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Mortgage Offerings Can Vary Greatly. How Does One Shop for the Right One?

I recently asked Jaxzann Riggs, president of **The Mortgage Network**, a question that many homebuyers have:

"When I am shopping for a mortgage, what should I really be comparing?"

Her answer surprised me a little. Most consumers immediately focus on interest rates and APR. While both are important, Jaxzann explained that they don't always tell the complete story.

Before discussing APR, she made another point that caught my attention: shopping pays off. According to Freddie Mac research,

borrowers who obtain multiple mortgage quotes often secure better pricing than those who rely on a single offer. Even a modest difference in interest rate can save thousands of dollars over the life of a mortgage, making comparison shopping one of the most valuable financial exercises a homebuyer can undertake.

APR, or Annual Percentage Rate, was created to help consumers compare borrowing costs. Because it includes certain fees in addition to the interest rate, it is higher than the interest rate itself.

Jaxzann told me that APR is a useful tool, but consumers should avoid treating it as the definitive answer. While APR is calculated according to federal guidelines, mortgage transactions are not always identical. Different lenders may structure fees differently, offer lender credits, charge discount points,

or package costs in ways that affect the APR calculation. She explained it this way:

"Think of APR as a good starting point, not a report card."

For example, two lenders might offer similar APRs, yet one loan could require several thousand dollars less cash at closing. In another situation, a loan with a slightly higher APR might be the better choice because it requires less money upfront or better fits the borrower's goals.

According to Jaxzann, borrowers should focus on four things:

1. How much cash do I need to complete the sale?
2. What will my monthly payment be?
3. How long do I expect to own the property or keep this loan?
4. What is the APR?

Notice that APR wasn't first on the list. Cash required to close can vary significantly from one lender to another. Two loan offers may have similar rates and APRs, yet one may require thousands of dollars more at closing because of points, fees, or pricing adjustments. For many buyers, preserving cash reserves after closing is just as important as obtaining the lowest rate.

Monthly affordability is equally important. A loan should fit comfortably within a family's budget while supporting long-term financial goals.

Another factor many borrowers overlook is how long they expect to own the property

or keep the mortgage. Paying additional upfront costs to secure a lower rate may make sense for someone planning to stay in a home for many years, but not for someone who might move or refinance in a few years.

We also discussed the value of working with a mortgage broker versus a direct lender. Brokers, as the term suggests, have access to multiple lenders, so consumers bene-

fit from more choices and competitive pricing.

Bottom line: Shop multiple brokers and lenders for the best deal, not just the best rate. As she puts it: *"The best mortgage isn't necessarily the one with the lowest rate or the lowest APR. It's the one that provides the best overall value for that particular borrower."* Reach Jaxzann at 303-909-2992.

Outdoor Living Is Becoming a 'Longevity' Habit

Outdoor space has always mattered in real estate, but now it's no longer just an aesthetic preference. It's a lifestyle indicator, a wellness cue and, increasingly, a longevity habit that shapes how buyers evaluate a home. As food prices continue their rise, more homeowners are turning to gardening not only to offset grocery bills but to embrace a daily practice linked to longer, healthier lives. And that shift is influencing what sells in a home — and what doesn't.

The data is clear on one point: the outdoor investments with the strongest resale return are the simplest ones. According to the **Remodeling Impact Report: Outdoor Features** from NAR and the National Association of Landscape Professionals, standard lawn care returned a remarkable 217% of its cost at resale. Landscape maintenance returned 104%, and a full landscape upgrade came in at 100%. No interior upgrade offers as great a return on investment. It's no wonder 92% of Realtors recommend improving curb appeal before listing.

Yet buyer demand goes beyond curb appeal alone. A survey conducted by Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate found that patios, porches and balconies are now the most requested feature among buyers, with

79% of buyers saying outdoor spaces that extend living areas are among the features that make them fall in love with a home.

However, the outdoor features that feel most rewarding to homeowners — elaborate gardens, perennial borders, ambitious vegetable plots — are not always the ones that pay off at the closing table. A well-maintained raised bed or herb garden can read as a **lifestyle amenity**. An overgrown or labor-intensive garden can read as a **chore list**.

Modern buyers want beauty without burden. Neatly mulched beds, native plants, drip irrigation and low-maintenance greenery rank just behind styled outdoor rooms in buyer appeal. Buyers love the idea of fresh herbs or citrus trees, but sellers shouldn't overspend. The front of the home, with clean landscaping, greenery and a welcoming entry, remains the most reliable place to invest before listing.

At the luxury end, outdoor space has become a full-fledged value driver. Thoughtful landscaping is one of the few home investments that appreciates over time. Mature trees, layered plantings and privacy hedging become more valuable as a property ages.

You can read the rest of this article at <http://RealEstateToday.substack.com>.

Denver Post No Longer Publishes Sold Listings, But I Can Send You the Sold Listings That Interest You

Several readers have called me to ask why the *Denver Post* no longer publishes real estate sales like it used to. I can't answer that question, but I can provide that service for any reader via a customized email.

Just tell me the county, ZIP code(s), city or subdivision, price range, style (single-family, condo, townhome), and any other criteria that you can think of, and I'll create an MLS alert that includes those sold listings. You can also draw me a map either visually or by description (between avenues or highways, for example) and that's what I will create for you at no cost.

Note, however, that this is an **MLS** alert, so it will not include any transactions that were not on the MLS. If there's a house

which sold without being on the MLS, I can find that transaction on county records.

The alert I send you will include listings that were reported on both REcolorado and IRES, which serves Boulder and northern Colorado, plus ROCC, which serves central Colorado. In other words, all of Colorado.

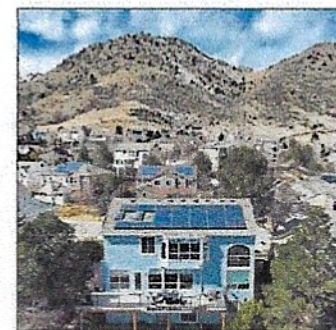
You can receive the alert daily, weekly, monthly or instantly as soon as there's a new sale reported. I can also customize it so you receive it Saturday morning, or whenever! It will not include the names of the sellers and buyers, but it will include the full MLS data and all the pictures, virtual tours and map.

Of course, I can also send you **active and coming soon** listings as well as **pending and sold** listings using similar criteria. I call it my "Neighborhood Alert," and many readers are getting those MLS alerts from me. The "neighborhood" can be however you define it, of course. Use it for where you live now and/or for where you'd like to live.

Again, I charge nothing for this service. Email Jim@GoldenRealEstate.com to sign up.

If you list your home with me, it will be featured on this page and on page 3 of all 24 metro area weekly newspapers.

Solar Powered Golden Home With Great Views!



This home at 359 Canyon Point Circle was one of the model homes for the Village at Mountain Ridge, so it was a show home. The seller, who purchased it in 2002, has made several great improvements including solar panels, hardwood flooring, and totally new gourmet kitchen and master bathroom. The stairs and four upstairs bedrooms have new berber carpeting, too. The view to the east takes in both table mountains and the city of Golden, plus a view of Lookout Mountain and the iconic "M" on Mt. Zion. Mitchell Elementary, one of Jeffco's best schools, is across a nearby pedestrian bridge, allowing children to reach the school safely. There's a trailhead to Mt. Galbraith Park's 5 miles of hiking trails within the subdivision. The main-floor deck has been completely rebuilt with composite decking, metal railings and a breakfast bar for enjoying the sunrises over South Table Mountain and the City of Golden, which are visible even from the walk-out basement. On a clear day, Denver International Airport can be seen from the master bedroom and back deck. Take a narrated video tour with drone footage at www.GRElistings.com.

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PDFs of past columns are archived



Artificial Intelligence Can Make You a Better Informed Voter.

I asked Copilot to tell me about the primary candidates I wasn't familiar with. It summarized their positions and gave me websites and other resources to delve deeper. With that information, I decided to vote against some incumbents or other candidates I might otherwise have voted for. I urge all voters to ask their favorite AI tool "Tell me about the fol-