



What a buyer wants: Green improvements that cut utility costs

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(BPT) - Going green is good for the environment, but it can also be good for a homeowner's wallet – and that's the aspect of eco-friendly improvements that seems most appealing to homebuyers. More than 80 percent of buyers said they would pay more for home features that saved energy and trimmed utility bills, according to a recent survey by the National Association of Home Builders.

That piece of information can be valuable to home sellers looking to get the best price for their homes this summer. Home improvements that also reduce utility bills – such as skylights and energy-efficient heating, ventilation and cooling systems – may be the investments that ensure a seller's home will get top dollar and multiple offers.

If you're interested in making energy-efficient, cost-cutting improvements a selling point for your home this summer, you can achieve the benefit with basic, moderate or impressive improvements. What you choose to do will depend on your budget, time-frame and perceived benefit in terms of a speedy sale. Here are a handful of improvements, from basic to beautiful:

Seal and insulate – Ideally, you've kept up on your home's insulation and sealing all the time you've lived there. If not, potential buyers may be attracted by recent refurbishments to the caulking and sealing around windows, entry doors, garage doors and ductwork. In most instances, homeowners can easily improve sealing and insulation on their own, without hiring a professional. While the improvement may seem minor, its impact can be significant; EnergyStar.gov says sealing and insulating ducts can boost an HVAC's efficiency as much as 20 percent, and sealing air leaks and adding insulation can trim annual energy bills as much as 10 percent.

Replace old incandescent bulbs – When it comes to cost savings, replacing traditional incandescent bulbs with energy-sipping CFLs or LEDs is a cost-effective way to trim electricity bills. Both types of bulbs use at least 75 percent less energy than traditional incandescents, and last 10 to 25 times longer, according to Energy.gov. While these bulbs cost more than regular bulbs, potential home buyers are likely to embrace the cost savings they'll reap over the lengthy life of the bulbs. In terms of energy upgrades, it's a relatively low-cost, high-impact improvement for a seller to make.

Install a wireless, programmable thermostat – Connectivity is all the rage. When it comes to reducing heating and cooling costs by smarter thermostat use, wireless thermostats are the next big thing. Programmable thermostats have been available for years, and help reduce heating and cooling costs by automating settings to use energy wisely. Wireless thermostats enhance that functionality by allowing users to access their home's temperature controls remotely from any Internet-enabled device. So if you're in the office and realize you forgot to program the settings on your thermostat, you can communicate with the thermostat from your office desktop or your smartphone.

Sellers can realize savings too

Upgrading or installing a skylight – While many energy-efficient home improvements do their jobs behind the scenes, an Energy Star-qualified skylight is front-and-center, saving energy and beautifying a home. A skylight appeals to homebuyers' aesthetic senses and love of savings and they are especially well received in kitchens and baths where they provide not only natural light but fresh air and privacy. A no leak solar powered fresh-air skylight, like those made by Velux America (<http://www.veluxusa.com/>), can help reduce electricity costs by providing passive ventilation and natural light.

Solar-powered Velux blinds (<http://www.veluxusa.com/consumer/products/blinds>) can improve a skylight's energy performance rating by as much as 45 percent while making a strong design statement. Solar-powered skylights and blinds, plus installation costs, can be eligible for a 30 percent federal tax credit. And for 10 weeks during the summer there's also a \$200 cash rebate from Velux on solar skylights. Visit www.whyskylights.com (<http://www.whyskylights.com>) to learn more.

Real-estate industry watchers predict buyers and sellers will both be active this summer. Making the cost-saving improvements buyers crave could help sellers move their homes faster and for the best possible price.