

Finding a Dog-Friendly Home



New Zealanders have a long-standing love affair with residential property ownership.

Over the past two years, however, the market has shifted. Independent economist Tony Alexander describes the current property market as a prolonged buyer's market, with first-home buyers among the most active purchasers. An oversupply of properties has given buyers more choice and greater bargaining power, allowing them to take their time and be selective.

What does this mean for dogs?

If the United States market is any indication, there are two distinct groups of home buyers: those

with dogs and those without. For many households, a dog is far more than a pet. It is a valued member of the family. As a result, canine needs increasingly influence purchasing decisions.

Security Comes First

For dog owners, a secure property is often the highest priority. Even the most obedient dog can be tempted by a passing animal, an unfamiliar sound, or an accidentally open gate.

When assessing a property, buyers often pay close attention to:

- The height and condition of fences
- Gaps beneath fences and gates
- The security of latches and gate closures
- Potential escape routes around sheds, decks, or other structures

Replacing or upgrading fencing can be costly, making a secure section an attractive feature for dog-owning households, particularly first-home buyers.

Outdoor Space Matters

A large section is not always essential, but functional outdoor space is highly valued.

Dog owners typically look for:

- Safe areas where dogs can run and play
- Shaded spaces for hot summer days
- Shelter from wind and rain
- Grass or other soft surfaces suitable for exercise

The desire for outdoor space is one reason many dog owners are less attracted to high-density townhouse developments and are often willing to consider outer suburbs or new subdivisions.

Importantly, layout can matter more than size. A well-designed 500-square-metre section may offer greater practical value than a larger property with steep slopes, awkward access, or unusable land.

Looking Beyond the Fence Line

Most buyers recognise that their dog's quality of life extends beyond the property boundary.

When evaluating a neighbourhood, they often consider:

- Nearby walking tracks and reserves
- Dog exercise areas and off-leash parks
- Quiet streets with footpaths
- Access to dog-friendly beaches and rivers
- Traffic volumes and road safety

A home's location can be just as important as its physical features when it comes to supporting an active and healthy lifestyle for both dogs and owners.

Creating a Dog-Friendly Home

Many dogs spend significant time indoors, particularly when their owners are at work.

Features that make daily life easier include:

- Durable, non-slip flooring
- Areas where dogs can be separated when visitors arrive
- Easy-to-clean surfaces
- Good ventilation and natural light
- Minimal stairs and easy outdoor access, especially for ageing dogs

Practical features are often more valuable than cosmetic upgrades and can make a noticeable difference to everyday living.

Increasingly, buyers are also looking for:

- Ample storage for food, bedding, toys, and equipment
- Mudrooms or laundry areas for cleaning muddy paws
- Outdoor taps or, better still, dedicated dog-washing facilities

A Growing Market Opportunity

Buying a home is one of the largest investments most people will ever make. By considering the needs of dogs alongside those of the human members of the household, buyers can choose a property that supports the wellbeing of the entire family.

For sellers, particularly older investors who may be downsizing or liquidating property assets to fund retirement, dog owning buyers are an opportunity. A property that is secure, practical, and welcoming for dogs can appeal to a significant segment of the market and may even help attract more buyers and achieve a faster sale. 

This column represents the author's reflections on her interaction with the dog world and does not necessarily reflect any official position of Dogs New Zealand.