

Home Sweet Home:

TIPS FOR FINDING A QUIET PLACE TO LIVE

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Have you ever moved into a new house or apartment and discovered that your neighbor blasts away with his leaf blower every morning, or the woman next door rides her thunderous motorcycle at 5:00 am, or the guy across the street has a car stereo with a booming bass? No one wants to find out that they've moved into noise hell. The purpose of this monograph is to help house hunters and renters avoid potential sources of noise.

There are many nuisances which affect how people feel about where they live. Traffic can create sound, odor, or visual nuisances. There can be smells coming from nearby factories, farms, or restaurants or visual distractions coming from junk yards, gravel pits, billboards, airports, or wind farms. Any nuisance can contribute to feelings of annoyance, anger, or helplessness.

Selecting a place to live involves many factors, including cost, amenities, layout, size, location, commuting distance, schools, crime, shopping, and noise. Knowing what sources of noise to look for may result in greater satisfaction with your housing choice.

My qualifications to write this manual? My husband and I have rented for many years and have moved quite a few times.

INITIAL RESEARCH

There are two starting points for your housing research: online mapping and visual inspection. Both can be very helpful.

Online Mapping

Online mapping shows satellite images, allowing you to look at neighborhoods from a distance and see nearby features. Realtors recommend using this tool for numerous reasons, including assessing noise levels: "Google Earth lets you zoom out to get a better idea of the surrounding area. You can map out nearby



parks, grocery stores, and essential services like the fire department and police station. Get an idea of where they are in relation to the properties you're considering and how they'll affect service or even noise in the area." ¹

Satellite images can help prospective renters and home buyers search for external features in an area, to help identify possible noise sources. Race tracks, amusement parks, lakes and streams, train tracks, open pit mines, and power lines can often be found by searching satellite images.

Visual Inspection

Visual inspection of properties at various times and days can give potential renters and buyers a feel for the neighborhood. The goal is to check out the property and the neighborhood. For example, I currently live near a school. Twice a day there is an excessive amount of traffic, with school buses, parents driving kids to school, and students driving themselves. Not only is there an increase in outside noise; this extra traffic makes it difficult to make a left turn out of the neighborhood or drive toward downtown.

Glancing inside a potential neighbor's open garage door can be helpful. Be on the lookout for noisy equipment in the garage, such as large televisions, stereo equipment, or drums.

Noting concentrations of people is often useful, as more people may mean more noise. One recommendation is to research adjoining properties. Large families, often indicated by how many vehicles are parked on

a neighbor's driveway, may be a clue as to the amount of noisy activity. Also, checking nearby streets can uncover additional traffic patterns or associated activities.

Another suggestion is to park and sit awhile to study the

neighborhood. This may allow you to observe traffic and notice background noises that occur frequently.

NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES AND NOISE

There are numerous potential sources of noise to consider when deciding where to live. Any significant noise could make your new home very unpleasant.

Local Ordinances

It is wise to understand local noise ordinances. Municipal codes can often be found on the city's web site. Another valuable resource is www.municode.com.² When moving to a new area, it is a good idea to check the local noise ordinance to understand what specific noise issues it covers.

The best local noise ordinances employ an "excessive or unusual noise" criterion. They also use the "plainly audible" noise at a specific distance standard. Further, the best ordinances don't rely solely on exceeding decibel levels (which require expensive noise meters and trained police officers). In addition, look carefully at the "exceptions" section in the noise ordinance, as there could be significant loopholes. Finally, the local noise ordinance shouldn't require more than one person to complain before authorities take enforcement action.³

Homeowners Associations

Whenever moving into an area with a condo or homeowners association (HOA), it is best to obtain the list of bylaws and rules before signing. It is important to read and understand HOA rules or covenants and how they relate to noise or other nuisances. Reviewing them with a lawyer may be necessary. One restriction could be for the type and number of vehicles permitted. It is possible there are restrictions on motor homes, boats, or motorcycles.⁴

Street Traffic

Always check for traffic noise when checking out properties. The noise is related to the speed limit and number of cars. More lanes in the road almost certainly means more traffic. Most of the noise from vehicles comes from tire noise at higher speeds. One apartment my husband

and I rented faced a busy boulevard. During rush hour, we often found it difficult to talk on the phone (unless we closed the windows).

Noise walls have been erected along some busy highways in metropolitan areas. Unfortunately, these are not present near every rental unit. Other possible solutions to street traffic noise include double-paned windows, brick in the front of the building, and the insulation of outer walls. Properties near highways often reduce commuting time, so this advantage should be weighed in your housing decision.

Check out how much traffic comes and goes at neighboring homes, as additional traffic brings increased noise. Also, if neighborhood residents are in the habit of honking horns to attract attention, that extra noise could influence your housing choice.

A neighborhood may have early-morning noise issues. I used to live at a house where a neighbor riding a motorcycle would leave for work at 4:45 am, 15 minutes before my alarm would go off. When he turned the corner and accelerated to head to the main street, he would make a great deal of noise. Apparently, he felt that if he had to be up that early, then everyone else should be awake. I adjusted by getting up 15 minutes earlier and going to bed earlier.

Motorcycles rumbling through a residential neighborhood can reach 105 dB. Experts believe that more than half of motorcycle exhausts are illegally modified to make additional noise.⁵ If you observe an inordinate number of motorcycles in your prospective neighborhood, you would do well to reconsider.



When checking out potential neighborhoods, you should also be on the lookout for cars with loud stereos, known as "boom cars." Excruciatingly loud boom cars with powerful bass can hit 120 dB; they can be heard from a mile away and can shake your windows and furniture.⁶ If you observe boom cars

during your neighborhood visit, you would be well-advised to find a different area to live.

Lawn Mowing and Leaf Blowers

Many Americans are in love with their lawns. A friend of mine moved into a residential neighborhood in Saratoga Springs, New York and was shocked to discover that his next-door “neighbor” mowed his lawn twice a week and used his gas-powered leaf blower six days a week. When my friend asked him why he was obsessed with lawn care, he responded, “Because I want the nicest lawn in the neighborhood.” My friend asked, in exasperation, “Why?!” “Because I do,” the neighbor responded.

In some American neighborhoods during non-winter months, it is possible to hear noise from lawn mowers and/or leaf blowers during all waking hours, as the noise can travel a least half a mile.

Oftentimes, living in an apartment complex has the potential for less lawn care noise, as landscaping services generally come once a week (usually at the same time).

Dogs

Dogs are another noise consideration. During one rental viewing, the neighbor’s dogs were barking at us. The neighbors did not appear to be home. Later, we went back and spoke to a woman who lived across the street.

My husband does such a good job of listening that she told us lots of things. She personally wasn’t bothered by the dogs, but it turned out that a neighbor in that same block had teenage children with cars that came and went at all hours. The street noise from these teenage drivers was excessive. That information, coupled with the knowledge of the dogs and the visible “beware of dog” sign, made us decide we would not pursue renting this house. Sometimes dogs are not present when viewing a property, so you may need to visit a property more than once.

Several times, we have rented houses where small dogs were in the neighbor’s back yard while we mowed the lawn. Every time we got close to the common fence the dogs would bark at us. We couldn’t help it (we had to mow the lawn), but the poor dogs did not like it. We

sometimes were able to change the time of the mowing and sometimes the neighbor would bring the dog inside while we mowed.



Airports

Clearly, large airports create significant noise from planes landing and taking off. Even small airports may be a concern for noise, especially if they also provide flight lessons. Early morning “touch and go” practices often last for an extended period of time.

The flight path of even small planes can affect a neighborhood. It’s important to find out if the airport has businesses that offer flying lessons. Large air cargo distribution centers also create noise pollution and sometimes their greatest flight activity is late at night or early in the morning.

Another factor to consider: emergency response helicopter traffic. Emergency helicopters used for transporting accident victims to hospitals can operate at any time of the day; if your house or apartment is in the flight path, you could experience significant noise late at night and/or early in the morning. Police helicopters may also be flying at night. When their duties are complete, the helicopter pilots may take the shortest route back to the airport. If that route is over your residence, the noise can be very bothersome.



Train Horns

It is important to find out how frequently the trains run and how close the train tracks are to residential properties. Train horns are extremely loud (96 dB to 110 dB at the source).⁷ This

noise can travel a significant distance and penetrate dwellings. Knowing how close the property is to the train tracks can give you an idea of how loud it might be inside while a train is going by. Knowing what time of day that the trains run is also important.

Restaurants and Bars

Restaurants and bars often have outdoor music. There is also the issue of closing time, when employees are cleaning up for the night. Large bags of trash containing

glass bottles make a great deal of noise when tossed into dumpsters. Patrons may make noise in the parking lot at the end of an evening (especially if they have been drinking heavily).

Commercial Businesses

Trucks used for shipping and receiving at commercial businesses often make a great deal of noise. Loading and unloading trucks also creates noise, as fork lifts are almost always equipped with back-up beepers. Fork lifts entering and leaving truck trailers also create noise.

Additional sources of noise can come from air-handling units. Rooftop air handling or cooling units sometimes do not employ noise-minimization techniques. Since they are mounted on or near the rooftop, the noise can carry over the building to nearby properties. Even ground-level air conditioning units can make considerable noise.

Industrial Businesses

There could be excessive noise from various business installations, such as refineries, power plants, pump stations, paper mills, foundries, or factories. Industrial businesses also generate noise from delivery trucks.

Package Delivery Warehouses

In your housing search, you should also be on the lookout for package delivery warehouses, such as Amazon, Federal Express, and UPS. These businesses often operate 24/7 and tend to make a great deal of noise.

Gas Stations/ Convenience Stores

One reason gas stations/ convenience stores may be loud is simply the number of noisy vehicles they attract. There is the added noise potential of remote keyless entry beeps from drivers locking their vehicles. Some people play their music loudly inside their vehicles and do not turn it off while pumping gas or shopping.

Many gas stations routinely play loud music or television broadcasts at the pumps.

Power Lines

Modern transmission lines tend to have high voltages, which increases noise levels. Power lines can sometimes create noise in rainy conditions; rain increases the conductivity of the air and thus the intensity of the electrical discharge.⁸ Furthermore, electrical companies often inspect power lines with helicopters or drones-- which can be very noisy.

Rivers and Lakes

Noise can travel over open water very easily. Buildings, hills, or trees can block some noise. Water has no natural barriers, so the sound (from boating, personal watercraft, or fishing) can travel without those barriers.⁹ It is important to find out whether local ordinances place restrictions on motorized boats or personal watercraft. Boats pulling water skiers can make a great

deal of noise. Water sporting events such as bass fishing can also be very noisy.



Fire Stations

Fire sirens can be as intensely loud as 124 dB at ten feet.¹⁰ As the distance from the siren doubles, the sound pressure will decrease by around 6 dB. Before making a housing decision, you

definitely want to know the location of the nearest fire station, the loudness of its sirens, and how often the equipment is called upon.

Neighborhood Parks

Parks are usually a quiet and attractive feature of any neighborhood. In many cases, there isn't any extra noise coming from these locations. Parks which rent picnic areas with grills may bring gatherings of people who bring noise with them, such as portable music speakers. Also, some neighborhood parks are used for seasonal or annual events.

The actual size of the park may not be a clear indication

of how much noise is produced. It is important to research how frequently a park is noisy and how loud it gets. The park's amenities might give a clue as well, such as the presence of a dog park or the number of grills, picnic tables, pavilions, play areas, and parking spaces.

Amphitheaters

Public events at municipal amphitheaters can be very noisy. Neighbors may complain about the noise, but the city council will weigh the needs of the neighborhood versus the revenue generated by the amphitheater. Speak with potential neighbors about an amphitheater before deciding to live near one. Try to visit the neighborhood during amphitheater events.

Fairgrounds

To raise money, fairgrounds often host events throughout the year. Some of these events may be noisy, especially if they are outside. When deciding whether to live near a fairground, it is important to find out what types of events are held throughout the year. If a race track is present and fairground managers want to host races, you should determine if the noise is tolerable.

Racetracks

The reported noise level for NASCAR at 20 feet from the track is 106 dB.¹¹ (For comparison, a table saw is around 92 dB and a rock concert can range from 90 to 115 dB.¹²) At one time, we lived a mile from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Usually, we did not notice any noise, as there was an eight-lane interstate highway between us and the race track. There were also noise walls on both sides of the highway. Even with the background noise of traffic on the highway,

we could clearly hear the noise from the speed trials. As luck would have it, the architecture of the rental house funneled the noise into the front living room; the large windows in that room did nothing to reduce the noise. I had my home office in this living room; as I worked at home, I heard noise from the time trials.

Horse Racetracks

Horse racetracks may also be noisy. Racehorses are sensitive and do not respond well to loud, startling noises.¹³ Ear plugs can be made for horses to reduce sounds from the crowd. One Triple Crown winner, American Pharoah, was given a pair of sheepskin earplugs to reduce noise distractions during his races.¹⁴

There is also the matter of foul smell. We once lived near the Turf Paradise racetrack in Phoenix. When the wind was blowing a certain way, we could smell the horse manure coming from the stalls.

Gun Ranges

My husband and I recently lived near a shooting range. The noise from the discharge of firearms wasn't that intense, but whenever we were outside at home, we could hear the noise in the distance. At my place of work, I could hear the noise whenever the HVAC units were not on.

Other Entertainment Venues

We once lived across from the Milwaukee County Zoo. Some Sunday mornings, when the street traffic noise was low and we kept our windows open, we could hear the lions roaring. Although not very loud, it was distinct and unmistakable. Occasionally in the summer, some of the zoo peacocks would escape and fly over the zoo's fence. If I saw them outside the fence, I would call



the zoo and they would send someone to chase them back onto the zoo property. The peacocks made a great deal of noise.

Parades, Fireworks, and Air Shows

Many people enjoy parades, fireworks, and air shows. Usually, these events are rare or seasonal. My husband and I found out a large fireworks and air show was happening near where my husband and I were looking to rent. Because of that, we decided to search for housing further away from the event. Knowing that an annual fair or race includes a fireworks display might not give a homeseeker any worries about noise. However, if a venue routinely uses fireworks, it would be wise to understand how often and what times of day these events happen.

Restaurant Drive-up Windows

Almost all restaurant drive-up windows provide loudspeakers for placing orders. To determine how loud these speakers are, it's important to visit the outside of the restaurant. There is also the possibility that the restaurant either plays their in-store music through outside speakers or plays anti-loitering music. If such a business is close to a property that you are considering renting or buying, you should factor this into your decision.

Neighbors with Numerous Ornaments

It is useful to learn about seasonal neighborhood noise well in advance of moving there. If possible, check out the neighborhood during Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Some states require sellers to notify buyers of environmental or neighbor-related issues like noise.¹⁵

Some lawn ornaments come with built-in sound and some people like to choreograph music with light

shows. Some personal holiday shows attract additional traffic through the neighborhood.

PROPERTY-SPECIFIC EXTERNAL FEATURES

So far, we have focused on neighborhood features that might contribute to noise. There are also individual property features and features of nearby properties that can impact noise. Both external and internal features of a specific property can give clues as to the amount of noise that might penetrate the living areas, including:

- Fences between properties: these can provide visual isolation but probably not auditory isolation.
- The relative location of the property's garage or carports: these can provide a needed buffer or act as funnels to bring the noise in.
- The location of neighbor's garage or carport: does it face the front door, front windows, or bedroom windows? If a garage has been altered to create a serious man cave with theater seating and surround sound, then even with some insulation you might assume the garage door itself may not be that well-insulated. In fact, some advice for man-cave design includes suggestions such as "surround sound systems are the standard when it comes to man caves."¹⁶
- It is possible for neighbors to provide sufficient insulation in the garage door to reduce any noise that may come from a man cave. There are insulated garage doors that not only help maintain heat or air conditioning inside a garage. These insulated garage doors would also cut down on noise transmission into or out of the garage.¹⁷
- The location of garbage cans or community dumpsters: dumping by garbage pickup may be noisy.
- The presence of outside stairwells and the material: metal outside stairs can make a significant amount



of noise when people come and go frequently.

- Patios or balconies with or without walls between the units: these can be noisy places for people to gather. Walls will provide some isolation in keeping neighbors on their side of the property, but usually won't provide much noise-cancelling help.
- Visible grills, coolers, swings, or other items like tables with obvious ash trays: these can indicate noise or smoke or other nuisances that might make their way into your unit. Patios or balconies with many stored items might indicate inadequate storage inside the units.
- The presence of swimming pools, tennis courts, fire pits, outdoor living seating, or other outdoor entertainment in back yards or on the property: these may add noise to any neighbor's property.
- The existence of recreation equipment (such as basketball hoops), in streets or driveways: the noise from users may be very annoying.
- Examine where vehicles normally park. If they park close to your apartment, then it is possible for remote keyless entry noises to penetrate into your home after people park and lock their car. Some vehicles make noise when the vehicle is unlocked as well.
- Observe the number of vehicles seen parking at neighboring properties. Sometimes the number of vehicles can indicate the amount of traffic to and from a neighbor, which may also be related to noise.
- Examine the line of sight to nearby rooftop air-handling equipment. Once, when we were considering renting half of a duplex, we noticed that

a nearby medical office building had a bank of air-handling units on the roof. They were clearly visible during our walk, but were not turned on. We knew that if we could see these units, then when the air-handling units were operating, we would hear them as well. We decided to not look any further in this neighborhood due to this potential seasonal noise source.

PROPERTY-SPECIFIC INTERNAL FEATURES

Internal walls for blocking sound can affect the noise levels of a rental. An open concept is nice visually, but more internal walls mean the occupants may be able to move further from noise nuisances. My husband and I once lived next to a home with a teenage boy who had a drum set. Whenever he would play it in the garage, we would move to the other side of the house to escape the noise. The drum practice occurred at reasonable hours in the evening and for a relatively short period of time, but we still did not like the extra noise.

Internal walls may be thin and not insulated; therefore, unwanted noise may seep into your apartment—from televisions, stereos, appliances, conversations, parties, or sexual activity. It is a good idea to ask to inspect your potential apartment while the neighbors are home.

I had a hard-of-hearing friend who insisted on insulating all the walls in a bathroom when she did some remodeling. Noise from the bathroom would add to background noise, which made it more difficult for her to hear. She did what she could to limit noise nuisances at home, to improve her hearing. As a renter, people are usually unable to make significant changes. Instead of hoping to modify a residence, it makes more



sense to look much more closely at how a dwelling was constructed.

The location of elevators in an apartment building is extremely important. I have a friend who moved into an apartment in Minneapolis and somehow missed the fact that his apartment adjoined the elevator. He was aghast when he discovered that the elevator screeched. Obviously, you want your apartment to be as far away from the elevator as possible.

The types of flooring available in a property may influence noise. Although hardwood floors are nice to look at and easy to clean, they can have loose spots that creak. If neighbors above you have hardwood or other types of smooth flooring, sounds from footsteps or dropped items may travel. Carpeting provides some noise-blocking. There is material that can be placed under floor coverings to provide more sound insulation to those living below. Soundproofing can also reduce noise created by people walking on the floor.¹⁸

Windows

The types of windows may affect energy efficiency and noise blocking. Multi-paned windows may provide some noise blockage. If you can't tell by looking what type they are, you should ask the landlord or realtor. Even types of window treatments may influence how soundproof a window will be.

Several of our rental places have come furnished with curtains. These were usually thick, fabric curtains with linings that helped block sound. If the rental does not come with window treatments, but curtain rods are supplied, you could buy suitable draperies. Mini-blinds don't do much to block noise (although they can be good for blocking light). You may need to find out if it is possible for you to hang curtains. If additions are permitted, you should research appropriate window treatments.

Doorways

Examine the types of doorways, including sliding glass doors. Metal doors

may provide more noise blockage. Glass doors with aluminum frames may allow more noise inside.

Doorways can give a clue as to how well a property was constructed. They sometimes indicate how well a home is insulated. Solid doors are often more energy efficient and more likely to reduce noise coming into the home, especially if it is obvious there is good weather-stripping around the door.

Other Internal Features

Internal features may affect noise reduction. Once we rented a small house and were very pleased when the landlord pointed out that she had recently purchased a quiet Bosch dishwasher. Also, when inspecting a rental property, I turn on all the water to see how well it runs, what it sounds like, and how well sinks, tubs, and toilets drain.

Another item to check when viewing bathrooms is the exhaust fan. If the fan is noisy or rattles, it may need repair or replacement. There are several models of quiet exhaust fans on the market. For example, Panasonic, Broan-Nutone, and Delta Electronics sell quieter models.¹⁹

OBSERVATIONS APPLYING TO APARTMENTS

A landlord has the authority to prevent a tenant from having specific possessions in the rental property.

To know what they are, the landlord should provide

a written policy.²⁰ Looking at this list can help a renter decide if the rules are strong enough to limit noise. Examples of restricted possessions are a waterbed, a dish antenna, or a motorcycle. Often, the restrictions can be general, such as items that are unsafe, not allowed by local ordinances, or prevent other tenants from the peaceful enjoyment of their properties (including storing toxic chemicals, poisonous snakes, or illegal fireworks).

Interestingly, a landlord cannot prevent families with children from renting an upper unit, because family status and members are a protected



fair housing class. Incidentally, pet ownership is not a protected class; a landlord is permitted to not rent upper units to pet owners to reduce the amount of noise.

Rely on your instincts when speaking to management. Ask yourself, “Would I go into business with this person?” Several times, we rejected landlords based on our gut feelings.

One technique that my husband and I have used is to ask questions that might be expected to result in outright lies by apartment managers. For example, landlords are very likely to downplay any crime risks in the area. Similarly, we had one landlord tell us that they had dealt with the termite problem. However, you could see some of the termite trails near one of the door frames. If the termites were in fact gone, it was unsettling to see the damage they left behind.

Car honking from remote keyless entry may be a persistent source of startling noise. Therefore, it is important to examine how far your prospective home’s windows are from the parking lot or street.²¹

How Full are the Dumpsters?

This may not be directly related to noise or quality of life, but it can indicate how much care goes into property maintenance. Typically, dumpsters are emptied on a schedule; if the pick-ups aren’t frequent enough or there aren’t enough dumpsters, then the landlord may not be paying attention to extra trash accumulating around the dumpsters.

Speak Frankly with a Potential Landlord

If a landlord allows pets, they are permitted to ask questions about them, such as number, size, breed, age, and loudness. The landlord may also set hours when a dog can be outside (for example, not after 9:00 pm or before 7:00 am). You should ask the landlord if there is a policy about pets.²²

Noise complaints are common landlord/tenant issues. If they have had tenants who were noisemakers, the

landlord may be more likely to ask an applicant’s current and prior landlords about noise. If the landlord knows about common external sounds, such as transportation noise, they should let applicants know about it before they make a decision.²³

Landlords are advised to include a policy in the lease against making loud noises or disturbances. This clause is useful, even though “loud noise” is subject to interpretation. Seeing such a clause in the lease can indicate the level of assistance a landlord might provide against noisy neighbors. Don’t count on it, though.

It is best to discuss this with the landlord or rental agent. We had one rental agent tell us they wouldn’t get involved in a noise complaint and it would be up to us or the police to resolve this. As soon as we heard this, we took this property off our list.

Talk to Strangers

Talking to people who live in the neighborhood can sometimes provide clear insights into noise or other problems in the neighborhood. In addition, these strangers may become your future neighbors; getting their views on topics that are important to them is a good way to start relationships. It isn’t necessary for everyone to be your friend, but a nice, courteous, informal introduction by simply talking about mutual concerns

(what it is like living here) is a good way to become acquainted.

Many years ago, as my husband and I were walking out of our apartment building, we met some people who worked across the street at the Milwaukee County Zoo. Two of the people introduced themselves and told us the third person was looking for a place to live. We were happy to tell these people that yes, we liked living in the building and we would recommend it to other people. We appreciated the fact that someone was interested enough to ask us about the place. Later, we noticed that the third person had in fact rented an





apartment in our building. After that, we realized that it was good to talk to people before making decisions about a place to live. We rarely decide about a place until we talked to people nearby.

Learn to Listen

Gathering information by listening is a skill that anyone can acquire. Don't be in a hurry to ask your next questions; spend time listening to the details in the current answer. Then you may be able to ask for further explanation of a point that was mentioned or go on to the next question in your list.

How to Approach People

Look for people outside tending a garden or hand-trimming shrubs. Do not interfere with them wanting to go back inside. Keep your distance, because closely approaching people without invitation can be intimidating. We don't want to intimidate; we are simply looking for information. Keeping a comfortable distance is important for asking questions.

Explain that you are looking for a house or apartment in the neighborhood. Ask them if they have time for a few questions. Often, it is necessary to reveal something

about yourself, such as where you work or currently live.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Even when you're not in the market for a new place to live, it might be wise to ask people about houses for sale or rent in a neighborhood. Remembering the questions that provided significant information can help for future discussions. After the discussion, write down any new questions that the conversation generated.

Questions to Start With

It is useful to start with more common issues, such as questions about neighborhood schools, crime rates, and potential flooding. What follows is a list of general questions to begin with:

- Would you recommend this apartment complex (or neighborhood)?
- How do you feel about living in this apartment complex (or neighborhood)?
- Are there features of this neighborhood (or apartment complex) that you don't like?
- Do you feel that the office staff (or homeowners

association members) are professional, pleasant, and helpful?

- Is there much turnover in the office staff?
- Do you feel the property management is improving, getting worse, or staying about the same?
- Do you get sufficient notice for maintenance or pest control having to enter your home?
- Does maintenance fix problems in a timely manner? Do you know if anyone went for a long time without heat or water?
- Do the dumpsters ever overflow?
- How is the parking situation? Is parking ever a problem? Are vehicles ever damaged in the parking lots?
- Do you feel the construction of the apartment is good or do you feel the walls are too thin?
- How is the laundry room? Do the machines ever need significant repair?
- Can you easily get packages delivered? If you receive a package, is it possible to have it delivered to the office? Will they notify you if this happens?
- Are the office hours adequate for picking up packages?
- What does the apartment complex do about pest control? Is it effective? Do you think the products they use are safe?
- Has there been any renovation? Was it done during reasonable hours? Do you know about any upcoming renovation plans?
- What have you heard about crime in this community? Do you feel safe walking at night?
- Do you know if there are large rent increases after your lease is up?
- Do you know if people get their deposits back after they move out?
- If pets are permitted, do people sometimes have more pets than permitted or keep dogs that are

bigger than the weight limit? Do people leave their dogs outside during the day to bark at everything they see?

- Is there ever a flooding issue? Is it ever hard to get in or out of the parking lot after a heavy rain?
- Do you get newsletters from the management (or homeowners association)? Are they helpful?
- Are there many flyers or notices left on front doors? Do you ever get any extra notices like this when you are out of town (letting others know you are not home)?
- How does management treat people who complain?
- Is noise ever an issue here? Do you know if there has been any soundproofing added between units?

Keep Notes After the Discussion

Taking notes can be useful in remembering a property's



features, including addresses, prices, landlord names, phone numbers, square footage, availability, and general impressions. Once we viewed several properties, we were able to eliminate certain ones due to potential noise nuisances. We've looked at some very nice properties--but once we talked to

neighbors, we realized there were some features that made the place less desirable.

Read the Lease

It is vital to actually read the lease. As a responsible renter, it is necessary to find out what rules will apply to any given rental. Sample rental agreements are available online.

Reasonable landlords should be willing to provide a copy of the lease well before the signing date. If a landlord tells you something like "it's just twelve pages of legalese," that could be a red flag. First, the landlord might be trying to hide objectionable clauses. Second, twelve pages may be an excessive number of legal requirements.

Understanding state statutes is a must when renting (and doesn't hurt when becoming a property owner).²⁴ For renters, state statutes often include clauses for rights that cannot be signed away, like the required amount of notice. Statutes also address items such as electricity, plumbing, and sanitary systems. If the state statutes contain "must," it usually means that the tenant cannot sign away that right or obligation of the landlord. Understanding the state statutes is very important when renting. Also, municipal codes sometimes include a section relating to rental properties.

Negotiate Terms

Don't hesitate to negotiate changes to the lease, especially clauses related to noise.

City ordinances or HOA rules are often difficult to change. Changing city ordinances requires extensive participation in council meetings and discussions with neighbors and council members. Changing HOA rules would require active participation in the association. Reaching a consensus about changing these types of rules or laws is incredibly time-consuming. It is best to avoid this need by fully understanding the city ordinances and HOA rules.

What Else You Can Do

Think about things you do that could possibly bring noise to your neighbors; reduce as much of your noise as possible. Simply keeping this issue in mind while you live your daily life may help you to be a good neighbor.

For example, I did not realize how much noise an old recliner was making when I closed it to get up. I needed to learn how to recline and close the recliner quietly. Although there is not an apartment below us currently, I still try to recline quietly, because there are some noises that transfer through the building; I don't want my recliner to be one of them.

If you know that the walls are thin, consider arranging noise sources like televisions, radios, and stereos to not rest against (or aim at) shared walls. Also, consider wireless headsets for superior sound quality rather than turning up the volume.

Wireless noise-cancelling headsets allow listening without disturbing neighbors or members of your own household.

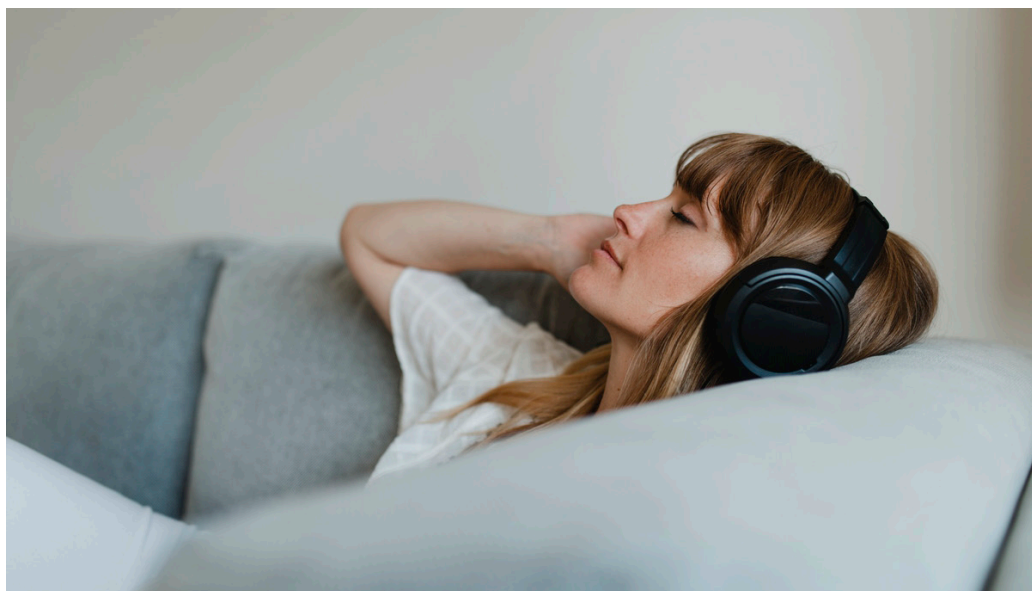
Consider learning how to silence the horn from the remote keyless entry to your vehicle. The owner's manual may include instructions; you might also learn how online or from your mechanic. This is especially important if you park near any of your neighbors' windows.

If none of your neighbors have wind chimes, consider hanging yours inside your home. Many people do not like noise from wind chimes.²⁵

Be patient when dealing with minor noise issues. My husband and I have lived several places where noisy children were often present. We learned early on those small children usually don't make that much noise during outside activities for very long.

CONCLUSION

Along with searching for good schools, acceptable commute times, and an affordable price, close attention to sources of noise can be very important when looking for a place to live. Expanding the assessment of a potential new home to include many more features related to the property will be important. Remembering to look for noise sources from nearby properties, neighborhood features, and transportation sources will help this assessment. This extra work should provide a way to avoid potential noise issues. All these factors, including identifying potential noise sources, will contribute to how well you enjoy your new living arrangements.



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