

COVER STORY

5 tips on what to look for when choosing a home for you and your pet

Some developments cater to the furrier members of family

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If you don't do your research, you could end up in the doghouse with your homeowners association and your pet. Pets aren't welcome at some developments.

But some condo, townhome and single-family communities are paying more attention to buyers wanting the best home possible for their furry friends by adding amenities with a focus on exercise and socialization for pets.



Christopher Oquendo/Special
[\(ENLARGE\)](#)

Catherine Chernecky grabs a bag at a pooper-scooper station.



Christopher Oquendo/Special
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Dogs and people get together at a doggie play date at Country Club of the South recently. 'We started thinking it would be great to get our dogs out there running around and to socialize our dogs out there,' says **Catherine Chernecky**, who helped start the group. From left: **Joan Fiore, Chernecky, Karen Woodbury, Susan Cornwell** and **Chris Lewis**.



Christopher Oquendo/Special
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Caren West's Chihuahuas are entertained by the critters they can watch through the loft's wall of glass at Tribute Lofts.

That's because the number of U.S. households with pets is growing, up from 56 percent in 1998 to 63 percent, totaling 71.1 million homes, according to the 2007-08 National Pet Owners Survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

"I'm finding that especially in certain groups, like the baby boomers, that their kids are all gone, these animals have taken the place of their kids that have left," said Pam Gebhardt, a real estate agent with ReMax Greater Atlanta.

The Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association doesn't track how many communities have amenities specifically for pets, but some developments — everything from apartments to high-end country-club estates — are emphasizing their dog parks, pet grooming areas and play groups in an effort to stand out in this buyer's market.

Mona Williams, a real estate agent with Shamrock Realty & Associates, has noticed that when she's visited communities with clients, onsite salespeople may ask if pets are part of the equation. One time, a caller inquiring about a listing asked if the property would work for a potbellied pig.

"Atlantans love their pets. They are literally members of the family," said Cheryl Mondello, sales manager at Mezzo Condominiums in Atlanta.

Mezzo is planning an indoor pet area with bathing stations, areas for play and walks, and a special canine grass.

"When we're touring customers through the sales gallery and we bring up the pet respite, their eyes just open up," she said. "When you have condo towers lining the streets, we do have something to offer our residents that no one else has."

Here are five things agents and homeowners say you should consider when buying a home with your dog, cat or other pets in mind.

1. Are they allowed?

Particularly with condos and townhomes, check the community covenants to make sure they allow pets, and how many, said Toni Kelly-Long, a real estate agent with ReMax Greater Atlanta who has been selling homes in metro Atlanta for 18 years.

At Mezzo, for example, there is no weight limit, but the number of pets is limited to two per unit. American pit bull terriers, Great Danes, Rottweilers, bull mastiffs and Doberman pinschers are not allowed.

2. Is the county, city and neighborhood pet-friendly?

Check whether the local governments have ordinances that apply to pets, such as leash laws, Williams said.

Dawn McGee, a real estate agent with ReMax Greater Atlanta, said she's noticed that some metro communities are creating separate fenced dog areas as part of the city parks. Determine if there are places in the neighborhood set aside specifically for pets, said Gebhardt, who also helped start the doggie play group at Country Club of the South a few years ago.

Take a ride around the neighborhood at night to see if any residents are walking their dogs — some communities even have stations with bags and garbage cans for picking up after them.

Kelly-Long recommends asking if dogs are allowed at community events, or even if there are special events for them, such as pet parades.

It's very much like when you have children, McGee said.

"You look for a neighborhood where you see other children," she said. "If you're in a neighborhood where dogs are a prominent part, you're going to have neighbors more tolerant of the occasional barking, which dogs will do."

3. What type of fences does the community allow?

Some of the newer neighborhoods allow only electronic invisible fences, McGee said. So be sure to check with the homeowners association for restrictions.

"If you have a larger dog, they will often break through," she said. "[Once] they've done it, the fencing doesn't work anymore for them."

4. Do the home's features fit with your pet?

Think about the floors, not only in terms of maintenance but whether your pet can travel easily on them, said Kelly-Long. Although hardwood floors might be easier to clean than carpet, her greyhound has problems walking on slick hardwood floors.

If your pet is older, it might be better to have a one-story home, she added. She's found that some clients prefer a home on a slab so they can let their dogs directly out back instead of a basement home, where the deck has stairs leading to the yard.

5. Will they be happy in the space?

"You have to know your dog's personality," McGee said.

Consider whether your pet enjoys being indoors or outdoors, which will give you a feel for space needs. If you have a large dog, but want to downsize into a condo or townhome, look for nearby parks or walking trails, she said.

Mondello advises checking with groups such as the Atlanta Kennel Club or veterinarians about the type of environment your pet requires.

Common sense has to play into it as well, Williams said. If you have six Labrador retrievers, you know that an 800-square-foot condo is not going to work. Or if you're going to be at work all day, you want a space big enough where you don't have to keep a large animal caged up, she said.

THE LOFT RESIDENT

- **Who:** Caren West, public relations firm owner

- **Community:** Tribute Lofts, Atlanta

- **Pets:** Two female Chihuahuas

- **What she considered:** She admits she was picky and had a lot of stipulations, including needing a place that allowed dogs. A big draw was a courtyard on the inside of the property, West said, which means she doesn't have to walk down a hallway to reach the outdoors. Amenities such as a dog wash station and access to Inman Park were appealing as well. She also liked the floor plan – one wall is entirely glass, so they just people, bird and pet watch. "They're my little guard dogs," she said.

THE TOWNHOME RESIDENT

- **Who:** Jane Su, who works in retail management

- **Community:** Mountain View Townhomes, Marietta

- **Pet:** Tristan, a 1-year-old Lab mix she adopted from the local Humane Society

- **What she considered:** Whether the area was safe for her to walk the dog at night. At Mountain View, she also liked the fact that it had a fenced-off dog park right across from the unit she chose. "He definitely goes to the dog park a couple of times a day. You don't have to leave him on a leash when you go in there," she said. "This was the only community that I viewed with my agent that had a dog park."

THE SINGLE-FAMILY HOME RESIDENT

- **Who:** Catherine Chernecky, a physical therapist

- **Community:** Country Club of the South

- **Pet:** Bentley, an 8-year-old golden retriever

- **What she's done for pets there:** Chernecky helped start a doggie play group, which meets at 5 p.m. Thursdays at the neighborhood's park. There are between five to 12 dogs in the group. "We started thinking it would be great to get our dogs out there running around and to socialize our dogs out there. It is just a lot of fun," she said. "When I meet somebody new in the neighborhood, one of the first questions I ask them is: 'Do you have a dog?'"

- **Other doggone fun:** The community has a pet parade on the Fourth of July, and the property owners association has purchased a wading pool and a bubble machine that churns out liver- and chicken-flavored bubbles for dogs. "It's like a bubble machine on steroids," said Chernecky, who has been able to use it for Bentley's birthday party during play group. The homeowners association also set up pooper-scooper stations about three years ago.