

Best Suburbs

NEW HOME BUYER'S GUIDE 2022

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION

Helpful Tips
& Insights

Look Inside!



Johnson
DEVELOPMENT



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● On the Cover: The tranquility of trails and nature in Grand Central Park, located north of Houston in Montgomery County.



What To Know: Mortgages

There's much to do for those thinking of upgrading their current home or making the leap into home ownership. Luckily, much of the work in locating your dream home can be done online. Before you start browsing, here's a little more intel to further you along the path to homeownership.

Which Loan Is Best for Me?

Homebuyers have plenty of loan options, including those that don't require a 20 percent down payment. Here are a few choices:

- **Conventional, fixed-rate mortgages** are available in 10-, 15-, 20-, 30- and 40-year terms, but 15-year and 30-year mortgages are most common. Typical down payment is 20 percent without the need for mortgage insurance. However, some programs with a lower down payment are available.
- **Adjustable Rate Mortgage (ARM) loans** have an interest rate that changes throughout the life of the loan. This is more popular when buyers think interest rates will go down.
- **FHA loans** are insured by the Federal Housing Administration and permit down payments as low as 3.5 percent. Borrowers must have a credit score of around 580 or higher. Check to find out the loan limit in your county.
- **VA loans** are for veterans of the U.S. armed forces and are guaranteed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, sometimes requiring no down payment at all.

More exotic loans such as a combination loan, balloon mortgage (pay only interest for a specified time and then the principal amount all at once) and jumbo loans for more expensive home purchases also are available.

New Home, New Option

Those wanting the suburban master-planned community lifestyle but aren't quite ready to buy a new home — down payment challenges, preference for low-maintenance living, etc. — are finding opportunities with single-family rentals. You get the advantage of a new home, the convenience of renting and access to community amenities. Several Johnson communities are adding "build-to-rent" neighborhoods — it's worth a look at a community's website to see if this option might be a good fit for you.



Tip: Check with your builder's sales representative about any affiliated lenders who might be able to offer you more savings than other lenders.

Work with your lender to lock in your rate as soon as possible — an important move in today's fluctuating market.





You'll get even more savings coupling a lower interest rate with builder incentives. Builders sometimes offer a variety of money-saving options, including reductions in closing costs, design center credit and more. These incentives are typically for a limited time.

Check the community and/or builder websites or speak to a builder sales representative for more information.

Why Rent?

....when you can own a brand-new home with multiple bedrooms, bathrooms, garage space, and more for about the same as what you're paying in rent? Plus you're getting the added benefit of equity in the home. Take a look:

For a \$400,000 Home

Money Down \$14,000
w/ FHA Loan

Monthly Pymt \$2,268
(Taxes not included)
at 4.5% interest rate

*This information is provided as a resource. Taxes, insurance and homeowners association dues not included. Multiple variables impact your final mortgage amount. Consult a REALTOR or builder sales associate for an accurate estimate.




Benefits of Living in a Master-Planned Community

In the past, many neighborhoods were built with only that particular subdivision in mind. The focus was homes and maybe a small park and/or neighborhood pool. Little to no thought was given to the surrounding area, which means any grocery stores, schools, shopping and other area amenities. On the other hand, master-planned communities are thoughtfully planned in advance to include those amenities for a more cohesive design, convenience and the enjoyment of residents.

There are many benefits to master-planned communities:

- **Convenience.** Often, master-planned communities are located close enough to large metropolitan areas to allow residents to work in the city while living in a suburb that allows for plentiful open spaces.
- **Resort-style amenities.** Many master-planned communities offer high-end amenities like waterparks and ways to connect with nature such as walking/jogging/biking trails, playgrounds and more.
- **Schools.** Land developers work with school districts for future planning of schools — often these communities are served by the region's more desirable schools.
- **Stabilized values.** Homeowner associations help preserve property values since homeowners must keep their homes in good condition by adhering to certain guidelines set by the community.
- **Quality builders.** Homebuilders in master-planned communities are purposefully selected, which can translate to quality construction from national builders with years of experience.

A Way of Life Like Nowhere Else

In Johnson Development communities, you'll find lifestyle professionals who are the "Directors of Fun," planning year-round resident activities, sports leagues and activities, from holiday festivals to outdoor concerts, food truck events, crafting classes, wine tastings, active adult game nights, teen study nights and story time for our little ones. You'll find a full calendar of events for all ages, helping you meet others in the neighborhood — you soon may find yourself gathering for play dates in the park, sipping wine at the fire pit, lounging by the pool or enjoying backyard barbecues. Because your life's journey should be a celebration.

We want to help make that happen.



Residents of Johnson communities enjoy numerous planned events weekly.

Add in tennis leagues, fitness classes, impromptu block parties, and school activities and you can have one busy, fulfilled life!





Don't Want to Make All of the Decisions?

Not everyone is into making all of the selections and decisions that go into building from the ground up. If you want exactly what you see in the model — the cabinets, flooring, fixtures, paint color, etc., — simply tell the builder to draft the contract based on the model. Model homes are built to impress, so the design specifics may cost more, but it's a time-saving option for you, similar to having a professional designer make the choices for you.



10 Benefits of Buying New Construction vs. Resale

One way to help cut through the clutter of the vast array of home choices is to think about why new construction is better than buying a previously owned home. Here are just a few reasons:

1. More Control Over Design

While you can certainly renovate an older home, the process tends to be laborious and costly. Even with a generous budget, you may still find your options limited for what you can add, remove or modify. With a home that is newly built, you won't lack for options. You can work with your builder to select a floor plan and finishes to suit your needs so your new home is one that feels perfect for you.

2. Save Money in the Long Term

You can escape the hassle and expense of maintaining an older home when you buy new. The older the home, the more you can expect to spend every year on keeping it well-maintained, from roof repairs to replacing appliances like air conditioning units and hot water heaters. Home insurance typically costs more for older houses, as well. New homes are also more energy-efficient because of new appliances, windows and insulation, which will make a big difference to your monthly utility bill.

3. Newer Construction Is Likely Safer Construction

From the latest circuit breakers to roofs with radiant barriers and the newest paint and finishes, newer homes typically offer enhanced safety features.

4. Modern Conveniences Come with the Home

One of the first things people say when they move from an old home into a new construction is how relieved they are to finally have a modern shower, windows, lights, smart home technology, etc. Imagine the benefits and the modern conveniences of having everything new.

5. The Right Size Home For You

If you've been in your current home for some time, it's likely it has become too small or too large for your current needs — and the configuration could be all wrong. Families with young children might want play areas within sight. Teens, however, likely prefer a place they can claim as their own. It can be difficult to find an existing home that is exactly the right size for you, which is one reason why many prefer to build their dream home.

6. Peace of Mind That Comes from Warranties

New homes aren't impervious to problems, but at least you know that many potential issues would be covered by your home warranty. You can't say that about most older homes, unless you purchase a third-party warranty on top of the price of the home. Also, most third-party warranties won't cover as much as a builder's warranty, which is why you have to be careful about checking your contract.

7. Access to Nearby Amenities

Many homeowners move to a new home because they want to live in a community that offers numerous opportunities for relaxation with amenities like water parks, fitness centers, playgrounds, walking paths and lakes for fishing. Nearby amenities are also a fantastic way of bringing friends and family to visit.

8. Streaming at Lightning Speed

New homes often feature enhanced structured wiring with Cat-5 or Cat-6 cables and RG6 coaxial cables, all of which allow for faster internet speeds and can accommodate multiple systems — telephone, audio equipment, cable television, home security, home computer networks and internet access. As more people work from home, this is an important feature.

9. You Can Ask the Builder for References

With a new home, you can often get references from those who bought from the same builder. They can tell you what they think about their decision — a big advantage.

10. Talk to Your (Soon-to-Be) Neighbors

Active master-planned communities have loads of new construction homes, which often means many residents are new to the community and eager to meet their neighbors. If you want to know what life is like here, all you have to do is ask them!



Getting the Perfect Homesite Location

Prefer a corner lot? Looking for a waterfront location — or no neighbors in back? Visit growing communities that are building brand new neighborhoods. Large empty tracts of land have been organized into homesites, and builders are eager for you to get the location you want. It can be competitive; everybody wants the best, so make sure and ask about contingency options that allow you to hold the homesite you desire. Some locations, like corner lots or lakefront lots, may cost a bit more, but you may decide it's worth it.



Keep in Mind

that a community developer does not decide school zoning; rather, school districts use specific criteria to determine which neighborhoods will be zoned to which schools.



Choose the Right School

For parents of older children, a child's interests can go a long way in selecting the right school. Do you have an elite athlete? Look for an athletic program that has a high number of college signings. Is your child meant for the stage? You'll want to look for a strong theater arts program. For those with younger children — or who are hoping to have children — you don't have the luxury of knowing if you have a natural athlete or a future scientist. You're going to have to dig deeper.

1. District and School Websites

A school district's website is a natural place to begin. There, you'll not only find useful, how-to information, but you can learn about the district's vision, bond programs and points of pride. From there, move to the school's website where you can see types of classes offered, clubs and organizations, links to parent organization websites and staff emails if you have a question.

2. Social Media

Most school districts and schools have active social media pages, with two of the most popular being Facebook and Twitter. See what they post and read the comments — this will help you measure the school's or district's "personality."

3. More Online Research

The Texas Education Agency website is a treasure trove of information. But don't become too attached to an overall score. Dig deeper to see how grades performed on various state-mandated tests. GreatSchools.org is another website chock full of ratings and insights and you can check local news sites, as well.

4. Visit the School

Ask to tour the school you're considering. Ask about the school's approach to learning as well as technology and students' access to it. Also ask about how parent-teacher organizations support teachers and students.

5. Ask Around

If you have friends in the area with school-aged children, they will probably have information regarding a school's reputation. Don't know anyone? If you're working with a real estate agent, you're in luck — they are typically well-schooled in the strengths and weaknesses of area schools.

So You're Relocating to Texas

Relocating to the Lone Star State? You aren't alone. More than 530,000 people moved to Texas in 2019.* U-Haul reports that 50.2 percent of its one-way rental truck bookings in 2021 were to Texas. Why? Inexpensive homes, no state income tax and the best barbecue in the nation (just because it's our opinion doesn't mean it isn't true). What should you know before moving? Just a few things.

1. Homes are Affordable

Compared to most cities, homes in Texas are affordable and you get a lot for your money — more square footage, better schools and master-planned communities filled with resort-style amenities.

In Houston, the average single-family home price for 2021 was \$376,075**. In Austin, the median home price is \$476,700 and in Dallas it's \$400,000.

2. Texas is Tax-Friendly

Texans don't pay state income tax on their personal income. That means more money for other expenses and a lot less paperwork when April 15 rolls around.

3. Commuting is a Part of Life

Texas is only second to Alaska in size, and it is the largest of the contiguous 48 states, so commuting is a part of life. It's not as bad as you think, though. Many master-planned communities are located less than 30 minutes from major employment centers.

4. Be Prepared to Live Outdoors

If you love the outdoors, Texas is home to many state and national parks. Hiking, camping and boating are all popular activities. If you love the beach, Galveston is a great vacation spot. Camping and spotting wildlife? Bryson is an easy drive to several of the Hill Country's treasured state parks. Communities like Viridian in Arlington and Trinity Falls in McKinney are within walking and biking distance to expansive nature areas.

5. Texans Are Very Friendly

Texans are friendly, welcoming and warm. They are ready to make you feel at home so don't be surprised if the entire neighborhood welcomes you with cookies, cakes and pies. No matter where you live, you'll be greeted with a "Howdy" and a smile.

*Texas Realtors' 2021 Texas Relocation Report

**HAR's Houston Housing Market Report Jan. 12, 2022



Ask your Realtor

where they live — you might be surprised how many of these real estate experts have chosen a Johnson community as their home.





If you're downsizing

Two things you have to do when downsizing — decluttering and shedding possessions — can be done simultaneously. Here are a few helpful tips:

- Take photos of your current home — it will not only preserve memories but could help you identify what you want to keep.
- Keep things you want, use, need or like to look at.
- Don't over-save for the next generation. Go ahead and gift some of your legacy pieces.
- Lots of bulky photo albums? Digitize them.
- Take only the favorites from your collections.
- Don't move anything that doesn't have a designated space in your new home.
- Get rid of duplicates. Only make yes or no piles — no maybes.

What to Do Before You Move

People consider changing their home for many reasons — your family of two has grown to three or four, the kids have moved out and you don't need as much space, you want to live in a particular area or maybe your financial situation has changed.

Increasingly, more people are working completely or mostly from home — why not head to the suburbs where you can buy more house for less money? Whatever the reason, some big things need to be done before you can make the move.

1. Prep Your Current Home for Resale

If you are planning to sell your current home, you may have some work to do — particularly if you've been in your home for many years. The first thing experts recommend is decluttering. You also want to de-personalize — take down family photos and box up personal items.

2. Brighten Up Your Home

Investing in a major upgrade for your existing home might not be the best idea. Instead, why not use that money as an allowance for the new buyer to make renovations suited to their style? That doesn't mean you shouldn't do any fixes, however. Neutralize and lighten any dark paint to be in line with current trends, tidy up the yard and plant flowers, and change out light bulbs to LED to brighten rooms. If a project is going to cost only a few hundred dollars and only takes a weekend to complete, go ahead and do it — buyers don't want to be faced with a multitude of items that need to be repaired before or as soon as they've moved in.

Some people prefer to have their home inspected before it's listed — then there are fewer surprises that may delay the sale of your home. Find out what's wrong now and either fix it or adjust the price of your home.

3. Find a Real Estate Agent

You could sell your home and buy your home without a real estate agent, but why? Realtors understand the paperwork and the buying process. They have invaluable information about local neighborhoods and communities. And they understand the current housing market and can negotiate the best price for your home.

When choosing your Realtor, make sure to talk to more than one; not only will this help you choose someone who best matches your personality, but also who would be more knowledgeable about selling your home

and helping you find your new home. Some homeowners may be wary of downsizing, thinking they are sacrificing luxury. A real estate agent will know which communities offer well-appointed, smaller homes with designer features.

Ask your prospective Realtor how much they would price your home — those that give you similar pricing are probably in the right range. An agent who says they would list your home for much higher may just be trying to get your business with an over-inflated price.

4. Decide Where to Move

As with any home purchase, you're not just buying a house — you're buying a community. When choosing where your next home should be, take a serious look at your lifestyle.

Do you like to swim for exercise? Look for pool complexes that offer swimming lanes. Like to cook, but always seem to need one last ingredient? You'll want a community with a good — and convenient — grocery store where it's easy to pop in and out of. Do you envision an active social life? Look for a community that has a packed calendar of activities for all ages. Matching your community to your lifestyle will have you enjoying your new home more than ever.

5. Life in Your New Home

One final tip — after you've successfully transitioned into a new home, only taking the things that give you joy and fit into your new space — make sure to keep it that way with a one-in, one-out policy. It will help closets, cabinets and drawers from overflowing.





Moving to the Suburbs Is Where It's At

Whether you're a young professional, someone who is just starting a family, a family with teens, or enjoying an empty-nester lifestyle, you'll find the suburbs to be a good fit.

Here's why:

1. Suburbs are Often Less Expensive

If you're used to living in the city, the first thing you'll notice is the cost of homes is probably much less — potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars less for the size of home you're currently living in. That means you can buy a home where every child has their own bedroom. And if you happen to be downsizing from your current home, the price can continue along the downward path. Also, those buying new find that the enhanced energy efficiency of a new home can lead to lower utility payments and no costly appliance repairs. In addition, many times home and auto insurance policies can be lower in suburban counties.

2. A Safer Environment

Suburbs are by no means crime-free, but they tend to be much safer than living in the city. Property crime is often significantly lower in the suburbs than in major cities and instances of violent crime in the suburbs are usually a fraction of what is reported in the city.

3. There's Plenty to Do

Whether you like browsing art galleries, visiting a museum or attending a play, you'll find plenty of choices in the suburbs — and it's not all community theater or local orchestras. The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion in The Woodlands and Smart Financial Centre in Sugar Land both attract world-class entertainers. McKinney's historic district is a draw for the D-FW region. Those with adventurous palates will find an array of ethnic cuisines served at locally owned restaurants in small Texas towns everywhere.

4. Access to Healthcare

Excellent healthcare isn't limited to big cities — many suburbs boast highly regarded hospitals that are often affiliated with facilities found in town. Plus, most doctors have satellite offices in the suburbs. It's comforting for many to know that if an emergency arises, excellent care is nearby.

5. A Lifestyle for You

Not all suburbs or master-planned communities within a suburb are created equal. Look for one that has activities for residents of all ages such as Easter egg hunts and Halloween festivals for the kids as well as casino nights and wine tastings for the adults.

Also see if the amenities cater to your interests. Are there tennis courts or other sports leagues? Is there access to fitness activities you might enjoy — trails for walking or perhaps a lap pool for low-impact swimming? Dog owners know that a dog park replaces the playground for meeting your neighbors.

6. It's Where the Family Is

Grandparents often move to the suburbs because that's where their children and grandchildren are. And first-time home buyers or parents with young children find living near parents or siblings to be convenient. So perhaps the biggest draw of a suburb can be seeing your extended family more and building a stronger bond with them.

Do your research and you'll see it's easy to make life shine in the suburbs.

A Community With Heart

One way to get involved and give back is by volunteering — and when you volunteer with people from your community, it's a great way to get to know your neighbors! On-site and nearby schools and churches provide ample opportunities for residents to give back in the form of time, talent, gifts or service.



Just for Those 55 and Better

Some communities — including four by Johnson Development — have neighborhoods specifically for people age 55 and older. Homes are all one-story with age-friendly modifications, and lifestyle directors plan events just for those residents. These active-adult communities also have clubhouses, pools, sports courts and other amenities just for people who live there.



Sienna
Southwest of Houston in Fort Bend County

Johnson DEVELOPMENT

HOUSTON • AUSTIN • DALLAS • ATLANTA



Established in 1975, Johnson Development, an award-winning residential and commercial land developer, has earned a reputation for vibrant, responsible development and innovative master planning. Johnson Development has been involved in more than 100 projects over 47,500 acres and, over the past five years, has had more top-selling communities than any other developer in the nation.

CREATING ENVIRONMENTS *that celebrate life!* | **JOHNSONDEVELOPMENT.COM**