

# Chapel Hill News REAL ESTATE



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## Prioritize when buying a home

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Before selecting a home to buy, many people spend hours wrestling with less-than-perfect alternatives. Their struggle focuses on finding a house with all the features they want without exceeding their budget.

### Smart Moves



Ellen James Martin

“For a lot of people, the choice is between a house with more space ...in a suburban setting versus one closer to a city and their workplace,” says Ashley Richardson, a long-time real estate agent.

The conflicts are especially intense for buyers with school-age children who think that suburban schools are better than urban ones.

“Almost all buyers shop first by school district, even if they don’t have kids. That’s because they know good schools lead to stronger property values,” says Richardson, who’s affiliated with the Council of Residential Specialists (crs.com).

But what about the trade-offs for those who opt for a suburban home? Lengthy commutes can be expensive, stressful and time-consuming. Are a larger house and a better school worth that time and unpleasantness?

Tom Early, a real estate broker who’s spent most of his career working solely with homebuyers, estimates that just 15 to 20 percent of older buyers will accept a smaller, dated house to gain closer access to their workplace. But he says younger buyers are increasingly city-focused and have a low tolerance for long commutes.

“Though most of these young folks grew up in the suburbs, they consider suburban living really boring and desolate,” says Early, a former president of the National Association of Exclusive Buyer Agents (naeba.org).

Fred Meyer, a veteran real estate broker who sells property near Harvard University, says there’s no one right answer for homebuyers who face incompatible priorities.

“Where you live is a very personal matter. So don’t worry about what other people think of your priorities,” Meyer says.

Here are a few other pointers for buyers:

■ Try out a potential commute before you commit.

Alan Pisarski, author of the “Commuting in America” book series, has done extensive work documenting the time Americans spend on the road. His research reveals that average commuting times have increased every year since 2004.

In high-cost areas especially, more people now face what Pisarski terms an “extreme commute,” which means it’s both lengthy and grueling. They do this because they can’t afford the large home they want closer to work.

“I call this ‘driving to qualify,’” he says.

Pisarski urges those considering a move to a far-flung suburb to do a test drive of the prospective commute during the rush-hour periods. They’ll get a false picture if they try the drive on Saturday or a Sunday.

■ Notice the major differ-

SEE SMART, PAGE 2B

# Plenty to glean from Green Home Tour



PHOTO BY ARIELLE C. SCHECTER

The butterfly roofed porch is one of Happy Meadows’ most important features as it collects rainwater to feed two small ponds on a five-acre tract near Fearnington Village. Happy Meadows is ‘net zero,’ — it produces as much energy as it consumes. In other words, calculated on an annual basis, there will be a no power bill.

BY SALLY KEENEY  
CORRESPONDENT

The Tenth Annual Green Home Tour begins next weekend with 32 homes open Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. Builders and other green building experts will be at the homes May 2, 3, 9 and 10, to answer questions and point out energy-saving and sustainable features of these homes.

The Green Home Tour is held annually in the spring and is a self-guided tour of new and remodeled green certified homes throughout the Triangle. Free and open to the public, this event provides visitors the chance to see firsthand 31 finished and unfinished structures (one duplex) that have been built using green building practices and materials.

Each home has been or will be inspected and third-party verified, to make sure the house meets minimum certification requirements established by the National Green Building Standard. The homes are in every size and price range. Of the 32 homes on the tour, 22 are available for purchase. Of those for sale, the highest and lowest are in Chatham County: a 1,763-square-foot home at 1954 Great Ridge Pkwy. in Briar Chapel for \$296,015 and a 3,933-square-foot home at 151 Rolling Woods Ct. in The Hamptons for \$924,900.

Priced in the mid-range, Barron Homes-Land has two finished homes on the tour in Horizon just south of Chapel Hill off Manns Chapel Road. Located at 140 and 148 Coley Ct., the 3,000-plus-square-foot homes are priced at \$459,000 and \$475,000, within walking distance of each other, certified to the Bronze level of Green Built standards and Energy Star certified.

“Be sure to walk in the conditioned sealed crawl space and see firsthand how this feature protects against moisture and mildew issues and promotes better indoor air quality in the home,” Mitch Barron said. “Also take a look in the attic to see the radiant barrier on the underside of the roof sheathing which significantly reduces hot temperatures typically found in attics and allows for more efficiently operating air conditioning systems.”

## TAKE THE GREEN HOME TOUR

**TWO WEEKENDS:** May 2, 3, 9 and 10 noon to 5 p.m. Free and open to the public.

**SELF-GUIDED:** To choose a starting point, pick up a tour book at local Harris Teeters or visit [hbadoc.com](http://hbadoc.com) to see a map, download the tour app and start your search.

### 31 HOMES IN 5 COUNTIES:

- 5 in Wake (3 in Raleigh, 1 in Wendell, 1 in Holly Springs)
  - 1 in Granville County, a contemporary in Creedmoor
  - 1 in Person County, a duplex in Elderberry, an agrarian senior living community in Rougemont
  - 4 in Durham County (all in Durham)
  - 8 in Orange County (4 in Hillsborough, 1 in Efland, 1 in Chapel Hill, 1 north of Chapel Hill, 1 west of Carrboro)
  - 12 in Chatham County (5 in Briar Chapel, 7 north and/or west of Pittsboro)
- Organized by Green Home Builders of the Triangle and the Home Builders Association of Durham, Orange and Chatham Counties and Home Builders Association of Raleigh-Wake County.

Looking for contemporary styling in a green-built home? Drive 15 minutes down 15-501 to 100 Lassiter Road and see how Chapel Hill architect Arielle Condoret Schechter designed 2,289-square-feet to become “Happy Meadows Courtyard” — a house that can become Net Positive, with enough excess power to charge an electric car.

“Happy Meadows is ‘net zero,’ which means that it is producing as much energy as it is consuming,” Schechter said. “In other words, calculated on an annual basis, there will be a zero power bill! By adding a few more solar panels in the future, Happy Meadows will be ‘net positive,’ which means it will produce more energy than it uses. The owners will be able to power a small electric car with the excess.”

“It’s a wonderful thing to not have to pay a power bill, yet there’s a very important global implication, as well,” Schechter said. “Net zero and net positive houses allow homeowners to take green living to the level we will all need to achieve in order to fight climate change.”

SEE GREEN, PAGE 2B

**CORRECTION:** The April 12 real estate story about Hilltop Condos in Meadowmont incorrectly stated the name of the condo management firm, which is Dunlap and Associates, Thomas Whisnant, manager ([dunlapassociates@gmail.com](mailto:dunlapassociates@gmail.com)). The Chapel Hill News regrets the error.

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Directions: From CH drive south on 15-501 and take a right onto Mann’s Chapel Rd. Continue for 5 miles, cross over Hamlet Chapel Rd. and you will see Perry Harrison School and Harrison Pond on the right.

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## GREEN

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“The Happy Meadows Courtyard House represents a confluence of net zero building with aging in place,” builder Kevin Murphy said.

Murphy, the president of Newphire Building Corporation, said Happy Meadows has a HERS score of -1, and was designed “with forethought for the homeowners to remain in their home even after they need assistance.”

“This model (net zero/aging in place) is certainly proving to be viable in this area as I have four net zero/age in place homes in process for the coming year,” Murphy said, “one with Arielle and three with architect Jay Fulkerson.”

The collaboration of the clients, architect and builder produced a home that did not compromise on comfort or performance while providing quantifiably healthier indoor air, Murphy said. The house has one of the first, if not the first, conditioning energy recovery ventilator (CERV) in the state, Murphy said.

It brings in fresh air like other ERVs, but the CERV has the capacity to dehumidify, preheat and pre-cool incoming fresh air, he explained. It also monitors humidity, VOCs, and CO2 and adjusts the amount of fresh air as needed. Other ERVs can run 24/7 bringing in unwanted humidity



PHOTO BY TRACY COLEBURN  
The kitchen at 148 Coley Ct. in the Horizon new-home neighborhood in Chatham County, just south of Chapel Hill off Manns Chapel Road, features granite counter-tops, soft-close cabinets and drawers, gas cook-top and convection oven.



PHOTO BY MATT HARMON  
The master bath at 140 Coley Ct. was designed to give the home owners a spa-like experience every day.

during the summer, and are often running when no fresh air is actually needed, he said.

There are plenty of ideas to be gleaned from touring smaller homes on the tour that are also not for sale. Drive just north of Durham to Rougemont and a little further to Elderberry Retirement Village. There M Squared Builders and Designers is showcasing a duplex (707 square feet and 1,205). Ask builder Michelle Myers about how both sealed and insulated crawl space and insulated slab make for better energy efficiency. The duplex, a plan by C. Jane Montgomery, has structural LP siding treated with borates (resource efficient and least toxic termite prevention).

There are two entries on Spruce Street in Northeast Central Durham by Habitat for Humanity of Durham and one in Efland in Orange County that showcase how to build green and energy efficient whether you want a ranch or a two-story house. With a ‘small is beautiful’ approach, the Spruce Street ranch has three bedrooms and two full

baths in its 1,198-heated-square feet. Two porches expand the living space. The two-story Spruce Street house has the same square footage and includes three bedrooms and 2.5 baths, as well as a fireplace in the living room. This house has a front porch and back deck. Both homes will have raised garden beds and rainwater capture barrels.

The Efland Habitat house in Tinnin Woods has three bedrooms and 1.5 baths in its 1,092 square feet with a front porch, small side entrance to the kitchen and a small, outside access storage space attached to the back of the house. In addition to energy-saving features, the house has transfer grills about bedroom doors for pressure balancing and increased comfort, and a whole-house fire suppression system.

Visit any or all of the homes in any order. To choose a starting point, pick up a Green Home Tour book at your local Harris Teeters or visit hbadoc.com to see a map, download the tour app and start your search.

## SMART

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

ence in floor plans between old and new.

As Early points out, many houses built during the big construction surge following World War II are laid out very differently than those built in recent decades.

The differences are most evident in the core of the house. Though many newer homes have a tiny living room — or none at all — they often feature an oversized “great room,” which involves a spacious and well-equipped kitchen that flows directly into a big family room. Most people aren’t really comfortable with the kind of small or narrow kitchens found in older

houses, he says.

Unlike Early, who relies on his microwave and rarely cooks, many homebuyers refuse to give up a showplace kitchen.

■ Seek the services of a highly qualified home inspector.

Early says that those considering the purchase of an older property in a close-in neighborhood should be especially careful when selecting a home inspector.

“You have to face the reality that older houses are more likely to have serious defects in terms of their plumbing, electrical and structural systems,” he says.

Early suggests you look beyond the names of inspectors provided to you by your real estate agent. One source of referrals that he recommends is the American

Society of Home Inspectors (homeinspect.org).

“Create a short list of inspectors and then be conscientious about calling and asking for references from past clients,” he says.

■ Take account of the full costs of a “teardown” project.

Buyers who have a tough time deciding between an old house in a close-in community and a roomier one in an outlying suburb often ponder a third option: building a new home in an established part of town.

But given that empty lots are typically rare and costly in desirable neighborhoods, this plan usually means they must tear down a home to get the lot they need for their new house. Teardowns are occurring with increasing frequency in many areas

where land values are high.

If you’re sufficiently well off to do a teardown, this plan could give you the best of both worlds: a new house with direct city access.

But Early warns that a teardown can prove far more expensive than many people anticipate. Not only must you pay for the original house and lot, but you also have to cover the cost to build the new property. In addition, unexpected expenses often surface before the project is over.

“The hidden costs for a teardown can rob you blind,” Early says.

To contact Ellen James Martin, email her at [ellenjamesmartin@gmail.com](mailto:ellenjamesmartin@gmail.com).




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