



# BUYING A COTTAGE

## Buying Tips and Advice to make your Dream a Reality!

By Brenda Visser

Ah! Summer! It is on its way, and you dream of putting your feet up, hearing the water ripple and splash as you enjoy the tranquil moments sitting along the waters edge. Or perhaps you dream of playing with water toys in the hot, hazy days and having extended family and friend BBQs. Whatever your wish, a local realtor can help you realize your dream.

There are many things to consider when buying a cottage. Justin Hudson, Broker of Record and President of Burt Hudson Real Estate, Ltd, in Athens and Chris McCorkell of Rob Thompson Realty Corporation, Brockville, both stress the importance of working with a realtor who is familiar with the area and knows the local benefits and challenges of such a purchase.

Buying a cottage can be a complex process, says McCorkell. There are many pieces of the puzzle to put together, such as a seasonal vs. year-round property, price-point, water accessibility, plumbing and electricity (or not), foundation type, and many other factors. A buyer needs to evaluate if these things will suit their needs in the future.

A realtor can help you come up with a plan to fit your needs. When you have established your budget, he or she can help narrow your search by evaluating the pros and cons of such things as ongoing maintenance, winter road conditions, water right-of-ways, and more.

McCorkell says a very important piece of this puzzle is in knowing the ins and

outs of the legal requirements of living and building near water. As the Ministry of Environment rules continue to tighten, there is a possibility of a negative impact on the property you may be interested in. For example, if your new-to-you property has an aging septic bed that needs to be replaced, what are your options? Can you replace the existing weeping bed in its present location or do you need more room for the new one? Will you opt for a holding tank, or is that a reasonable solution for the number of people using the cottage? A realtor is a definite asset in navigating through this tricky legal terrain.

Hudson agrees. When discussing the option of building new on a cottage property, he says it is imperative to gather information on the rules of the

municipality, setback requirements, and septic regulations before committing to any vacant lot purchase.

Realtors can also help recommend local contractors to assist you in meeting your dream.

Another factor to consider is who owns the right-of-way to the water? Is it the neighbour, is it Crown land? If water levels are decreasing, who owns the newly exposed land, or the area past the end of the dock?

How physically invested do you want to be with your cottage property? Do you mind stairs and rocky terrain, or would you prefer grassy lawn? Would you rather have the neighbours close-by or a retreat of silence? Do you like motorized activity, or is peaceful canoeing more your style? Do you want a gentle slope for toddlers, and large area for distance swimming, or a rock to jump off of? When buying or building a cottage, there is a lot of homework to be done!

Hudson says that one thing that potential cottage buyers often miss during summer real estate shopping is the ease of access to the property in the winter. He suggests asking questions such as: Are there any steep hills or sharp turns? Are there other year-round residents on the road? Who is responsible for road maintenance? The answers to these questions could have a big impact in your decision-making.

As with all material dreams, money is always a factor. Establishing a budget goes a long way in determining what is available to you. McCorkell has been finding that waterfront properties in the

area may be going beyond the typical retirees' budget, especially if they also enjoy going south in the winter. He is seeing a trend in waterfront condos for this particular segment of the population. With a waterfront condo, there can be all the joy of waterfront living, but less physical work involved.

Perhaps having a waterfront or waterview property is not important- you would just like a getaway in the woods. The search for this type of property can be very different, with accessibility being a key issue. Pricing varies significantly for this type of purchase, as the value of waterfront property is in the waterfront itself. Hudson says that not many non-waterfront vacation properties exist in our market.

Mortgage financing for year-round waterfront homes vs. the weekend getaway can be vastly different, says Hudson. If the property you are considering is not accessible by road has no hydro, and lacks septic and a portable water supply, your lender may not finance to your liking. On the contrary, if your year-round waterfront property is on a paved road with a full foundation, well, septic, and heating system, financing can usually be secured. What are the pros and cons of each property purchase? A realtor or mortgage broker can help guide you with some financing options.

Insurance is also important, make sure you talk to an experienced broker and firm to get the proper coverage for your property and contents. They will guide you and make sure the coverage fits the property you are considering.

Here are some final tips to consider in cottage ownership, like landscaping. Do you want to have gardens, or a complete makeover of the property grounds? What plants or trees work best in the area you are considering to live? If you live near water or in the woods consider the wildlife that exists in the area. You are co-habiting with nature so be prepared for all sorts of critters and potential pests. You may need an expert in pest control removal on your speed dial depending where you are. For home/cottage makeovers there are experts in kitchen design and home renovations for room makeovers. The property you acquire may need some upgrades or redesign, plan for this in your budget. You may need to upgrade the decks or docks if you are on the water, again plan this in your budget. Lastly, home décor is also a consideration and furniture that fits your style and comfort, again budget accordingly for this factor as well. You cannot live in empty rooms!

The Counties of Leeds-Grenville have many lakes and waterways to explore and enjoy in the summer, or year-round. Is cottage life the dream for you? Why not start asking some questions? Your local realtor will be happy to help!

As Hudson says, "Cottage ownership is without a doubt a fantastic investment opportunity as well as an outlet to create family memories that last a lifetime. If you can afford to take the plunge or even "think" you can afford it, go for it! You won't regret the experience". [LH](#)

