

**A List of**  
**Do's and Don'ts**  
**for the**  
**Noise Sensitive Home Buyer**  
*(before you make the offer)*

by:  
Douglas J. Whicker, P.Eng.  
Principal



**BKL CONSULTANTS LTD.**  
*Consultants in Acoustics*

308 - 1200 Lynn Valley Road  
North Vancouver, B.C. V7J 2A2  
Tel: (604) 988-2508; Fax: (604) 988-7457  
Email: [whicker@bkl.ca](mailto:whicker@bkl.ca)  
Visit our Website at <http://www.bkl.ca>

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**B**uying a house or apartment is a traumatic time. The decision to purchase is often driven by conflicting emotions and pressure to close the deal. In the heat of the moment issues may be overlooked which result in downstream dissatisfaction.

At BKL Consultants, we are often called by the purchasers of a new dwelling shortly after they have moved in, bemoaning a litany of noise concerns. Based

on the myriad of complaints that we have heard in our 30 years of experience in the Acoustical Consulting business, we have assembled this list of noise issues which the buyer should consider prior to making the offer on a new home. While we likely have not caught every situation that could arise, we are confident that if you deal with the following points, your awareness of noise issues in residential dwellings will be raised, and you will make a better decision in your home selection.

## DO

- If you are really sensitive to noise, consider a single family dwelling as a first choice, a townhouse as a second choice, and the top floor of a condominium as your last choice.
- Find out the location of the nearest:
  - ▶ Traffic artery (truck route).
  - ▶ Bus stop - is it right outside your door?
  - ▶ Rail line.
  - ▶ Airport/heliport.
  - ▶ Fire Hall - are you on a route that the fire trucks will frequent?
  - ▶ Hospital/ambulance station - are you on a route that will have ambulances at all times of the day and night?
  - ▶ Pub/nightclub or other facility that could produce loud noise late into the night and could have noisy patrons leaving in the small hours of the morning.
- Talk to the municipal planning department and find out what changes in zoning and/or transportation routes are on the books or planned for the future. Look at any official community plan (OCP) that may be in effect. **Do not rely solely on what the realtor may tell you!!**
- Visit the property several times on different days of the week. Street traffic varies throughout the day. If near an airport, planes take off and land in different directions depending on wind and other factors. Neighbours may be out during the day. In order to get a better appreciation of whether you can live with your neighbours, if possible, arrange to spend a night in the dwelling prior to signing. Of course, this doesn't work if you are one of the first to move into a new project.

- Listen for traffic noise both inside and out.
- Walk outside around the building and note adjacent premises.
  - ▶ If an adjacent property is vacant, find out what the OCP and zoning will permit to be built there.
  - ▶ If trees block your visibility, make a point of finding out what is beyond the trees.
  - ▶ If you are contemplating a multi-family dwelling, consider the significance of outdoor ambient noise on the indoor noise masking. When you select an extremely quiet site, you can expect increased disturbance from noises generated within the building. If the outdoor noise is significant, then it raises the background noise within the suite and masks noise from other units.
- Go with a friend and arrange for the friend to walk in the unit above, flush some toilets, etc. Listen for the noise and judge if it is acceptable.
- Note where the elevator, main transformer and garbage chute is relative to your suite; listen for them in the suite.
- Talk to the builder; confirm that cast iron plumbing waste stacks have been used.
- Get a photocopy of the party wall and demising floor/ceiling assemblies from the architect's drawings for your files. This will prove useful if retrofit upgrades are contemplated.
- Find out if the suite above/below you has the same floor layout. If the layout is the same, then kitchens are over kitchens and bathrooms over bathrooms. If they have different layouts, then the kitchen/bathroom above may be over your bedroom, or your kitchen/bathroom may be over the bedroom below.
- Get written confirmation of the strata's position on changes to floor coverings. You don't want the person above you changing the carpets to marble tile!
- Get written confirmation of the strata's position on pianos and organs.
- If the building is occupied, talk to other residents about noise issues. Do they have any complaints? Can they hear their neighbours?
- Request a copy of the strata council's minutes for the past couple of years. Is there any mention of noise complaints? Were the complaints dealt with?
- Get **written** confirmation of the vendor's and realtor's representations and claims regarding noise and noise issues.



- In a Condominium try to obtain a suite with a minimum of party walls (corner suite, etc.). In a Townhouse, consider an end unit.
- **If you are really sensitive, consider only the top floor in a multi-family dwelling.**

## DON'T

- **Don't** purchase the suite next to the elevator, garbage chute, exercise room or party room.
- **Don't** buy sight unseen.
- **Don't** visit the site **ONLY** on Sunday.
- **Don't** have your bedroom back to back with the kitchen in the next suite or below a kitchen/bathroom above.
- **Don't** expect that you will never hear your neighbours.
- **Don't** make an offer without considering the items on the "Do" list!!

