

Moving to Portland™

Portland Metro Area Home Market Report For April 2014

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Portland Home Market for April 2014

April 2014 Highlights: Prices Cool and Inventory Remains Low

Seasonal activity was again on the upswing this April in the Portland metro area! Closed sales, at 2,143, rose 15.4% from March's 1,857 and represented a 0.8% increase over the 2,125 sales closed in April 2013. Despite the small increase, it was still the best April for closed sales in the Portland metro area since 2007, when there were 2,594. New listings (3,629) were up 0.2% compared to last April, when there were 3,623, and 17.4% compared to the 3,090 new listings posted in March. Pending sales (2,825) increased 11.5% from March's 2,534 but dropped 4.0% from pendlings in April 2013 (2,942).

There are currently 6,093 active residential listings in the Portland metro area. Total market time in the region fell again to 77 days in April, and inventory again decreased to 2.8 months..

Portland Metro Residential Highlights		New Listings	Pending Sales	Closed Sales	Average Sale Price	Median Sale Price	Total Market Time
2014	April	3,629	2,825	2,143	332,600	280,000	77
	March	3,090	2,534	1,857	328,100	277,500	85
	Year-to-date	11,806	8,971	7,141	325,100	275,000	88
2013	April	3,623	2,942	2,125	302,600	257,000	91
	Year-to-date	11,678	9,314	7,039	293,600	250,000	107
Change	April	0.2%	-4.0%	0.8%	9.9%	8.9%	-14.8%
	Prev Mo 2014	17.4%	11.5%	15.4%	1.4%	0.9%	-9.4%
	Year-to-date	1.1%	-3.7%	1.4%	10.7%	10.0%	-17.6%

Average and Median Sales Price

The average price the first four months this year was \$325,100, up 10.7% from same time in 2013

when the average was \$293,600. In the same comparison, the median rose 10.0% from \$250,000 in the first four months of 2013 to \$275,000 in the same period of 2014.

Year-to-Date Summary

Portland has seen slim gains in 2014 compared to the first four months of 2013. Closed sales (7,141) are up 1.4%, and new listings (11,806) are up 1.1% compared to the first four months of 2013. However, pending sales (8,971) are down 3.7% in the same comparison..

Sales Price Percent Changes for Portland Metro Area

The Average Sale Price Percent Change is based on a comparison of the rolling average sale price for the last 12 months (5/1/2013 - 4/30/2014) with 12 months before (5/1/2012 - 4/30/2013).

- Average Sale Price Percent Change: 11.6% (\$318,900 v. \$285,700)
- Median Sale Price Percent Change: 13.8% (\$273,000 v. \$240,000)

Sales Price Change in February 2014 From Peak in 2007

Here are the sales price percent changes in April 2014 from their peak prices in 2007:

- Average Sale Price Percent Change from peak in August 2007: -9% (\$332,600 v. \$366,900).
- Median Sale Price Percent Change from peak in July 2007: -7% (\$280,000 v. \$302,000).

Average and Median Sale Price Chart for April 2005 - April 2014

Below is the Average and Median Sale Price chart for the periods 2005 - 2014 showing the home sales by six-month intervals. The chart is for the five county Portland metro areas. It does not include homes in southwestern Washington (Vancouver to include Clark County).



The Portland-area housing market showed some signs of cooling in April as it did in March. According to numbers from the Regional Multiple Listing Service, the 2,143 homes sold in April represent just a 0.8 percent increase from the same month a year ago. Still, it represents the strongest April for home sales since 2007.

Prices, too, are growing at a slower rate but remain higher (significantly, in this case) than a year ago. The average and median home prices for the Portland five county metro area is now down to a single digit number (percentage) below the peak prices that occurred in the summer of 2007.

At April's sales rate, it would take only 2.8 months to sell all 6,093 homes on the market at the end of the the month. Six months of inventory is considered balanced, with anything below indicating a seller's market. It's definitely a seller's market.

It's not uncommon for many Realtors in the Portland area to have 4-5 offers on a listing. The resulting competition is helping to drive prices higher, and it's also contributing to a fast-moving real estate market. Homes sold in April spent on average only 77 days on the market, from listing to closing. That's two weeks less than a year ago.

Above data based on information from the RMLS™ [Market Action report](#) for April 2014.

First Quarter Home Sales

Although strong year-over-year price growth continued in most metropolitan areas in the first quarter, increases were somewhat smaller, according to the [latest quarterly report](#) by the [National Association of Realtors®](#). A companion breakout of income requirements to purchase a median-priced home on a metro basis shows the typical buyer was in a good position to buy an existing home in many cities in the Midwest and South.

The median existing single-family home price increased in 74 percent of [measured markets](#), with 125 out of 170 metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) showing gains based on closings in the first quarter compared with the first quarter of 2013. Thirty-seven areas, 22 percent, had double-digit increases, and 45 areas recorded lower median prices.

The national median existing single-family home price was \$191,600 in the first quarter, up 8.6 percent from \$176,400 in the first quarter of 2013. In the fourth quarter the median price rose 10.1 percent from a year earlier. Portland first quarter median price was \$271,600.

The national median family income was \$64,500 in the first quarter. To purchase a home at the national median price, a buyer making a 5 percent downpayment would need an income of \$44,200. With a 10 percent downpayment the required income would be \$41,800, while with 20 percent down, the necessary income is only \$37,200.

Five Most Expensive Housing and Five Lowest Cost Housing

The five most expensive housing markets in the first quarter were:

- San Jose, California where the median existing single-family price was \$808,000.
- San Francisco, median price of \$679,800.
- Honolulu, median price of \$672,300.
- Anaheim-Santa Ana, California, median price of \$669,800.
- San Diego, where the median price was \$483,000.

The five lowest-cost metro areas were:

- Youngstown-Warren-Boardman, Ohio, with a median single-family home price of \$64,600.
- Decatur, Illinois at \$69,600.
- Toledo, Ohio at \$72,100.
- Rockford, Illinois at \$73,100.
- Cumberland, Maryland at \$81,400.

What a range of prices. I suspect that a median price home in Cumberland, Maryland has more space than a \$808,000 home in San Jose, California. Cumberland Maryland is often referred to as "Where the South Begins." It's possible that grits are available with any restaurant meal you order.

In the West, existing-home sales fell 6.0 percent in the first quarter and are 12.4 percent below a year ago. The median existing single-family home price in the West jumped 14.0 percent to \$282,100 in the first quarter from the first quarter of 2013. The median existing single-family home price in the Midwest increased 6.7 percent to \$144,000 in the first quarter from the same quarter a year ago. Homes in the West sold for almost twice as much as homes in the Midwest (\$282,100 vs. \$144,000).

Home Sales Report: Portland Metro Area for April 2014

Below is the Home Sales Report for residential properties in the Portland metro area for April 2014. This includes the five county Portland metro areas (Clackamas, Columbia, Multnomah, Washington, and Yamhill). Note the third line where the areas are listed. RMLS™ divides the counties into numerical areas. For example area 141 is North Portland, area 142 is Northeast Portland, etc.).

Home Sales Report: Total Residential										April 2014	
Portland Metropolitan Area - Combined Report (141-156)										05/10/2014 06:03:20 PM	
Prop Cat: RESIDENTIAL Area: 141,142,143,144,145,146,147,148,149,150,151,152,153,155,156 Status: SLD											
Sold Price	Residential Units (Excluding Condo)				Condo Units				Total	Full Units	
	2 or less	3 Bdrms	4 +	Total	2 or less	3 Bdrms	4 +	Total			
UNDER 29,999	3	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	5		
30,000 - 39,999	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2		
40,000 - 49,999	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1		
50,000 - 59,999	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2		
60,000 - 69,999	0	0	1	1	8	0	0	8	9		
70,000 - 79,999	1	2	0	3	4	1	0	5	8		
80,000 - 89,999	4	2	1	7	6	1	0	7	14		
90,000 - 99,999	2	2	0	4	4	0	0	4	8		
100,000 - 119,999	5	13	1	19	13	2	0	15	34		
120,000 - 139,999	14	15	1	30	17	1	1	19	49		
140,000 - 159,999	21	38	2	61	14	5	0	19	80		
160,000 - 179,999	22	61	4	87	12	3	1	16	103		
180,000 - 199,999	22	88	11	121	20	4	0	24	145		
200,000 - 249,999	46	237	68	351	18	9	2	29	380		
250,000 - 299,999	30	198	86	314	21	1	0	22	336		
300,000 - 399,999	43	211	183	437	26	7	1	34	471		
400,000 - 499,999	10	74	125	209	11	2	0	13	222		
500,000 - 749,999	3	50	144	197	9	1	0	10	207		
750,000 - 999,999	0	8	38	46	4	0	0	4	50		
1,000,000 - 1,249,999	0	2	9	11	2	0	0	2	13		
1,250,000 - 1,499,999	0	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	5		
1,500,000 - 1,999,999	0	0	4	4	0	1	0	1	5		
2,000,000 - 2,999,999	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1		
3,000,000 and Over	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	2		
Total	226	1,008	686	1,920	189	38	5	232	2,152		
Median Price	224,700	257,950	390,000	289,925	195,000	216,500	204,000	199,900	280,000		
Average Price	235,006	285,391	459,763	341,762	253,347	274,657	217,939	256,075	332,524		
Total Dollar Volume Residential			Total Dollar Volume Condo			Total Home Sales Dollar Value					
656,182,291			59,409,317			715,591,608					
Days on Market: # of Units Sold				Cumulative Market Time: # of Units Sold				Type of Financing: # of Units Sold			
Days	# Res	# Condo	Total	Days	# Res	# Condo	Total	Financing	# Res	# Condo	Total
0 - 30	1,159	128	1,287	0 - 30	1,084	120	1,204	ASSMP	0	0	0
31 - 60	231	41	272	31 - 60	202	40	242	CASH	360	94	454
61 - 90	131	15	146	61 - 90	112	13	125	CONV	1,183	123	1,306
91 - 120	81	17	98	91 - 120	90	18	108	FHA	199	6	205
120+	318	31	349	120+	432	41	473	VA	110	5	115
								OWNCONT	3	2	5
								OTHER	65	2	67

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Above data based on information from the RMLS™ Web site for the period April 1-30, 2014.

Cost of Residential¹ Homes by Area/Community for April 2014

Area	April 2014 Closed Sales	April 2014 Average Sales Price	Year-to-Date For Period Ending April 30, 2014		Average Sales Price Percent Change ²
			Average Sales Price	Median Sale Price	
Portland Metro Area³					
Includes these counties in Oregon: Clackamas, Columbia, Multnomah, Washington, & Yamhill	2,143	\$332,600	\$325,100	\$275,000	11.6%
Portland					
North	100	\$290,000	\$275,400	\$260,000	15.7%
Northeast	194	378,000	346,000	285,000	11.1%
Southeast	288	304,000	292,800	249,000	15.4%
West (Includes SW and NW Portland and parts of eastern Washington County)	228	473,500	466,500	379,300	7.6%
Portland Metro Suburban Areas					
Corbett, Gresham, Sandy, Troutdale	137	\$233,900	\$230,200	\$220,000	13.2%
Clackamas, Milwaukie, Gladstone, Sunnyside	176	307,700	298,900	275,000	14.8%
Canby, Beaver Creek, Molalla, Mulino, Oregon City	103	278,500	293,100	279,000	15.3%
Lake Oswego and West Linn	108	565,400	525,400	440,500	7.9%
Northwest Washington County & Sauvie Island	120	441,900	413,700	378,800	9.7%
Beaverton and Aloha	192	274,200	269,700	245,000	13.7%
Tigard, Tualatin, Sherwood, Wilsonville	171	314,400	323,900	306,000	8.1%
Hillsboro and Forest Grove	164	259,200	256,000	234,600	12.7%
Mt. Hood: Brightwood, Government Camp, Rhododendron, Welches, Wemme, ZigZag	12	265,700	249,900	235,000	16.9%
Counties					
Columbia County	42	\$204,200	\$200,000	\$188,700	25.9%
Yamhill County	108	233,700	252,700	215,500	12.1%
Southwest Washington State					
Clark County (Battleground, Camas, Ridgefield, Vancouver, Woodland, etc.)	522	\$265,500	\$263,500	\$235,400	10.0%

¹ Residential includes detached single-family homes, condos, townhomes, manufactured homes, and multi-family (e.g., duplexes, triplexes, etc.) homes when one of the units is sold.

² The average sales price percent changes are based on a comparison of the rolling average price for the last 12 months (5/1/2013-4/30/2014) with 12 months before (5/1/2012-4/30/2013).

³ Based on information from the RMLS™ Market Action report for April 2014.

Mortgages

Primary Mortgage Market Survey: 30-Year Fixed Mortgage Rate 4.20%

Freddie Mac released its Primary Mortgage Market Survey (PMMS) results of its Primary Mortgage Market Survey® (PMMS®) on May 15 showing average fixed mortgage rates easing slightly for the third consecutive week to remain at a six-month low.

News Facts

- [30-year fixed-rate mortgage](#) (FRM) averaged 4.20 percent with an average 0.6 point for the week ending May 15, 2014, down from last week when it averaged 4.21 percent. A year ago at this time, the 30-year FRM averaged 3.51 percent.
- [15-year FRM](#) this week averaged 3.29 percent with an average 0.6 point, down from last week when it averaged 3.32 percent. A year ago at this time, the 15-year FRM averaged 2.69 percent.
- [5-year Treasury-indexed hybrid adjustable-rate mortgage](#) (ARM) averaged 3.01 percent this week with an average 0.4 point, down from last week when it averaged 3.05 percent. A year ago, the 5-year ARM averaged 2.62 percent.
- [1-year Treasury-indexed ARM](#) averaged 2.43 percent this week with an average 0.5 point, unchanged from last week. At this time last year, the 1-year ARM averaged 2.55 percent.

Attributed to Frank Nothaft, vice president and chief economist, Freddie Mac. "Mortgage rates were little changed amid a week of light economic reports. These lower than expected rates are welcome news with the spring home buying season underway and may even provide those who haven't already refinanced possibly a reason to take another look. Of the few releases, advanced [retail sales \[PDF\]](#) rose 0.1 percent in April, but below the market forecast consensus of a 0.4 percent increase. Also, the Producer Price [Index \[PDF\]](#) for final demand rose 0.6 percent in April which followed a 0.5 percent boost from the prior month."

To view the "Regional Breakdown" click [here](#).

Portland Area Mortgage Rates



To check on Portland metro area mortgage rates visit Professor Guttenberg's website at mtgprofessor.com – click on "Fixed-Markup Lender." Jack M. Guttentag is Professor

of Finance Emeritus at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Taking the median home price in the Portland area of \$280,000 for April 2014 and with 20 percent down payment (\$56,000) and a mortgage of \$224,000, the payment for a 30-year fixed loan is \$1,069.41 per month (excluding property taxes and insurance) in Portland, Oregon. The interest rate is 4.00%, and the APR is 4.147%.

Total closing costs are \$5,429.52. Guaranteed lender fees are \$3,294.52 – the lender fees are guaranteed not to change from the time they lock your rate (30 days) to closing. Closing attorney/agent, appraiser, title insurance, and credit reporting costs are \$2,135.00. The markup fees are \$4,727.36. Local government taxes and fees are \$217. Escrow fees are not waived. FICO credit score is good (720-739).

According to the professor: "In using an on-line lender monitored by the mortgage professor, a borrower enjoys competitive wholesale prices, which are disclosed and passed through by the on-line lender and a standardized and reasonable markup over the wholesale price, which is guaranteed by the professor. This eliminates all potential sources of abuse."

Weather

[NASA satellites and ocean sensors](#) are showing that sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean this May look similar to the conditions in May 1997 that resulted in one of the strongest El Niño events of the last century [during the fall and winter of 1997-98](#). El Niño conditions usually cause milder and warmer winters in the Pacific Northwest.

According to NASA, during an El Niño easterly trade winds in the Pacific falter and allow giant waves of warm water — known as Kelvin waves — to drift across from the western Pacific toward South America. Surface waters in the central and eastern Pacific become significantly warmer than normal, altering weather patterns and affecting fisheries along the west coasts of the Americas.

The height of the sea surface is a good indicator of the amount of heat stored in the water. As the ocean warms, the surface rises; as it cools, its falls. This is due to thermal expansion and contraction; the molecules in warmer water are farther apart than in cooler water. Above-normal sea surface heights in the equatorial Pacific indicate El Niño conditions, while below-normal heights indicate La Niña.

Source: "[Strongest El Nino in 17 years brewing: Oregon weather watch](#)" by Stuart Tomlinson, May 15, 2014, *The Oregonian*.

Below is the [National Weather Service](#) precipitation data for the month of April 2014. These readings are from the Portland airport.

- Average Monthly Temperature for April 2014: 53.7 (1.4 degrees above normal of 52.3).
- Warmest Day: 83 degrees on April 26.
- Coldest Day: 39 degrees on April 17.
- Most Rainfall in 24 Hours: 0.62 inches on April 23-24.
- Rain Days: 0 days with thunderstorms, 0 days with heavy rain, 17 days with light rain.
- We had 13 days of fog with visibility equal to or less than .25 miles.
- Clear/Cloudy Days for April 2014: 2 fair days, 16 partly cloudy days, and 12 cloudy days.
- Average Wind Speed for April 2014: 6.8 mph

Below is the precipitation data for the water year (October 1 – September 30)

Water Year (October 1 - September 30)	Average Precipitation In Inches	Actual Precipitation in Inches	Water Year
Year-to-Date	29.07	24.29	Portland's rainfall is measured by the "water year" which is from October 1 through the end of September. Precipitation is measured from the NOAA Weather Station near the Portland International Airport.
October	3.00	1.15	
November	5.63	3.05	
December	5.49	1.62	
January	4.88	2.70	
February	3.66	5.12	
March	3.68	7.52	
April	2.73	3.03	
May	2.47		
June	1.70		
July	0.64		
August	0.67		
September	1.47		
Yearly Average	36.27		

Portland Inner City Neighborhoods Protesting Infills



Many close-in neighborhoods are undergoing a transition as older and smaller homes are being demolished and replaced by new homes that are larger and often don't fit the style of the neighborhood. In some cases small parts of the older home are left intact and a new home goes up around the left-over section. This lowers the property tax since remodeled homes are taxed much less than a new home.

Neighborhood advocates, mainly in Northeast and Southeast neighborhoods, are organizing to change the rules on residential demolitions and other issues related to infill housing projects.

Some of the loudest protests have come from the Beaumont-Wilshire neighborhood in Northeast Portland, where residents have unsuccessfully tried to stop several homes from being demolished and replaced with new ones. In two cases, one in Eastmoreland and one in Northwest Portland, neighbors have worked to buy houses slated for demolition.

Eastmoreland neighbors were upset last week when a 1940 house, at 3431 S.E. Rex Street, was largely demolished for a renovation. It is near Duniway Elementary School and was mostly torn down during school hours.

The Reed neighborhood, like much of inner Southeast Portland, is undergoing a largely unwelcome makeover. The number of home demolitions has increased dramatically in recent years, prompted by rising demand for living closer in with all of its perks such as sidewalks and walkable communities. No one walks to a suburban mall, they drive to it.

At the heart of the neighborhood is an area locals call "Reedwood." It's characterized by mostly one-story midcentury homes situated on large lots, making it ideal for redevelopment. Large, expensive new homes stand out on the streets of Reedwood more dramatically than in neighborhoods to the north, like Richmond, where large four-squares are already king.

Reedwood is pursuing three ways to protect Reedwood's midcentury character.

- The neighborhood is considering the pros and cons of becoming a National Historic District.
- Reedwood is advocating for a zoning change.
- The neighborhood association is talking with land-use attorneys about establishing deed restrictions.



In the Southeast neighborhood of Sellwood, neighbors started a "Preserve Historic Sellwood" movement. They distributed lawn signs like the one in the photo at the left. The message is a bit confusing as they want to stop the demolition and building of monster houses.

Members of the Beaumont-Wilshire Neighborhood Association sponsored an Infill-Demolition Neighborhood Association Summit on May 6. It was attended by people in a number of neighborhoods, including representatives from other neighborhood associations, including Alameda, Eastmoreland, Mount Tabor, Mount Scott-Aleta, Multnomah, Rose City Park, Sunnyside and the

Northwest District Association.

Issues discussed at the meeting include a lack of advance notice on demolitions, near-total

demolitions classified by the city as remodels, a lack of off-street parking for new multi-unit housing projects, the larger size and different character of many new homes, and fears that many homes being demolished include lead paint and asbestos that can be spread to nearby residences during demolitions.

The city has begun taking action that addresses some of those concerns. The Bureau of Development Services (BDS) recently reinterpreted an existing rule to require developers to always notify neighbors of demolition projects that will replace an existing home with more than one house. BDS still requires no notification if the developer applies for a demolition permit and a permit to build a single house at the same time, a practice opposed by many of the neighborhood activists.

In addition, the Development Review Advisory Committee that advises BDS is considering how to encourage developers to voluntarily notify neighbors of pending demolitions more often. One idea under discussion is for the city to provide developers with door hangers announcing upcoming demolitions that can be distributed to nearby homes. Another is to apply demolition rules to remodel projects that tear down more than a fixed percentage of an existing structure.

Here are the Numbers

In 2013, at least 275 Portland homes were leveled completely, 43 percent more than the previous high in 2007 and 2008. That's about the number of houses sold in an average month in Southeast Portland last year.

These demolished homes are typically replaced by one or two new single-family houses or an apartment building. Infill construction of both houses and apartments is booming in the central city.

The Oregonian has a [graphical display](#) of 10 years of demolition activity on their website. It gives you the feel of the impact that demolitions have made and where they have occurred. Not included in the graphic display are houses that were largely demolished in a major renovation that doesn't qualify as a demolition under the city rules.

In Defense of Demolitions



New homes bring in more taxes which means more money for schools. For example in the Sellwood neighborhood sit three new houses along with two remodels; all five homes are on the same block.

These five homes have added close to \$30,000 to the tax rolls. That pays three-quarters of the salary for a beginning teacher. Only one of the homes is over 2,500 square feet. All are energy efficient with three of them bearing "Energy Star" awards.

Three of the homes use a "dry well" that disposes of stormwater runoff by dissipating it into the ground, where it merges with the local groundwater. This means the stormwater doesn't enter the city's sewer and stormwater system. During heavy rains the overflow sometimes ends up in the rivers. Older homes in Portland have their rain gutters connected to the city sewer and stormwater system.

New home construction and remodeling create jobs. Not just for the carpenters, plumbers, electricians, etc. but also for the lumber industry and the suppliers of all the materials that go into a house.

Some zoning regulations are needed especially with regards to size so the homes fit in with the older homes. McMansions fit better in the suburbs. Style is another matter. A few modern homes add some variety to the landscape.

43 Questions to Ask Before Picking a New Town

The story below appeared in the *New York Times* early this month and it was thought-provoking as it added a new dimension to picking a new place to live. It pertains more to living in a large city like New York but many of the ideas (or techniques) are applicable whenever one is thinking of relocating.

When it comes time to move to the suburbs, pick a town or settle in a new neighborhood, the checklist generally begins like this: Best school test scores. Most house for the money. Shortest commute.

There's another way to do this, however, that may yield more happiness for less money. Call it a values audit.

This checklist includes scouting the drop-off zone at schools, eavesdropping shamelessly, figuring out where people swim in the summer, scanning the community's bookshelves and pestering the local psychologist. The object is to figure out what a community really stands for and whether you would want to be friends with any of the people who live there.

Not every real estate agent provides that sort of information. Specialists in a single area don't have much incentive to offer the warts-and-all download, or [they may fear](#) being accused of violating federal law that forbids steering buyers based on race.



But the questions are about shared values and how community-minded the residents are. So the answers will have to come from people who have been there (and perhaps left), and experts like Alison Bernstein, who has built a business called [Suburban Jungle](#) around guiding people to the places within commuting distance of New York City that suit them best.

Many times each week, Ms. Bernstein hears comments from suburb shoppers about cars in the driveways being too nice or concerns about how dressed up the mothers are in the drop-off line at school. So, start there, with materialism. Then consider these eight other categories before you make what could be the biggest purchase of your life.

ONLINE FORUMS Even the most local newspapers often have an online presence these days. Start reading them and keep reading them as you house hunt. "What seems to be the push of the power brokers in the community?" said [Tim Kasser](#), a psychology professor at Knox College in Illinois and the author of "[The High Price of Materialism](#)."

Is most of the coverage about economic growth? Or are most articles about the health of the community and parks and other services? What are readers saying when they comment on articles? Analyze the local parenting web boards and email Listservs the same way.

IN-PERSON RECONNAISSANCE Suburban Jungle claims neutrality on the answers to the many questions it puts to its customers, but it tries to ask provocative ones. "We park them in front of the nursery school at drop-off time to see who is going in and out," Ms. Bernstein said. "Nannies? Dads? Working moms? How are they dressed? If it's chicks in yoga pants and you want that, great. Just know what you're getting into."

Then, the high school — again, outside, since some towns won't let you take tours without a signed contract to purchase a home in the community. Where are the students going when they leave? To team practice? To smoke cigarettes just off campus?

Now, a stroll down the street or over to the biggest park. "I'd probably want to see if I met anybody," Mr. Kasser said. "Will people talk to you, or do they seem rushed?"

Next, the sidelines of the kiddie soccer games to overhear on purpose. "What dominates the

conversation?” Ms. Bernstein said. “Politics? Work? SoulCycle? Babysitters?”

NATIVES What percentage of the people who live in a town or suburb grew up there? On one hand, a high number suggests that a community is attractive. On the other, they may form cliques that make it hard to make new friends. Larger communities may have more transplants.

LIBRARIES Nearly every community has one. New arrivals are probably near the front. So what’s on the shelves? Is it a [Piketty](#) kind of place, or does it lean toward James Patterson? There’s nothing wrong with either type of reader, but you may want to spend the next couple of decades with ones more like you.

This same approach goes for people’s homes — and not just the ones for sale that have been staged within an inch of their lives. If you don’t know anyone in town, find a way to invite yourself to homes of friends of friends. What are they reading? Are there any books at all? What about books for the children?

[Continue Reading the Entire Story...](#)

Source: “43 Questions to Ask Before Picking a New Town,” by Robert Neubecker, May 2, 2014. [New York Times](#).

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