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MARCH/APRIL 2025



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TREPAC Major Investors p. 27

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TEXAS REALTORS



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Texas REALTORS®

CHAIRMAN'S

The 89th Legislature is upon us! Each session brings excitement, anticipation, and even some anxiousness. You never know exactly what will happen! But one thing is for sure: Texas REALTORS* is always engaged. We work tirelessly to shape policy, support good legislation for real estate, and fight the harmful proposals that pop up.

Nearly 30% of current legislators are new this session or have served only one term. I see this as an opportunity for our team to connect with these new decisionmakers, to educate them (and re-educate the experienced ones) on our real estate positions, maybe in ways that they have never understood our issues before. This leads to fresh conversations and approaches



to ensure that we see successes on our policy positions. Not only am I honored to be a part of those conversations this year, but as I write this, I'm so excited that thousands of members from across Texas are planning to attend our REALTOR® Day at the Texas Capitol. I can't wait to be part of the sea of purple that converges on the Statehouse to talk with our representatives.

At that productive day—as well as when testifying for committees, speaking to legislators and their staff during and between sessions, and in any other place we can make a difference—we

advocate for all things important to Texas real estate and all things important to members of Texas REALTORS®. We fight for the rights of consumers in Texas, for property owners, and for small business owners, as well. As advocates, we bring attention and action on issues that are important to us all.

If you aren't able to join us at REALTOR® Day at the Texas Capitol, it doesn't mean you can't be involved. Check out our policy positions at texasrealestate.com/ issues. Make sure you're getting the RECAP legislative email updates (email recap@texasrealestate.com to subscribe). And be on the lookout for calls to action and other requests to volunteer. Working together with a voice 140,000 members strong, Texas REALTORS® works for the good of all in our profession and the people of Texas.



ONE MORE THING...

Sadly, my father passed away when I was just 25. He imparted a lot of wisdom I'm thankful for, including this: "Who you surround yourself with matters, Christy." I thought he was talking about who I dated but soon realized he meant a lot more.

He was telling me to surround myself with people I admired and aspired to be like, and that would serve me well throughout my life.

With a lot of noise out there todayespecially in social media—the people you surround yourself with will guide and support you and never judge you. Select them carefully. I know I owe everything to the people in my inner circle.

As you go through your personal journey, remember that who you surround yourself with matters!

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BIG PICTURE

26.7 minutes



TEXANS' AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME TO WORK

\$146.3 BILLION

VALUE THAT COMMERCIAL REAL **ESTATE ADDED TO** THE TEXAS ECONOMY IN 2024, BY FAR THE HIGHEST SUCH **CONTRIBUTION TO ANY** STATE'S GDP.



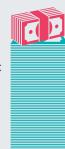
OF TEXAS LAND IS RURAL

OF TEXAS HOUSING UNITS ARE IN URBAN AREAS

TEXAS IS PROJECTED TO BECOME THE MOST POPULOUS STATE IN THE U.S. BY 2045

SELLERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOME VALUE

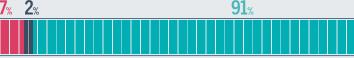
Nearly three-quarters of Texas REALTORS® had at least one client in 2024 who thought their home was worth at least 10% more than the REALTOR®'s market analysis of the property's value



For the most recent seller who thought their home was worth at least 10% more than the REALTOR®'s market assessment, did the home eventually sell for at least 10% more?

YES DON'T RECALL

NO 91



1.800 hours — Total time members serving on the Texas REALTORS® Public Policy Oversight Committee studied issues and reviewed member input to establish Texas REALTORS® priorities for this legislative session.

642 interactions between Texas REALTORS® and elected officials at the Capitol in the run-up and first two months of the current Legislature.



7,177 bills filed (so far) Texas REALTORS* has reviewed all bills filed during the 89th Legislature. Of the 1,341 bills the association is closely tracking, Texas REALTORS° is supporting 145 and opposing 105.

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SOURCES: (1) U.S. Census (2) Commercial Real Estate Development Association (3) Texas Comptroller; Texas Real Estate Research Center (4) realtor.com (5) Texas REALTORS® (6) Texas REALTORS®

GET TO KNOW THE NEW CEO

Mike Barnett

He knows his way around the Texas Capitol

I spent about a decade there, including as chief of staff for a member of the House. I joined Texas REALTORS® in 2006 as the first North Texas field representative. There's no better way to truly understand our organization and the people it represents than to be in the field-working closely with REALTORS® in your communities.

This isn't his first rodeo in leadership

I went from field representative to director of political affairs, leading the team's grassroots political efforts and serving on the lobby team. I jumped to management in 2012 as vice president and chief operating officer-overseeing the broader operations of the organization, including finances and strategic planning—and in 2020 I took on the role of executive vice president.

Professionalism is key

Professionalism has always been the driving force behind the REALTOR® organization. I see great opportunities for members to double down on education and differentiate themselves through professionalism.

Texas REALTORS® is vour co-pilot

The profession is going through tremendous changes right now. One of the best things Texas REALTORS® can do is to help you navigate these changes. That includes keeping you informed, offering useful courses and resources, and advocating for the best environment for you to do business.

He wants you to get involved

Members don't just benefit from Texas REALTORS®—you help shape it. You have opportunities to engage, lead, and set the vision for the organization. Whether through advocacy programs, professional development, or leadership opportunities, Texas REALTORS® is built on the active involvement of our members.

You are the face of Texas REALTORS®

We need to continue to communicate the value of REALTORS® to consumers. Your membership in Texas REALTORS® sets you apart. Every interaction is an opportunity to share that with your contacts. Tell them what you can bring to the real estate transaction and how the REALTOR® organization is their advocatethen show them through outstanding service.

He likes to be outdoors

When time allows, I love to go out with my wife, Heidi, and our two sons in our recreational vehicle and explore the natural beauty around Texas.

This isn't just a job

You hear the phrase REALTOR® family all the time, but it's true. It's an honor to serve folks who care so deeply about not just the profession but also each other and your communities.

Mike Barnett assumed the role of Texas REALTORS® President and CEO in April.

INSIGHTS

You can't unring a bell, but what about an email or text message?

We've all said things we instantly wanted to take back. Unfortunately, the damage may be done the moment our words hit the recipient's

ears. But what about text-based messages? Can you retract them before it's too late? It depends.

You can unsend emails ... maybe

Many email applications have a built-in delay from the time you hit send until the message goes out. After you've sent a message, look for small text on your device that says something like undo send or unsend. Delays typically are set for 10 to 30 seconds. If you don't see this option when you send emails, look in your email application's settings. You may also be able to adjust the length of the delay.

That text message went through ... probably

There's no mechanism to delete regular text messages after you send them. However, when using Apple's iMessage (an app that works only between Apple devices), you can delete a message within two minutes. Press and hold the text bubble to reveal several options and select unsend. (You also can choose to edit the message.) Keep in mind that the recipient may have read your message before you deleted or edited it. After retracting the message, your text will be replaced with a note saying that you unsent (or edited) a message.

You should think before you send ... definitely

The sage advice to think before you speak also applies to text-based communications. It's one thing to realize you forgot an email attachment or you saw a misspelled word just as you tapped send. It's quite another to dash out an insult when you're upset or send sensitive information to the wrong recipient. Also remember that just because you delete a message doesn't mean that it has vanished from servers, hard drives, or other systems.

DEFINE THIS

riser

The vertical part of a step. A riser connects two treads (the horizontal surfaces people step on). Closed risers are solid, while open risers leave an open space between the treads.



Play Fair with a Free Fair Housing **Training**

Online simulation helps you comply with the letter and spirit of the law.

This April. why not recognize Fair Housing Month—

and fulfill your fair-housing training requirement—by visiting Fairhaven? Fairhaven 2.0 is NAR's newly revised simulation that explores fair housing issues through realistic scenarios set in a fictional online town. In this game-like training, users choose their path through interactive stories that illustrate how to identify and prevent discrimination in real estate transactions. The twohour, self-paced program is free for members and counts as the required Fair Housing/Anti-Bias training that members must complete upon becoming a REALTOR® and every three years thereafter. The current threeyear period runs through the end of 2027. Visit the training module online at nar.realtor/fairhaven.



Court Victory on Use of Floorplans in Real **Estate Marketing**



An appeals court has ruled in favor of real estate professionals, helping preserve a valuable marketing tool. Real estate listings can include floorplans of copyrighted home designs without violating copyright law, the court affirmed, because that is a fair use of the designs.

On January 14, 2025, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit upheld a lower court's decision that agents from two Missouri brokerages had not violated the rights of the home designer who sued them for copyright infringement. Agents with Columbia House of Brokers Realty, Inc. and The Susan Horak Group RE/MAX Boone Realty each listed a home for resale that had originally been designed by Charles James of Designworks Homes, Inc. The agents created floorplans to show the dimensions and layout of the homes in their listings.

The court found that the floorplans served an informational purpose and pointed out that widespread use of floorplans in real estate listings was likely to benefit the designer. The court said that "the homes should, on average, resell more quickly or for a higher price than they would absent the use of floorplans," which would allow the designer to charge more for designs and homes.

The clear value for REALTORS® nationwide in being able to continue using floorplans in their listings made it a priority for NAR to be involved in this case throughout the nearly six years of legal proceedings, providing three amicus filings and multiple rounds of financial support. In a program similar to the one Texas REALTORS® has on the state level with its Legal Fund, NAR's Legal Action Program supports members who are involved in litigation that could significantly affect the real estate industry.

FROM THE **ARCHIVES JULY 2001**

THE TEXAS REAL ESTATE TRANSFER TAX THAT NEVER WAS

A bill filed in the 77th Texas Legislature that would have taxed all real estate transfers never made it out of committee—thanks in large part to efforts by Texas REALTORS®.

Several of the bill's authors were later defeated in their re-election bids by candidates who received Texas REALTORS® and TREPAC support.

Though most U.S. states levy real estate transfer taxes, Texas REALTORS® has continued to successfully thwart proposals to adopt transfer taxes and other burdensome costs on homebuyers and property owners.

Taxation on private property

This legislative session saw nume ous proposals that would have increased various taxes and fees for all Texas consumers. The most controversial was a proposal to tax all real estate transactions at the current tax rate of 8.25%. The proposal was an attempt to fix the mechanisms in place to fund our public schools. Although the proposal was a good-hearted attempt to fix a real coblem in Texas, TAR and the egislative Management Team di not believe that this proposal the correct solution. Thanks to the

This session. TAR offeeted Praymone

ISRAEL SUSTER, Attorney

- Disputes between Managers & Owners.
- Disputes and Litigation Regarding Sale of Homes and Commercial Properties, including Fraud and DTPA Claims. Litigation stemming from foreclosure sales.
- Representation of Owners and Managers in Disputes and Litigation involving Residential and Commercial Properties.
- Tenant Claims, Suits, Evictions and Appeals.
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> Note: Not all submissions are guaranteed to be published



Keeping Risk Out of Accessory **Dwelling Units**

Accessory dwelling units can be an exciting option for property owners looking for more space. A separate, freestanding building could add usable square footage onsite, host family or friends, or generate income as a short-term rental.

While owners may focus on the advantages, you should know that an ADU can present risks for sellers and buyers.

Laura Prouse is Director of REAP/REALAX Data Analytics at CRES, Gallagher Affinity Insurance Services, Inc., a Texas REALTORS® risk management partner. Claims involving ADUs are becoming more common, she says.

"ADUs can provide great benefits, but they can also create additional risk exposures," she says. "Instead of one structure in the transaction, there are two-which can mean more opportunity for disclosure or misrepresentation issues."

Misrepresenting permits

Permits are the most common issue associated with ADUs, Prouse says. Perhaps the seller states the property's ADU is permitted when it only has partial permits, incomplete final permits, or no permits at all.

Prouse recalls a claim in which the property owner was granted a permit to build a second structure, but didn't have a permit allowing people to live there. "That led to a claim for misrepresentation for loss of rental income," she says.

Then the buyer has to pay to get the ADU permitted while losing expected income and not using the property as intended.

Misrepresenting income

Sellers and agents risk misrepresentation

accusations when they advertise an ADU's income-generating possibilities.

A buyer may purchase a property thinking it has an income-generating ADU, only to discover permitting and/or habitability issues due to poor construction, Prouse explains.

Then the buyer has to pay to make the ADU habitable or compliant. Even if the ADU generates income, it might not be as much as originally advertised. Prouse is aware of claims in which the buyer alleges the ADU doesn't earn as much as the seller said it would.

Problems with short-term rentals

Are short-term rentals even allowed where the property is located? Some cities have STR restrictions. "We've seen claims where there are pending changes to STR ordinances," she says. The buyer soon learns that she isn't allowed to rent out the ADU because of new rental restrictions.

Failure to disclose problems

Sellers can face disclosure complaints if they fail to document issues such as substandard construction, health and safety issues, code compliance, no separate entrance for the tenant, or insufficient utilities. "For example, can the septic system handle an ADU?" Prouse asks.

If the property is not in the condition the buyers expect, the buyers can claim that they overpaid for the property. The buyers may demand compensation for repairs, bringing the property up to code, lost income, and loss of use.

Staying safe with ADU transactions

"As with any transaction, it is always best

to have a written trail. That way if there is any question about what was said and when, it is in writing," Prouse advises. "Save text messages and email threads. Conversations should be followed up in writing to confirm what was said."

If you are representing the homesellers, advise in writing that the sellers should fully disclose everything they know that can materially affect the value or desirability of the property, she says. "The seller should not understate issues or be vague. The seller should provide permit information and invoices so the buyer has an accurate understanding of what work was done and by whom."

Were the contractors and subcontractors licensed? Does the seller know about any current or potential ordinances that could affect if the ADU can be rented? The more information the buyer has about the property, the more the buyer can research and investigate the property to a satisfactory level.

If you represent the homebuyer, tell your client in writing to do due diligence. Your buyer should hire qualified professionals to conduct inspections, check permits, deed restrictions, zoning, and investigate any ordinances that could affect the ability to rent out the ADU, she says. "If the seller is representing the ADU as an incomeproducing property, then the buyer should retain a qualified expert to examine the financials," Prouse adds.

Your errors & omissions coverage typically covers disclosure and misrepresentation claims, but every scenario is different, she cautions. Talk with your E&O provider before an issue arises to learn more about your coverage.

One of my agents wants to sell her home without listing the property with our firm or any other firm. She's not advertising the property through the MLS, either. What disclosure must she make about her status as a real estate agent?



She should inform any buyer that she is a licensed real estate sales agent acting on her own behalf—either in writing before entering into a sales contract or by disclosing the information in Paragraph 8 of the sales contract. This disclosure is required by TREC rules.

The Code of Ethics outlines similar requirements in Article 4 and Standard of Practice 4-1. In addition, Standard of Practice 12-6 requires REALTORS® to disclose their status as owners or landlords and as REALTORS® or real estate license holders when advertising unlisted real property for sale. Similar rules apply when license holders intend to acquire property on their own behalf.

These disclosure requirements are intended to ensure the public is informed of an agent's license status when buying real estate from the license holder, and to avoid claims that a real estate license holder was using her undisclosed license status and expertise to take advantage of a member of the public.

TREC Adopts Changes to IABS and Notice of Buyer's Termination of Contract

The Texas Real Estate Commission met February 10 and adopted changes to the Information About Brokerage Services (TXR 2501, TREC IABS 1-0) form and Notice of Buyer's Termination of Contract (TXR 1902, TREC 38-7). The mandatory effective date of the updated forms is April 1.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

- The updated *IABS* form clarifies to consumers that any brokerage fees are not set by law and are negotiable.
- There is a clarifying change in Paragraph 2 of the *Notice of Buyer's* Termination of Contract to ensure that the buyer has delivered the lender's written statement to the seller in accordance with recent changes to Paragraph 2A, Buyer Approval, of the *Third Party Financing Addendum*.



Texas REALTORS® offers **Spanish and Vietnamese** translations of more than two dozen forms. Several of those forms were recently revised, and Texas REALTORS® updated the translations to reflect the changes:

- Residential Real Estate Listing Agreement, Exclusive Right to Sell (TXR 1101)
- Residential Real Estate Listing Agreement, Exclusive Right to Lease (TXR 1102)
- Seller's Disclosure Notice (TXR 1406)
- Residential Buyer/Tenant Representation Agreement -Long Form (TXR 1501)
- General Information and Notice to Buyers and Sellers (TXR 1506)
- Residential Buyer-Tenant Representation Agreement -Short Form (TXR 1507)
- Residential Lease Application (TXR 2003)
- Notice To Vacate (TXR 2208)
- Compensation Agreement Between Broker and Owner (TXR 2401)
- Consumer Protection Notice (TXR 2503, TREC CN 1-5)

Visit the Blank Forms Download page on texasrealestate.com to access all the updated translations.



Translations of forms are not contracts or legally binding contracts. The translations are for informational purposes only and may not be used in place of English versions.

FLOWCHART FOR USING PARAGRAPH 12 AND COMPENSATION AGREEMENT BETWEEN BROKERS (TXR 2402)

Has the seller authorized the listing broker to pay an amount towards the buyer's broker's fee in the listing agreement?

Has the seller agreed to pay an amount towards the buyer's broker's fee directly through negotiations? Buyer is responsible for paying their own broker's fee under the terms of the buyer's representation agreement.

YES

Listing broker pays buyer's broker

The brokers should use the Compensation Agreement Between Brokers (TXR 2402) for the amount being paid by the listing broker and complete the Disclosure Paragraph on page 10 * of the sales contract with the agreed-upon amount.

NOTE: Do NOT complete Paragraph 12A(1)(b) in the sales contract for the amount the *listing broker* is paying.

Seller pays buyer's broker directly

Complete Paragraph 12A(1)(b) in the sales contract with the amount the seller agreed to pay the buyer's broker.

YES

NOTE: Do NOT use the Compensation Agreement Between Brokers (TXR 2402) or complete the Disclosure Paragraph on page 10 for the amount the seller is paying.

Commission Disbursement Authorization Forms (CDA) [provided by the brokerage firm]

- The listing broker should submit a CDA to the title company to disclose the amount of compensation the seller is paying the listing broker.
- The buyer's broker should submit a CDA to the title company to disclose the amount of compensation the buyer is paying the buyer's broker that has not been covered by either the listing broker or the seller.

*If the Farm and Ranch Contract (TXR 1701) is used, the amount of broker-to-broker compensation should be inserted in the Ratification of Fee section on Page 10. If the amount the *listing broker* is paying the buyer's broker is not enough to cover the entire buyer's broker's fee, the seller may agree to pay an additional amount directly to the buyer's broker in the sales contract. In this scenario, a portion of the buyer's broker's fee will be paid by the *listing broker* using the *Compensation Agreement Between Brokers* (TXR 2402) and a portion will be paid by the *seller* using Paragraph 12A(1)(b) in the sales contract.

PARAGRAPH 12A[1][b]

12. SETTLEMENT AND OTHER EXPENSES:

- A. The following expenses must be paid at or prior to closing: (1) Seller shall pay the following expenses (Seller's Expenses):
 - (a) releases of existing liens, including prepayment penalties and recording fees; release of Seller's loan liability; tax statements or certificates; preparation of deed; one-half of escrow fee; brokerage fees that Seller has agreed to pay; and other expenses payable

 - (c) an amount not to exceed \$ ______ to be applied to other Buyer's E

DISCLOSURE PARAGRAPH

Disclosure: Pursuant to a previous, separate agreement, Listing Broker has agreed to pay Other Broker a fee (\square \$______ or \square _____% of the Sales Price). This disclosure is for informational purposes and does not change the previous agreement between brokers to pay or share a commission.

This flowchart applies to Paragraph 12 in the following sales contracts:

- One to Four Family Residential Contract (Resale)(TXR 1601)
- New Home Contract (Incomplete Construction)(TXR 1603)
- New Home Contract (Completed Construction (TXR 1604)
- Residential Condominium Contract (TXR 1605)
- New Residential Condominium Contract (Complete Construction) (TXR 1608)
- New Residential Condominium Contract (Incomplete Construction)(TXR 1609)
- Farm and Ranch Contract (TXR 1701)

Property Managers: Do You Know What Changed in the Residential Management Agreement?



Texas REALTORS° recently updated the Residential Leasing and Property Management Agreement (TXR 2201) based on recommendations from a forms task force to improve clarity and usage of the form. The form is available for use and can be found at texasrealestate.com/realtorforms and through all Texas REALTORS°-licensed forms vendors.

HERE'S A SUMMARY OF CHANGES:

- A line for owners to initial was added to every page of the document.
- On the first page, the parties' information has been reworked to provide for an easier read. Checkboxes were added for owners to consent to receive text messages from the broker and/or the broker's operating software.
- In Paragraph 3, Terms, the clause "Notice to Modify Terms and Conditions" has been added to allow for changes to be made to the document after the end of the first term of the agreement. This will allow for necessary modifications to be made in certain circumstances without the parties having to execute an entirely new agreement.
- New Paragraph 4, Summary of Fees, was added to assist brokers when explaining their fee structures to an owner. With blanks for reserves, broker's fees, and termination fees all in one place, this paragraph will streamline fee discussions, removing the need to search all 14 pages of the agreement for specific fee information.
- In Paragraph 5, Reserves, a sentence was added to account for additional make-ready costs upon vacancy or notice of termination by a tenant.
- Broker's Fees, previously Paragraph 11, was moved to Paragraph 6, and the blanks to insert fees have been moved to the Fees Summary Paragraph. Additional fee structure options have been included under A. Management Fees, B. Leasing Fees for New Tenancies, and C. Renewal or Extension Fees. Under D. Maintenance Coordination Fees (previously titled "Service Fees"), these fees are now payable at the time the services are rendered. An additional option was added under G. Fees Related to Insurance and Legal Matters (see the Insurance Paragraph below). Finally, in H. Fees in the Event of a Sale, the options for "Fee if a Tenant Purchases Property" and "Fee if Buyer is Procured through Broker" have been removed. In either of these cases, a separate written listing agreement should now be used.
- Paragraph 7J, Fund-Sharing Within Portfolio of Properties, has been added to allow the owner the option to grant the broker the authority to share that owner's funds from

View a video discussing the changes:



- one property to another if the broker is managing multiple properties for the owner. This is intended to assist, for example, where a property within that owner's portfolio of properties has deficient funds for reasonable upkeep but another of their properties could cover those costs.
- In Paragraph 9, Advances, a sentence was added at the end of the paragraph to limit broker's obligation to performing only those repairs related to the health and safety of the tenant and/or the securing of the property.
- Paragraph 11, Owner's Cooperation, adds a requirement that the owner provide necessary passwords and controls to ensure that the broker has access to any electronic devices that are on the property. The owner must also provide the broker with owner's association documentation and contact information, and reasonable notice before listing the property for sale.
- Relating to Paragraph 12, Insurance, a clause has been added to provide for an administrative fee (either monthly or annually), along with reimbursement of the cost of the policy, if an owner does not maintain the owner's own public liability insurance policy naming broker as a co-insured or additional insured and the broker chooses to purchase an insurance policy.
- The previous Paragraph 12 has now been renamed Paragraph 13, Termination, and has been reworked to provide additional clarity after the agreement ends. These changes give the broker the option to provide off-boarding services for a fee after the agreement ends. Certain services, such as processing vendor invoices, utility bills, security deposits, etc., generally must still be provided after the agreement ends, and this new paragraph gives the owner and the broker the ability to negotiate how those services—and the broker's fees for providing those services—will be handled.
- Paragraph 23G was added to inform the owner of certain fund-withholding requirements under federal tax law if the owner is a foreign person. This paragraph also provides check boxes for the owner to notify the broker whether they are or are not a foreign person.

hotos & Images: @Andrew, @Michael, @elmantastic, @7AM - stock.adobe.com

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BY JOE OLIVIERI

The challenges facing buyers seeking insuranceand how you can help. IT IS GETTING MORE EXPENSIVE—and in some cases more difficult for your clients to get home insurance.

Insurance rates have been rising nationwide as companies try to deal with higher costs from major weather events, inflation, and

reinsurance. Meanwhile, rising home values mean homeowners are paying more to insure their same property.

"It's what people call a hard market. It's difficult to shop in," says David Bolduc, Public Counsel of the State of Texas Office of Public Insurance Counsel. "Your options are relatively Reinsurance is insurance for insurance companies to help them transfer risk from major claim events from their business to another insurer.

expensive and limited. You're dealing with companies under a lot of cost pressure because payments to policyholders are up, the frequency of major events is up, and the severity of damage is up."

Most of your clients will insure their homes, either because their mortgage lender requires them to or because they want to protect what is probably their most valuable asset.

These rising costs have an effect on home affordability.

Issues in the insurance industry are causing difficulties and delays in some real estate transactions and can put deals at risk of not closing.

You should also know that insurance options may be limited in areas at the highest risk for major weather events. In these markets, it's important to know what resources you can share with your clients and where to find additional help.

Here's where the industry in Texas stands today, and ways you can serve your clients as they navigate this market.

Why rates rose in Texas

Major storms are driving an increase in the number of home insurance claims. Including drought events, NOAA reports 16 events in 2023 and 20 events in 2024 with billion-dollar losses.

The issue isn't just the hurricanes on the coast or tornadoes in North Texas—major events are happening across Texas. And from an insurance perspective, the greater the population density, the more claims will be generated when an event happens. The companies' exposure goes up pretty fast, Bolduc explains.

The number of claims and dollars distributed is rising in hard-hit areas in part because more people are moving to these

Companies are not only facing more insurance claims, but higher inflation and reinsurance costs are making it more expensive to respond to them. These circumstances are going to drive up insurance rates. In 2023 alone, rates rose an average 21.1%, according to the Texas Department of Insurance.

Same house, higher bill

Median home prices in Texas grew about 30% from 2020 to 2024, according to MarketViewer data from Texas REALTORS®.

Unfortunately, that means homeowners insurance premiums went up, as it costs more to repair or replace something more valuable. Using higher rates to insure more valuable properties is going to translate into larger bills for Texas homeowners.

Home insurance has always been part of a homebuyer's calculations, but it didn't used to be as significant a consideration, Bolduc says. It's easy to imagine a car buyer thinking about how much more it would cost to insure the pricier model of two options.

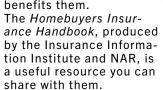
Nowadays, the same thing is happening in home sales, he continues. Can your clients afford to insure that house if the market booms and it doubles in value? The topic is now on homebuyers' radars.

Where do we go from here?

In its 2024 Biennial Report, TDI suggested that the Texas Legislature incentivize programs related to home construction. Make homes and roofs more resilient, the logic goes, and properties can better weather major events. "More widespread use of higher building standards could result in less costly insurance claims, which would act to restrain the cost of homeowners insurance," TDI states.

WHY DO **YOU NEED INSURANCE ANYWAY?**

Here are some helpful tips for explaining to your clients why home insurance benefits them.



Your clients may need insurance as part of obtaining a mortgage. Insurance could help a homeowner rebuild, repair, or replace the home and belongings if something happened to it. Insurance can help your clients recover following a burglary or help defend them during a lawsuit.

Homeowners can purchase insurance policies based on the amount of coverage they want. Do they want the cash value of what was lost? The cost to replace? Replacement plus a little more? Or whatever it takes to restore or replace the assets?

The *Homebuyers Insurance* Handbook goes on to explain what to keep in mind when choosing how much coverage to buy. Insurance typically covers the home itself, the insured's belongings, the property's landscaping, no-fault medical coverage, liability protection, and additional living expenses if some event forces you to stay away from your home.



Texas is the nation's second largest insurance market with \$265.7 billion in premiums. **SOURCE:** Texas Department of Insurance













WHAT'S HAPPENING NATIONALLY?

In January, the Department of the Treasury's Federal Insurance Office released a major report looking at homeowners insurance markets from 2018 to 2022 and climate-related risks and other factors. "The cost and availability of adequate homeowners insurance has a direct impact on housing expenses and the value of homes," the report states.

The report notes that it was more expensive for insurance companies to do business in areas at the highest risk for climate-related perils. "Extended periods during which insurances have elevated paid loss ratios may cause insurers to respond by raising rates, not renewing policies, or changing coverage options."

Hurricanes caused more expected annual losses to buildings than any other climate-related peril and were associated with the highest premiums and non-renewal rates in the country.

The Insurance Information Institute states that supplychain issues and labor shortages have also driven up the cost of repairs and replacement.

The Department of the Treasury report found that average policy premiums grew 8.7% faster than inflation from 2018 to 2022. Homeowners in the top 20% of affected ZIP codes saw premiums rise at least 14.7% faster.

Bolduc recalls a time after a major storm when houses built by Habitat for Humanity fared much better than neighboring houses. It turned out that the Habitat houses used a particular type of roof fastener that made them more resilient.

For its part, the insurance industry is intensifying its focus on predicting and preventing future damage and losses, says the Insurance Information Institute.

Carriers are looking at how to spread out their risk, Bolduc says. Companies are discussing where to offer coverage so their business is not exclusively concentrated in hard-hit areas, he continues. They are also developing new insurance products. They're looking at mitigation funds and grants, among other strategies.

So far, Texas has not seen major insurance companies say they are going to completely stop writing policies, according to Bolduc. However, some carriers took steps last year to limit new policies or stop renewing policies. "Companies are deciding internally that they have too much exposure in some areas. If we have a bad storm, it's going to cost them a fortune. So they are looking at insuring homes in other places and maybe cutting back in parts of Texas," Bolduc says.

What's happening on the coast?

If carriers decide to limit their coverage in hard-hit places, that leaves homeowners fewer and more expensive options.

"The Texas Windstorm Insurance Association is the insurer of last resort, offering windstorm and hail insurance to home and commercial property owners who cannot get this coverage in the regular market due to the risk of catastrophic hurricanes," TWIA says.

Since 2021, TWIA has seen its policy count increase. "The association's exposure, which is the total insured value of the properties that TWIA insures, has also increased," according to TWIA's 2024 *Biennial Report* to the 89th Texas Legislature.

The 2024 Atlantic Hurricane Season was a challenging time for the Texas coast. In July, Hurricane Beryl became the third-largest claim event in TWIA history, generating more than 31,000 filed claims. TWIA has paid out more than \$295 million as of late December.

Bolduc says there has been significant debate—which continues in the 89th Legislature—about how TWIA is financed.

How can you help?

Bolduc recommends discussing insurance topics early on with

your clients. It gets them thinking about affordability and helps shape the home search.

Talking about insurance early on also helps you. Insurance-related complications tend to happen at the end of the transaction, Bolduc notes. Something falls through and the buyer and insurer must scramble to find coverage to meet the lender's requirements. The earlier you discuss the topic, the more likely it is that the process will go smoothly.

You can also encourage your clients to hire an independent insurance agent, he says. An insurance agent may be able to help your clients find advantages your clients wouldn't know about.

Bolduc also suggests that you recommend that your clients shop policies. While some deductibles may be 1% of the value of a home, others are

of a home, others as now much higher.

Pay attention to insurer discounts. Little things add up. Carriers may offer your clients a break if preventative measures reduce the chance of a future claim. "Keeping an open dialogue with your

Check out this home insurance comparison tool from the Office of Public Insurance Counsel: opic.texas.gov/resources/policy-comparison-tool/homeowners-insurance-comparison/

insurance professional can enhance your efforts to protect your investment cost-effectively," the Insurance Information Institute's *Homebuyers Insurance Handbook* states.

Bolduc encourages your clients to think about how much insurance they need to buy. What do your clients need to protect against? Do they have enough insurance? "Homeowners can do their part by being aware of the risks specific to their property and region and taking preventative measures," the handbook adds.

An effect of companies limiting their exposure is that your clients will have to shop around pretty hard, Bolduc says. It gets more challenging to buy a policy.

"The thing to remember is that we're living in an environment that's going to be difficult for a while," he advises. "It's not going to turn around tomorrow. It is something you and your clients ought to be thinking about upfront. It's a significant part of the monthly expenses, just like taxes are."

JOE OLIVIERI is a business writer who frequently writes for *Texas REALTOR*°.

TOOLS YOU CAN SHARE WITH YOUR CLIENTS

Insurance Information Institute, What Should New Homebuyers Know About Homeowners Insurance:

iii.org/article/what-shouldnew-homebuyers-know-abouthomeowners-insurance

Office of Public Insurance Counsel, Homeowners Insurance Comparison:

opic.texas.gov/resources/policycomparison-tool/homeownersinsurance-comparison/

Office of Public Insurance Counsel, Why Are Insurance Rates Increasing in Texas?

opic.texas.gov/news/why-are-insurance-rates-increasing-in-texas/

Texas Department of Insurance,
Home Insurance Guide:

tdi.texas.gov/consumer/home-insurance.html

YOUR STATE ASSOCIATION IS WORKING ON SOLUTIONS

A Texas REALTORS® workgroup made up of members from across the state has been examining homeowners insurance issues. The workgroup continues to gather information from insurance industry experts to explore ways to keep homeowners insurance available and affordable, and to provide information and resources to members. Texas REALTORS® is also actively engaged with elected officials on the topic and is closely monitoring activity during the 89th Legislature that could benefit current and prospective homeowners.

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PROPERTY MANAGERS:

Get answers to your questions about fair-housing rules related to people with disabilities

Discrimination based on disability accounted for more fair-housing complaints in 2023 than all other protected classes combined, according to a report by the National Fair Housing Alliance. Here are some FAQs to ensure you comply with fair-housing laws related to disability.

What is a disability under the federal Fair Housing Act?

Disability means a person with physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of a person's major life activities; a record (history) of the impairment; or being regarded as having the impairment. Major life activities means functions such as caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. The term does not include current illegal use of or addiction to a controlled substance, but could protect persons who are recovering from substance abuse.

Is it a fair-housing violation for a real estate ad to include "City Park is within walking distance" or "easy walk to neighborhood schools"? Does this language discriminate against people with disabilities?

No. Advertisements with this language would not appear to be violations of fair-housing laws. HUD has indicated that ads containing descriptions of properties (e.g., "fourth-floor walk-up" or "walk-in closets"), services or facilities ("jogging trails"), or neighborhoods ("walk to bus stop") do not violate the Fair Housing Act.

What is a reasonable accommodation?

A reasonable accommodation is a change in rules, policies, practices, or services that is feasible and practical under the circumstances. Under the federal Fair Housing Act, discrimination can include a property owner's refusal to make a reasonable accommodation in the rules, practices, or services if necessary to afford the tenant, or any person associated with the tenant, equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.

A property owner must grant a tenant's request for a reasonable accommodation unless there is no disability, no disability-related need for the request, the request poses a

direct threat to the health or safety of other residents, the request would result in substantial physical damage to the property of others, or the request is unreasonable. Unreasonable requests include requests that are unduly burdensome or would fundamentally alter the landlord's operations.

For example, a landlord of an apartment building may have a policy to assign parking places based on how long a tenant has lived at the building. Under this policy, new tenants get parking places farthest from the building's entrance. A new tenant with a disability who asks for a parking place close to the door is making a request for reasonable accommodation.

If that same new tenant instead asked for 24-hour valet parking at the apartment building, that would likely be an unreasonable request.

If a request is denied, the landlord should consider and discuss with the tenant whether there is an alternative accommodation that would address the disability related need without being unduly burdensome. If such an alternative exists, the landlord must grant the alternative accommodation.

What is a reasonable modification?

A reasonable modification means a structural change to existing premises to allow a person with a disability the full enjoyment of the premises. A reasonable modification can be made to the interior, exterior, public areas, or common use areas of a building. Under the federal Fair Housing Act, discrimination because of a disability can include a refusal to permit, at the expense of the person with the disability, a reasonable modification of an existing premises to be occupied by the person if the modification is necessary to afford the person full enjoyment of the premises of a dwelling.

For example, a tenant with mobility challenges who asks to add a ramp to the front door of his rental is making a





request for a reasonable modification. However, if that tenant were to ask to create a new entrance through a brick wall to bypass the stairs, he is likely making an unreasonable request.

When reasonable, a property owner may condition permission for a modification on the tenant agreeing to any of the following: 1. When moving out, the tenant must restore the interior of the

premises to the prior condition, ordinary wear and tear excepted.

- 2. Provide a reasonable description of the proposed modification, as well as reasonable assurances that the work will be performed by qualified individuals in accordance with industry standards, and that any required building permits will be obtained.
- 3. Pay into an interest-bearing escrow account, over a reasonable amount of time, a reasonable amount of money not to exceed the costs of restoration, if necessary to ensure funds are available for restoration. The interest accrues to the benefit of the tenant. An owner cannot increase the security deposit. Note: A resident cannot be charged for restoring common-area or exterior modifications.

What does familial status, one of the protected classes under the federal Fair Housing Act, include?

Familial status relates to any family in which one or more individuals (who have not attained the age of 18 years) live with a parent, a legal custodian, or a designee of the parent or legal custodian, with the writ-

SHORT VIDEOS EXPLAIN FAIR **HOUSING RULES AND** OTHER LEGAL TOPICS

Check out the Texas REALTORS® Legal Briefs series, with discussions of assistance animals, rejecting tenant applications, and a host of other legal issues. Most videos are under two minutes.



ten permission of the parent or legal custodian. The protections against discrimination also apply to any person who is pregnant or is in the process of securing legal custody of an individual who has not attained 18 years.

I manage rental properties for a client who doesn't want people smoking on his property. If we deny a potential tenant's application because he or she smokes, will this violate any federal fair-housing laws?

No, this will not violate federal fair-housing laws. Federal fair-housing laws make it illegal for the landlord to choose tenants based on their race, color, sex, national origin, religion, handicap, and familial status. However, people who smoke are not a protected class. A landlord can refuse to lease to potential tenants who smoke as long as the landlord consistently enforces such prohibition.

The landlord for the property I manage wants all potential tenants to submit a photo ID with their lease application. Can I require that?

Yes, but you should only use an applicant's photo ID to verify the applicant's identity and/or to check on criminal history, rental history, or credit history. You must be uniform and consistent with your photo ID policy, requiring it from all applicants. Never use the photo ID to discriminate against an applicant.

The owner of the rental property I manage wants to limit the number of people who can live in the property. Will such a policy violate fair-housing laws? Possibly. A property owner who tries to impose limits on families with children may be violating fair-housing laws that protect familial status.

HUD says an occupancy policy of two people per bedroom can be reasonable, but other factors should be considered, including the size and number of bedrooms, the age of the children, and the configuration of the unit.

You should ensure that your occupancy policy is consistent and applies to all occupants and rental applicants. For example, you can't refuse to rent to one family because they have children or demand that a tenant with a baby on the way move to a larger unit.

A prospective tenant learns from a neighbor that the former tenant was infected with HIV. The prospective tenant contacts the property manager to inquire about whether this is true. Is the property manager required to disclose such information?

No. The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits agents from making unsolicited disclosures concerning whether sellers or property occupants have tested positive for HIV or have been diagnosed with AIDS. Additionally, The Real Estate Licensing Act (TRELA) states that licensees shall have no duty to inquire about, make a disclosure related to, or release information related to whether a previous or current occupant of real property had, may have had, has or may have AIDS, HIV-related illness, or HIV infection.

The National Association of REALTORS® provides guidance on how to respond to an inquiry like this and suggests stating: "It is the policy of our firm not to answer inquiries of this nature one way or the other since the firm feels that this information is not material to the transaction. In addition, any type of response by me or other agents of our firm may be a violation of the federal fair housing laws. If you believe that this information is relevant to your decision to buy/rent the property, you must pursue this investigation on your own."

A prospective tenant for a property I manage uses a wheelchair. He wants to build a ramp to the front door, widen two bathroom doors, and install grab bars in the bathroom. If he becomes a tenant, what modifications does the owner have to allow?

The landlord must permit reasonable modifications necessary to afford the disabled tenant full enjoyment of the property, such as the modifications described.

To protect both parties, the lease they sign should address who will arrange for the modifications, who will make decisions regarding workmen and materials, and who will pay for the modifications. For example, the lease may provide that the tenant will pay the cost either directly to any contractor or by reimbursement to the landlord, or the lease may provide that the landlord will make the modifications in exchange for a concession, such as an increase in the rent based on the cost of the modifications.

The lease should also cover whether the property will be restored when the tenant moves out and, if it will, who will pay for the cost of such restoration.

Due to a disability, a tenant requests an assistance animal as a reasonable accommodation. Can a property owner require the tenant to pay an additional deposit as a condition for allowing an assistance animal in the dwelling? No. The property owner cannot require the tenant to pay an

additional deposit as a condition for allowing the assistance animal in the dwelling. However, the tenant would still be legally responsible for any damage caused by such an animal.

Is a tenant required to renew any documentation that was provided with a reasonable accommodation request for an assistance animal?

There is no obligation on the tenant to renew the reasonable accommodation documentation. If the tenant's disability is not readily observable or the documentation does not include information about a chronic disability-related need for the assistance animal, a landlord may contact the healthcare provider that provided the documentation after 12 months to assess whether the healthcare provider still advises the need for the assistance animal. However, if a landlord were to implement a practice of re-assessing reasonable accommodation requests, the landlord should include information about the re-assessment in the landlord's written criteria or policies to apply to future requests. A landlord should not re-assess any accommodations the landlord has already granted prior to implementing such a policy. 🔀

NEED MORE INFO ON ASSISTANCE ANIMALS?

The Texas REALTORS® form General Information for Landlord Regarding Assistance Animals (TXR 2226) provides three pages of information, definitions, and requirements. Use it to ensure that landlords understand their obligations and to maintain a record that you shared the information with your client.

Scan the code to watch a webinar that covers documentation requirements, rights of all parties, and how to navigate scenarios that include assistance animals.



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Area REALTORS® [3]





OVER A THOUSAND MEMBERS GATHERED IN AUSTIN in

February to connect with colleagues and attend to association business. This year's meeting included sessions to promote professional growth, such as Al applications for commercial real estate, issues related to MLS data, and property financing in Mexico. Attendees also received regulatory updates, information on forms changes, and the latest legislative news.

Chairman Christy Gessler welcomed attendees to the Opening Session, where retiring CEO Travis Kessler [1a] and his wife, Shelley, discussed milestones and advice with the association's officers. Incoming CEO Mike Barnett [1b] and his wife, Heidi, then joined the discussion to talk about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

2026 LEADERS ELECTED

The Board of Directors elected **Deborah Spangler [2d]** of Montgomery as Texas REALTORS® Secretary/Treasurer and Tony Lloyd [2a]of Lubbock as Texas REALTORS® Chairman-Elect. Jennifer Wauhob [2b] of Houston was affirmed as Texas REALTORS® Chairman. Christy Gessler [2c] will serve as Immediate Past Chairman, and Mike Barnett [2e] will round out the Leadership Team as President and CEO.

The following Texas REALTORS® were elected as regional vice presidents for two-year terms beginning December 1:

- Region 1 Donna Sue Clements [A], Lubbock
- Region 3 Paula McDonald [B], Granbury

- Region 3 Elizabeth McCoy [C], Greater Fort Worth
- Region 4 Robin Mata [D], Greater Texoma
- Region 4 **Bob Baker** [E], Collin County Region 8 - Kriston Wood [F], Five Points
- Region 11 Jeremy De La Garza [G], Corpus Christi
- Region 12 **Jeff Varnell [H]**, MetroTex
- Region 12 Ashley Gentry [I], MetroTex
- Region 12 James Martin [J], MetroTex
- Region 13 Traci Hasslocher [K], San Antonio Region 13 - Sara Briseño Gerrish [L], San Antonio
- Region 13 Marquis Williams [M], San Antonio
- Region 13 Kim Bragman [N], San Antonio
- Region 14 Mario Arriaga [O], Houston
- Region 14 Cathy Trevino [P], Houston
- Region 14 Theresa Hill [Q], Houston
- Region 14 Kat Robinson [R], Houston
- Region 14 Chaille Short [S], Houston
- Region 14 Bob Christian [T], Houston
- Region 15 Jay Gohil [U], Austin
- Region 15 Brandy Wuensch [V], Austin
- Region 15 Becky Debutts [W], Austin
- Region 15 Emily Bibby [X], Austin
- Region 16 Shy Rodriguez [Y], Greater El Paso
- Shannon Cobb Evans [Z] of Houston, was elected, effective immediately, as an RVP in Region 14 to fill a vacant position.

■ The Texas REALTOR® Strike Force Award: Diana Barnett, Fort Hood; Sandra Breedlove, Collin County; Amy Hanson, Collin County; Chad Hovde, Bryan-College Station Regional; Brenda Job, Jasper; Ken Kiel, Four Rivers; Olivia Kiritsy, Lufkin; Carie McNeil, Permian Basin; Kelly Rudiger, Collin County; Jeff Varnell, MetroTex; Taylor Walcik, MetroTex; Sharon Williamson, Longview

Award for outstanding grassroots involvement: Collin County

 Grassroots Advocate of the Year: Jeff Varnell, MetroTex Association of REALTORS® [4]

■ Lehman Local Board Governmental Affairs Achievement

Richard Miranda Global Achievement Award: Adrian Arriaga, Greater McAllen Association of REALTORS® [5]



2026 REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENTS

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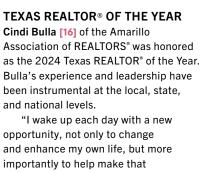












happen for clients," said Bulla. "Entrepreneurship is terrifying, and it really doesn't get any easier, but it's the most rewarding and truly fun and invigorating way to make a living."

Bulla's journey into real estate began with a clerical job at a bank when she was a single mother in her twenties. She progressed to become an agricultural specialist and loan officer, eventually moving to Amarillo to work with a savings and loan, and then the Resolution Trust Corp. and FDIC disposing a large portfolio of commercial loan projects throughout the U.S.

"The logical next step for me was to pursue a career in lending, construction, and real estate," said Bulla. She became a REALTOR® in 1999 and opened her own brokerage in 2006.

Since then, Bulla has served as the chairman of the Amarillo Association of REALTORS® in 2012, chairman of Texas REALTORS® in 2020, and countless other volunteer leadership positions.

"The real estate profession has been a transformational force throughout my life," said Bulla. "I have met lifelong friends through becoming involved in the Amarillo community and have also been honored to advise so many clients in their homeownership journey from start to finish."

Bulla encourages her fellow REALTORS® to take on leadership roles to ensure the member vision is carried out. "It will be the hardest but most rewarding contribution you can make to your profession and yourself." 17

























- Innovative Program of the Year: Texas Contract Program, San Antonio Board of REALTORS®
- Marketing Program of the Year: There's No Place Like Home, Houston Board of REALTORS® [6]
- Series or Short Program of the Year: Agent Etiquette 101, Danielle Tucker Shepard of Fort Hood Area Association of REALTORS® [7]
- Legal Program of the Year: Right Here, Right Now, Austin Board of REALTORS® [8]
- Educator of the Year: Shelyna Tinglin [9], Collin County Area REALTORS®
- Tom D. Morton Award for Association Executives: Gilbert Gonzalez [10], San Antonio Board of REALTORS®
- Texas REALTORS® Good Neighbor Award: Kent Redding [11], Austin Board of REALTORS®
- Texas REALTORS® Diversity Recognition Award: [12, left to right] Greater Fort Worth Association of REALTORS®, San Antonio Board of REALTORS®, Greater McAllen Board of REALTORS®, Austin Board of REALTORS®, and MetroTex Association of REALTORS®

Texas YPN REALTORS® to Watch [13, left to right]: Katherine Nebel, Spring; Miriam Valencia, Houston; Preston Davis, Sherman; Naguay Dunbar, Houston; Kayla Sorrell, Houston; Jose Nieto, Houston; Randi Houston, Katy; and Rick Ramirez, MetroTex.

Texas Accredited Commercial Specialist (TACS) Scholarship recipients: Aaron Sowemimo, Houston; Audrey Munoz, San Antonio; Shonda Strives, Irving; Porsha Burns, Plano; Narcippa Teague, MetroTex; Lorena Decanini, Frisco and Hanayya Shah, McKinney.

Robert Wright [14] of Austin was presented with the association's Distinguished Service Award, recognizing 45 years of commitment to the REALTOR® organization and his community. Wright, who has volunteered in some capacity every single year since 1992, said, "Always give back, because the profession has been good to us. Service is something we all should do."

Two local association executives were recognized for earning the REALTOR® Association Certified Executive (RCE) designation:

- Laura Tilley [15, right], Heartland Association of REALTORS®
- Ana Casanova [15, left], Greater Lewisville Association of REALTORS®.







SCAN THE QR CODE TO VIEW ADDITIONAL PHOTOS.



PET PROJECTS



are at the heart of many families and, increasingly, a factor in determining where those families live. In a recent online Texas REALTORS® poll, 83% of members said pets had influenced their buyers' home-purchasing decisions. And an NAR report showed that 18% of members had clients who moved solely because of their pets. Real estate agents who are ready to serve a client's whole family—including the members with fur, feathers, or fins—may find that being petfriendly is good for business.

More American households have pets than have children, and pet owners overwhelmingly (82%) say that their pets are like their own children. From empty-nesters whose kids have left home to young couples delaying or foregoing having children, an ever-growing number of people think of themselves less as pet owners and more as pet parents. Millennials—the generation with the most pets—are especially vocal about their "fur babies," with 80% saying they talk to other people about their pets as if they were children, according to a 2024 Harris Poll report. Millennials and Gen Z spend more money on their pets than older generations do and are more likely to go into debt for pet-related expenses. They also see pet parenting as a legitimate social role, with 62% of Millennials saying that parenting a pet should get as much recognition in society as parenting a child.

"Pets are not just companions—they are family, and their needs often shape the homebuying process in significant ways," says Kristina Land, agent at Coldwell Banker Island Escapes, in Corpus Christi. Land's own experience as a proud pet-parent to three dogs— Awesome, Rousey, and Riddick—has helped her connect with clients who put their pets first. "I've had buyers walk away from homes that didn't meet their pets' needs, whether it was a lack of a secure yard or insufficient outdoor space for play," she says. "These priorities are front and center for pet owners who want their homes to be a haven for their furry family members."

In the doghouse? Yes, please

Pets are a top concern for prospective homebuyers, according to a realtor.com survey, in which 91% of pet owners said that pets would factor into their decision, and 82% said their pets' needs were just as important as their own, if not more so. Most pet owners (72%) would even pass on buying a property that was otherwise their dream home if it wasn't right for their pets.

The younger the homebuyer, the more likely they are to report putting their pets' interests first. More Millennials would be interested in a yard than a newly renovated kitchen, and more of them would choose to live in a petfriendly city than live close to their friends, according to one survey. Another survey found that members of Gen Z chose pets over people, with a majority saying they would pick a pet-friendly home over a child-friendly one and 22% saving they would want to move out of their current home if it stopped working for their pet, while only 12% would move if the home didn't work for their partner.

So what's your role, knowing how important pets are to people? When working with buyers, you may want to ask about pets early on, so you can tailor their home searches to take pet priorities into account. Land says many of her clients value "fenced yards, pet-friendly flooring, and homes close to parks or beaches where their pets can enjoy outdoor adventures." She has had clients



It's about more than square footage—it's about creating a safe and comfortable environment for every member of their family, pets included.

ANIMAL HOUSES: TIPS FOR WORKING WITH PET PARENTS

Ask about pets right away. There's a good chance your clients have pets about two-thirds of American families do. Keeping the whole family in mind shows you care and are pet-savvy. It can also help to get everyone on the same page from the beginning, if pet priorities will factor into your clients' decision-making.

Collect resources. Can you recommend a great dog park or doggy daycare? Are there petfriendly businesses nearby? What's the vet situation? Do you know a contractor who builds catios? Being a local expert on pet resources pays off with appreciative pet parents on either side of the transaction.

Know the rules. Learn all you can about where pets are allowed, how many, and of what kinds. But don't hesitate to point clients to other professionals whenever needed.

Anticipate pet priorities. With buyer clients, keep an eye out for details that could be valuable (or problematic) in the future. Is this flooring durable? Will the layout work well for pets, especially as they age? Is the outdoor space safe and usable year-round?

Don't hide your pet pride. Seller clients may not want to hide all signs of their pets and doing so could even be counterproductive, if the home has great pet-related features. Consider staging petfocused areas of the home so buyers can imagine their own pets enjoying them. You may also want to include pet-friendly features in marketing and listing materials.

IF THE LISTING IS PET-FRIENDLY, CAN FIDO COME? NOT NECESSARILY.

Buyer clients might need a gentle reminder: Home showings are usually reserved for human family members.

Be aware that bringing animals to showings and/or open houses could potentially be problematic. Before attending an open house or showing with an animal, it's important to contact the real estate agent hosting the event or listing. Let the agent know your client would like to bring an animal and ask about any specific rules or restrictions.



choose homes specifically for pet-focused features like shaded yards or built-in pet doors. "For pet owners, it's about more than square footage—it's about creating a safe and comfortable environment for every member of their family, pets included," Land says.

Show off at showings, if your home is the pick of the litter

When listing a home, you may want to keep in mind that attitudes toward pets have shifted. Removing all signs of pets might not be as desirable as it once was, especially if clients have added features that would appeal to other pet parents. One recent poll found that 79% of potential buyers would not be deterred from making an offer if they saw signs of pets, and 16% would actually be more likely to make an offer. As long as everything is clean and undamaged, it might be more productive to suggest staging pet-focused areas in the home, so buyers could imagine their own pets enjoying them.

"When marketing a home," Land says, "I always highlight its pet-friendly features because I know how valuable they are to buyers." At her own home, having a spacious yard has made all the difference for her dogs. "So I make a point to show how a home's outdoor space can accommodate the same kind of joy and activity for other families and their pets," she says. "I also include information about nearby pet-friendly amenities like trails, parks, and pet-focused businesses to help buyers see the bigger picture."

Betty Saenz, agent with Ranch Roads - Windham Rose Realty, in Austin, markets herself as a pet-friendly REALTOR®. Whether her clients are looking for an area that allows large animals, a neighborhood with

restaurants that let you bring your dog along, or a home layout that is optimized for aging pets, Saenz takes pride in being a great resource by keeping up with local pet-related information and trends. One change she has noticed in recent years is the rise of "barkitecture"—remodeling projects that add pet-specific features. "What's popular nowadays are pet washing stands," she says. "Usually, they're in the mud room. And I've seen



l've seen some quite fancy mud room areas for pets at higher end homes that not only had a washing stand but even a set-up almost like a vet's office.

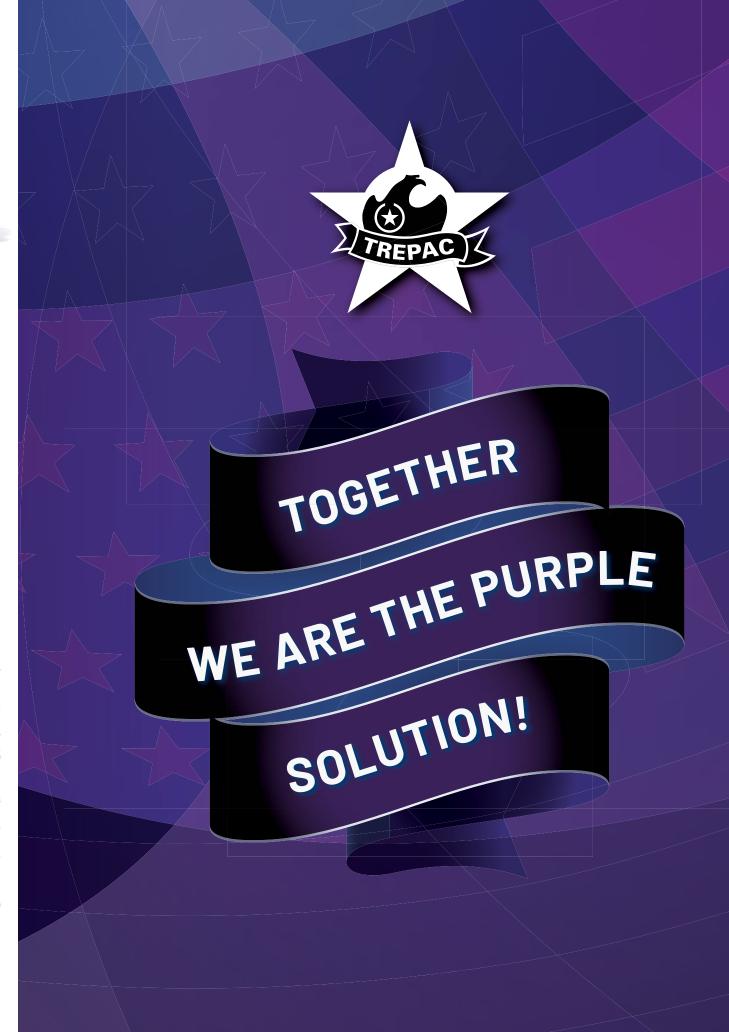
some quite fancy mud room areas for pets at higher end homes that not only had a washing stand but even a set-up almost like a vet's office." When Saenz remodeled her own bathroom, she added a built-in water dish for her dogs, Sophie and Schatzie, and designed a dog-washing area in the large walk-in shower.

Saenz, who grew up on a ranch, doesn't mind getting her hands dirty to help clients with pets. She has transported chickens, corralled dogs, babysat ducks, supervised goats during a closing, and scooped litterboxes before showings. She loves animals and enjoys the challenge of helping clients navigate a real estate process that is sometimes complicated by pets. Rules about the type and number of pets allowed vary widely depending on a home's location and any deed restrictions. She recommends that agents learn all they can about local requirements and point clients to other professionals when appropriate. "I have a property under contract right now for a lady who has dressage horses," Saenz says, and while some restrictions on the acreage she was considering looked like they were expired, it was outside of Saenz's field of expertise to advise on that. "Thankfully, she hired an attorney on my asking her to, and he did confirm that they were expired," she says.

A cautionary tail

About five years ago, Saenz helped clients sell one property and buy a larger one to accommodate their many pets. She came away with more than just a commission, though. The clients worked with a shelter and were fostering a Yorkie mix dog and her puppies. After closing, when Saenz picked up her staging items, the clients asked if she wanted to see the puppies. She did. Did she want to hold a puppy? She did. Did she want to adopt a puppy? "Now I have my Sophie," Saenz laughs. "So, I had to make new guidelines for my pet people: I show you houses and properties, but don't show me any pets that need a new home, because I'm a sucker."

KELLIE BARTLETT is assistant editor for Texas REALTOR®.

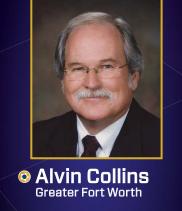


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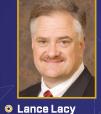
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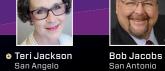
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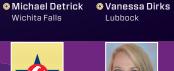
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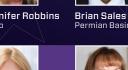


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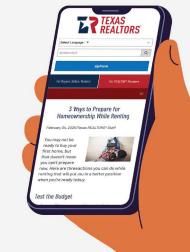
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THE CLOSING



You market on your website. It's woven into your social media presence. Your email newsletter, just-listed postcards, and even your community involvement are examples of it, too. In fact, you spend a lot of time on marketing. But are you doing it right?

Here are three common blunders to avoid.

MISTAKE 1 Saying what everyone else says

Why should people work with you instead of your competitors? If you have no answer, figure it out. Otherwise, you're "selling the category" rather than giving people a compelling reason to hire you.

Painting too rosy a picture

It's tempting to tell prospects you can help them accomplish their real estate goals without hiccups or compromises. You know that's often not how it works, though. Buyers, sellers, and landlords know that, too. It's OK to acknowledge the real challenges that exist. In fact, doing so builds trust and appreciation of your expertise.

Focusing on the wrong person

Is your marketing based on what you think buyers and sellers should care about? That's not necessarily what they do care about. Unless your marketing convinces them you can address their concerns and desires, you'll never get the opportunity to share your perspective on other matters

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