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**Canyon Lake
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Researching the Perfect Neighborhood

There's an episode of the hit TV series "How I Met Your Mother" where the characters of Marshall and Lily decide to buy a home in a neighborhood they are unfamiliar with, only to learn later that it sits downwind from a sewer plant. The message is obvious: A buyer must do his or her due diligence on prospective neighborhoods to make the best real estate decisions.

For starters, investigate the local school district as good schools boost your property value. Research the closest parks and community centers and consider how busy streets impact the neighborhood.

Profiling the perfect neighborhood also involves meeting prospective neighbors. Walk through the area and say hello to people, and ask them for their impressions of the neighborhood. While you're at it, look around. Are there lots of kids on the block? Do people walk or jog through the neighborhood at night? A neighborhood can speak volumes by itself.

Don't forget to map out stores and restaurants in the area. You may be used to a five-minute drive to the local grocery store, only to find out that your new home is 25 minutes away from the nearest place to buy milk. Of course, find out if your potential new home is part of a neighborhood association bearing regular fees, and if your community has lawn or construction restrictions.

A good agent can furnish you with a wealth of local information, and will take you on a tour of the closest commerce centers, restaurants and shops.

With a little groundwork you can help ensure that your dream house is surrounded by a dream neighborhood.