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Calculating Living Area

What is living area and how does it affect the home buyer or seller? The answer to that question may not be as simple as you think! Most people have heard "Location, location, and location are the factors that determine the value of real estate." Well, in this author's opinion, living area is the second most important factor in determining the price or value of a home.

When people search for a home, living area is one of the top criteria given to identify properties that have enough space. Living area, sometimes referred to as heated area, also serves as an important figure from which real estate agents derive the sales price (For example, comparable properties have sold for \$130 per square foot). Being square footage is so vital; it only makes sense that it be accurate.

In this article we will be considering the living area of a typical detached single family dwelling (most frame constructed homes are considered this type). Living area is space within a home designed for human occupancy. Living area is calculated by measuring the length of the exterior, not by measuring each room and summing the results. There are three criteria that determine if a certain "space" within the total area should be included in the living area calculation. Within each criterion there are certain rules that should be met. To be considered living area, each space must be:

1. **Heated:** Living area must be heated by a permanent conventional heating system that renders the dwelling suitable for year round living. The heating system should be of adequate capacity to service the entire living area. For example, with central HVAC systems, each room will generally have at least one air register.
2. **Finished:** The walls, floors, and ceiling must be constructed and finished in material generally accepted as suitable for interior construction. The ceiling height must be at least seven feet to be considered living area except under beams, etc. where the height must be at least six feet four inches. Also, rooms with sloped ceilings must have at least 50% of the finished area with an average ceiling height of seven feet. Areas of this room with a ceiling height below five feet are excluded from the living area calculation.
3. **Directly Accessible:** All living area must be accessible from other living areas. In spaces where one is required to gain access from outside is generally excluded from the living area calculation.

Measuring and determining the living area of a home can be a challenge but one that must be accurately performed. Results, when relied upon for pricing may result in a drastically over priced or under priced home. Real estate agents should measure and verify the living area each time a house is sold, regardless of whether this information is already available.

For more detailed information on square footage calculations, please refer to the ANSI publication at <http://www.ansi.org>.