creating your outdoor rooms, be sure to consider the architecture of your home, especially when choosing hardscape elements. For exam-

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