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How to Stop That Unruly Neighbor From Ruining Your Sale

Some neighbors are determined to make things difficult. But it's in everyone's interest to play nice.



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Q: I am writing to you on behalf of my lovely neighbors, who have been harassed for years by a neighbor who shares their driveway and often blocks them in. Now they have put their home up for sale and he's at every open house intimidating potential buyers. We live in a great community in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. He's the bad seed on the block. It seems the real estate agent can't handle him. What can my neighbors do?

A: The neighbor has a financial interest in behaving nicely while the house is on the market. If the house sells for less than it's worth because of his theatrics, other homes in the immediate area (including his own) could see a drop in value.

The neighbor's antics may backfire in another way, too. Someone will buy that house eventually, and he will have to live alongside that person (and continue to share the driveway). If he shows himself to be an unpleasant person, he may attract a buyer willing to take him on. "The person who ends up buying it is going to be somebody who can take it," said Anna Shagalov, an associate broker with Halstead. Such a neighbor will be primed for confrontation, "and that is not in their best interests."

The seller, or the real estate broker, should explain to the neighbor that his attitude is self-defeating. Be positive and try to enlist him in the sales effort. After all, a quick sale means a swift end to a long, unpleasant relationship. Ask him what can be done to appease him.

If the neighbor refuses to cooperate, the seller could make the open house a boisterous one, with distractions like balloons, a food truck and coffee. "Even if he's ranting in the corner, he gets drowned out," said John W. Harrison, an associate broker at CORE. "Really, all you're trying to do is curate the purchaser's first impression."

Even if the neighbor is on his best behavior during the open house, the seller may still need to disclose past confrontations over the shared driveway, depending on what information the buyer requests in the contract.