

Neighbourhoods ... what makes one?



Once upon a time, a neighbourhood just ... happened.

As a Gen Xer who grew up in the quintessential suburban cul-de-sac, I look back fondly on my childhood of kids roaming the streets on bikes and playing hide and seek until our Mums called us in for dinner.

If our parents wondered where we were, it was easy to find out – we were never too far away. In fact, the furthest we roamed was to the shop around the corner to get a 20c bag of mixed lollies.



What defines a neighbourhood?

We've lived in our house for six years and have been blessed with good neighbours, but it is a crushing realisation that our 9-year-old will never experience that same carefree environment of my own childhood.

For the first few years, we bumbled along meeting the odd neighbour here and there, through the strangest consequences at times – a sudden power outage that forced us all out onto the street, house auctions, the odd garage sale, a door-knocking campaign from a resident about a proposed nearby development and – bizarrely – when a car caught on fire and make quite a commotion.

Then a major event changed everything. The former primary school across the road from our house closed its doors but was retained by the Department of Education for a variety of purposes.

Where previously the gates had been firmly locked (heartbreaking, given there were three playgrounds just staring us in the face all those years), the powers-that-be in charge of the new facility decided to leave them unlocked.

Suddenly, the place was open to the whole neighbourhood.

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Source: realestate.com.au

Date: 9th May 2014

Build a neighbourhood ... and families come

On a summer's evening, older residents now sit together and chat. Young families bring their children to play on the playground equipment. Dog owners throw balls to their dogs. Keen parents (blessed suddenly with an open, clear stretch of bitumen) teach their littlies to ride their first bikes. Tennis balls are thwacked against brick walls.

In the space of a few months, I met more people in my street than I had in the previous few years combined. People whose children now play with my son, who have generously swapped produce from our veggies patches and just chat about life and the world.

A humble communal space has become a cherished haven. We all watch over it protectively – whenever there looks like the slightest hint of trouble, residents (including us) contact the authorities.

It's not the neighbourhood of my childhood ... but it's a wonderful start.



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Quick Fixes that will Instantly Improve your Street Appeal



1

Install an impressive house number. People trying to locate your home will pointedly look for its address numbers.



Big brass numbers instantly attract attention, but you can also let your creativity go wild. Some would use wood carvings, hand-painting tiles, or copper. Just make sure that your house number is in the classy side and complements the style of your house.

2

Put charming porch furniture. Cosy porch chairs, a rocker, or a swing will add homey charm to any house. Add a small table but be sure not to overcrowd your verandah. Also make sure that the view from the verandah is utilised to its full potential. Prospective purchasers could be sitting on the verandah with your real estate agent discussing the potential purchase of your home.

3

Fence up. A fence gives depth and establishes your property. It also provides a sense of security, control and space propriety. Make sure that the gate is welcoming ... an arbor is always charming & interesting. If you already have a fence, add a fresh coat of paint.

4

Install exterior lighting. Strategically placed, lighting showcases your home at night. A lot of home buyers are likely busy during the daytime and drive around to check houses in the early evening. Make sure they spot your house.



5

Plants, plants, plants – add soft hues to your front and side yards. If you already have a garden growing, spruce it up, trim wild branches and take out weeds. No garden yet? Instantly add greens and other colour by placing potted plants.

6

Emphasize details. Paint trims and window shutters. Replace or polish your front door knob & knocker. Buyers might not be pointedly looking into these but will be pleasantly surprised or turned off as they see details. They will keep a mental tally on the positive and negative aspects of your home. This might include entries like “nice doorknob”, “front stairs need repair”, “plants are wild”, “flowering perennials” or “one window broken”.

7

Repair the small things. Is your gutter hanging out? Do you have one loose step in the front? Make sure that everything is good and working. A potential buyer will be looking into things that would cost additional money.

8

Edge the driveway. A good trimming will showcase the driveway. You can use small plants, line decorative stones or even install footlights. Make sure cracks and other damages to the driveway are fixed and addressed.



9

Wash the roof. Getting a new roof is best and also costly but you can always wash and clean your roof for that sparkly new and clean look.

10

Install an attention grabber. This can be anything that will instantly attract attention. Real estate agents suggest you put red throw pillows on the porch seat, a huge and colourful potted plant near your front door or a really unique mail box or garden implement like a statue or fountain.