

Booms 'may not deliver all they promise'

Many homebuyers are wary of buying properties in so-called open suburbs because of security concerns - but their confidence in boomed areas may be misplaced.

This is the view of Dr. Willie van der Merwe, owner of the RealNet WaterMeyer franchise in the east of Pretoria. "In our franchise area, which stretches from Brummeria to Murrayfield, crime statistics certainly back this out - crime is actually sometimes more prevalent in closed suburbs and boomed estates than in open suburbs with other security measures such as community patrols and observant residents in place."

He says many buyers who are scorning good buys in open suburbs have not done any research to test the validity of the perception that booms and high-tech equipment equal security, but that, from his own involvement with community forums and neighbourhood patrols in his franchise area, he can say that observant residents and patrols that act as the "eyes and ears of the SAPS" are an excellent and often better crime deterrent than a boomed entrance to a suburb.

"Active community associations also ensure that residents are aware of exactly what is going on in their area. And they will no doubt discover that reports of lost pets and a few medical emergencies dominate our community radios."

Consider before committing

He advises buyers who have security concerns to consider their options before committing to buying any property. "They should keep in mind that there is a real risk that residents in so-called secure areas succumb to a false sense of security and consequently neglect to observe even basic safety measures such as locking doors.

"The bigger a complex or boomed-off area, the bigger the risk that many residents are tenants without a vested interest in the area - and we have indeed seen cases where tenants were proved to be the culprits when controlled access areas were suddenly hit by a wave of theft. Another red flag is an area with a lot of building activity going on, since statistics show such areas are prone to more crime."

Van der Merwe adds that boomed and walled areas also come with higher costs since residents have to foot the bill for equipment and guards' salaries. A new trend in his area, however, is that of security complexes joining community patrol associations due to the faster response.