



[www.housesonlanier.net](http://www.housesonlanier.net)

770-536-44116

## How to choose a lake agent

There can be a lot of pitfalls in buying and selling lake property. By choosing the right agent, you can avoid these potential problems and ensure a smoother sale. Here are ten questions you should ask when interviewing an agent to represent you in a lake property transaction.

1. **How many Lake Lanier homes have you sold in the past year?** Ask for a *list* of the properties they've sold, and see if there are sales that are comparable to your home. It doesn't matter how many homes they've listed. Part of a Realtor's job is to provide you with a realistic list price for your home. They are not doing you any favors by overpricing your home just so they can get the publicity. You want to seek results, not promises. It also doesn't matter how many homes they sold in years past. The way lake homes are sold today is exponentially different from the way they were sold ten years ago. Experience is great, but make sure your experienced agent has embraced the new technologies and information sources that drive today's market.
2. **What lake-specific advertising do you do?** There are publications and web sites, both local and national, that target lake buyers. Does your agent invest in that type of advertising? If not, they are missing a lot of potential buyers.
3. **What web sites will my lake property be listed on?** It's probably not a surprise that 94% of home searches start on the Internet, and that number increases every year. A lake expert should have a strong web presence to reach the broadest audience. Some agents post on the FMLS, some on the GAMLS, and some on both. You will want to be included in both listing services that serve the metro-Atlanta area. Does the potential agent have a web site that targets lake buyers? Does the agent post listings on a national site to reach other states? There are quite a few out-of-state buyers who invest in property on Lanier. Does the agent post on an international site of any kind? This is especially important for higher-priced homes. Four out of five of the highest priced homes ever sold in the U. S. were sold to international buyers. Sites like [proxiopro.com](http://proxiopro.com) are often used by international buyers, and not everyone invests in this type of exposure.
4. **Does this agent know the rules for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers?** When a potential buyer asks if they can upgrade a property's dock, would this agent be able to answer that question? Do they know the current status of dock permits on Lanier? Do they know what protected areas are? How

wide can the paths be? Can you cut down small trees on Corps property? (No! You can be fined for it. Those rules have changed.) Could they tell potential buyers how to plan for droughts? Do they know local companies that can help with dock issues, riprap, paths? These are the issue that worry buyers. An experienced lake agent can help with those concerns.

5. **Ask if the agent knows whether a dock automatically conveys with the house.** This is a very important question, and most non-lake agents don't know the answer. (A dock is personal property and does not automatically convey with the house.) To convey the dock, there is a very specific way it should be transacted, especially if the buyer is getting a mortgage. Does the agent you're interviewing know how to do that?
6. **Can the agent help you stage your house for lake buyers?** In lake homes, the view is supremely important. There are staging techniques that help showcase the view and direct the buyer's eye to the home's most valuable asset, the lake. Sometimes, the difference between making or losing the sale is as simple as arranging the furniture to showcase the view.
7. **Does the agent know about comparable properties that can be used in an appraisal?** Most appraisers welcome good agent-provided comps when they're doing a lake appraisal. They can read the listings to see the home's features, but it's often harder to find out about the lake situation. A good lake agent can provide comps with similar views, water depth, and path to the subject property being appraised. This is very important because a bad appraisal can absolutely kill a sale, and it often does. A home with shallow water and no view is NOT a good comp for a deep water dock with a great view. A home in Murrayville is not a good comp to a Cumming lake home. This is where an experienced agent can really help in getting a valid, realistic appraisal.
8. **Does the agent have local contractors who can work on the home?** Once a home goes under contract, the buyer will have a professional inspection done. Inspectors always find things wrong with houses, even new construction. Some inspectors state the problems in such a way that it scares the buyers to death. It makes a big difference if you have a local contractor who can give you a quick estimate of the fix and minimize the fears of the buyer. Many times the "problem" is not really an issue, just the normal aging of any house. It helps to have a contractor who knows local codes and can check out these types of issues. Agents from other parts of the state will not have these local contacts and will have to rely on the advice of the professionals in their home towns. These folks charge extra to drive to the lake, and that raises the price of any job. Plus, they probably don't know local codes, so you're paying for them to come up to speed or risking a job done incorrectly.
9. **Does the agent know the area?** Because people find properties as they drive around (by lake or land) on the weekends, a lot of showing requests happen on

short notice. If you choose an agent who lives in Atlanta, it's unlikely that they will be able to run up to the lake at the last minute to show a property. The buyer is going to keep calling until they find someone willing to accommodate them which means they move on to the next property. That is most likely to be a local agent, so it's important to choose someone who lives near the lake. Plus, they are more likely to be able to discuss the local events, stores, schools, restaurants, groups, commercial growth, and other factors that might help sell your lake home. Lake agents don't just sell homes, they sell a lifestyle. You can't sell it if you don't live it.

- 10. What factors go into pricing a lake home?** Whether you're buying or selling a home, understanding the pricing is key. Some cities are hotter than others. Some features, like view and water depth, are extremely important to buyers; therefore, they have a huge influence into the pricing. Ask how the price affects people searching on the internet. For example, a price point of \$529,000 is not a good choice. Web users usually search in \$25k or 50k intervals, so that takes this search into a range that ends in \$550,000 or maybe even \$575,000. That means this house will be compared to nicer homes and may not look as good. Further, a jumbo loan starts at a price point of \$520,000, so this Internet search would pull in buyers who are looking in the jumbo range which probably goes even higher. By dropping it just \$4000 to \$525,000, you will get a lot more search hits and will not be compared to those more expensive homes. Also, conventional marketing wisdom has always stated that you end your price in nines so it looks lower. For example, instead of \$400,000, choose \$399,999. In real estate, all web searches are done by price ranges. If you choose \$399,999, people who start their searches at \$400,000 will not see your house. Above all, you want to be included in as many searches as possible. The more people who see your house, the more likely you will find the right buyer. So, it makes more sense to choose a price point of \$400,000 in this case. It's these small choices that get the job done.

In summary, it really does matter which real estate agent you choose. In this area, there are a lot of experienced agents who specialize in lake property. For sellers to get top dollar and buyers to get the best possible deal, it will pay you to choose an agent who understands the issues involved in buying and selling lake property.

*Bev Knight is the lead agent for The Good Life Group, Keller Williams Lanier Partners, who specialize in property on Lake Lanier. You can email Bev at [bevknig@bellsouth.net](mailto:bevknig@bellsouth.net) or visit her web site at [housesonlanier.net](http://housesonlanier.net).*