

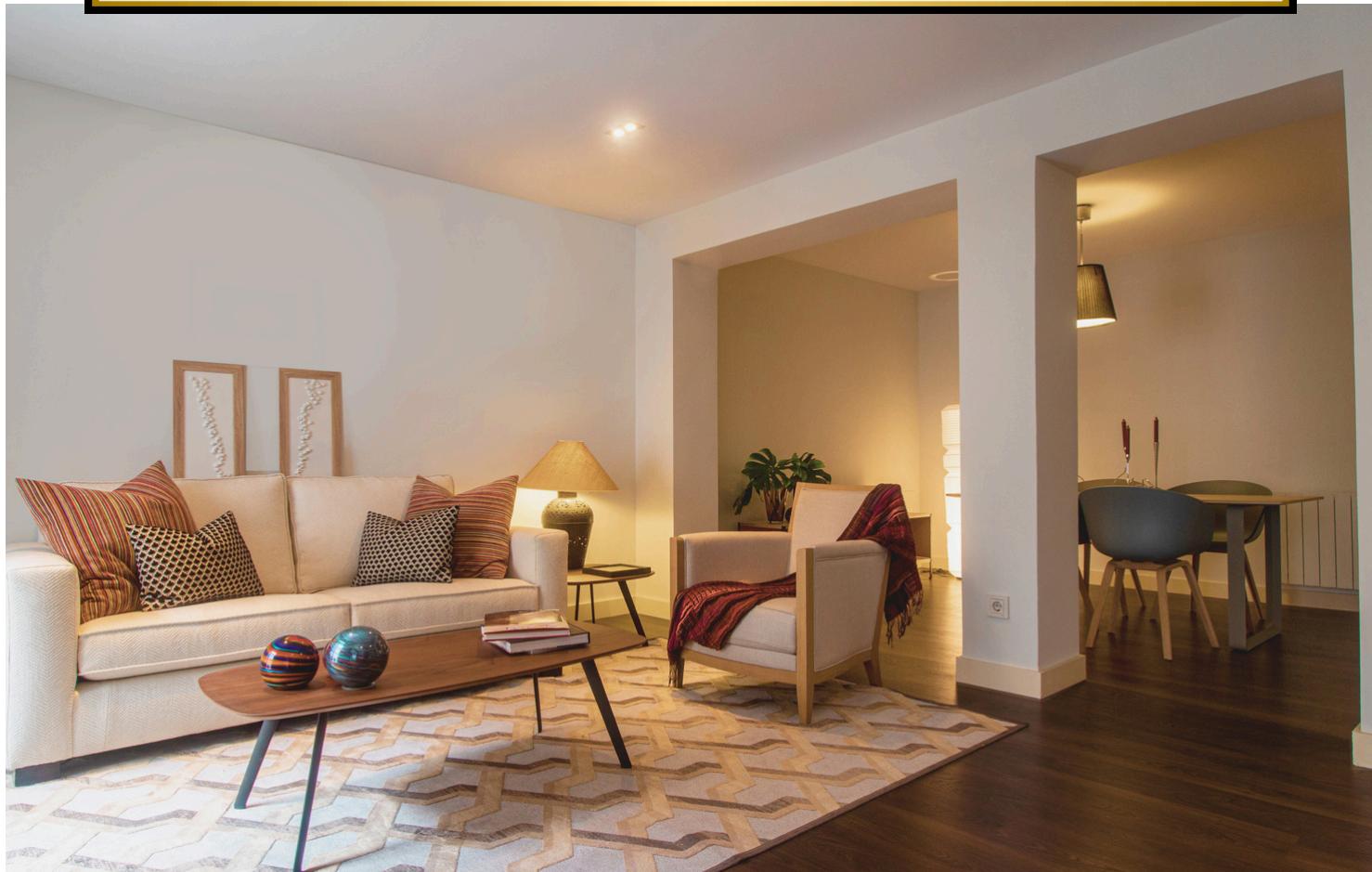
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The Marylander's Guide To  
**BUYING YOUR  
NEXT HOME**

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO BUYING A HOME....  
(EVEN IN A CRAZY COMPETITIVE MARKET)



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# *Exciting times ahead...*

You are about to start a moving journey..literally, one that will end with you as a happy homeowner. While the home-buying process can seem scary. I'm here to make it as seamless, and successful!

## **IN THIS GUIDE:**

- Welcome Message
- Why Buy A Home
- Steps to Homeownership
- Understanding the Maryland Real Estate Market
- Buyer's Roadmap
- Financing Your Home
- Working with a Real Estate Agent
- Touring & Selecting Homes
- Making an Offer
- Home Inspections & Appraisals
- Closing Process
- Moving Checklist

*cheering you on, Kara*

# Dear Future Homeowner,

## SO YOU'RE THINKING OF BUYING A HOME?

I'm Kara, and I'm committed to making your home buying experience an pleasant one.

Buying a home is one of the most exciting and rewarding decisions you'll ever make, and I'm honored to be part of this journey with you. Whether you're a first-time buyer or experienced in the process, my goal is to make your home purchase smooth, stress-free, and enjoyable.

***My goal is straightforward, to help you find the best home for you and secure the best possible deal in this market.***

This guide is designed to walk you through every step of the homebuying process, from securing financing to closing day and beyond. Maryland's real estate market offers incredible opportunities, and having the right knowledge and guidance can make all the difference. As your trusted real estate advisor, I am here to provide expert insight, answer your questions, and ensure you feel confident every step of the way.

**Ready to experience a different kind of home buying journey? Let's get started!**



# Why buy a home?

Owning a home is one of the most significant financial and personal investments you can make. Homeownership offers long-term stability, financial growth, and a place to truly call your own. Here's why buying a home in Maryland could be the right choice for you:

## Build Equity & Wealth

When you own a home, you're investing in your future. Instead of paying rent to a landlord, your mortgage payments contribute to building equity, an asset that grows over time.

## Stability & Predictable Payments

Unlike rent, which can rise each year, a fixed-rate mortgage provides stable monthly payments. Homeownership offers long-term security, allowing you to plan for the future with confidence.

## Tax Advantages

Maryland homeowners may benefit from tax deductions on mortgage interest, property taxes, and other home-related expenses. Consult with a tax professional to see how homeownership can reduce your taxable income.

## Freedom to Make It Your Own

When you own a home, you have complete control over renovations, upgrades, and decorating, something renting doesn't allow. Whether you want to paint the walls, remodel the kitchen, or create a backyard oasis, the choice is yours.

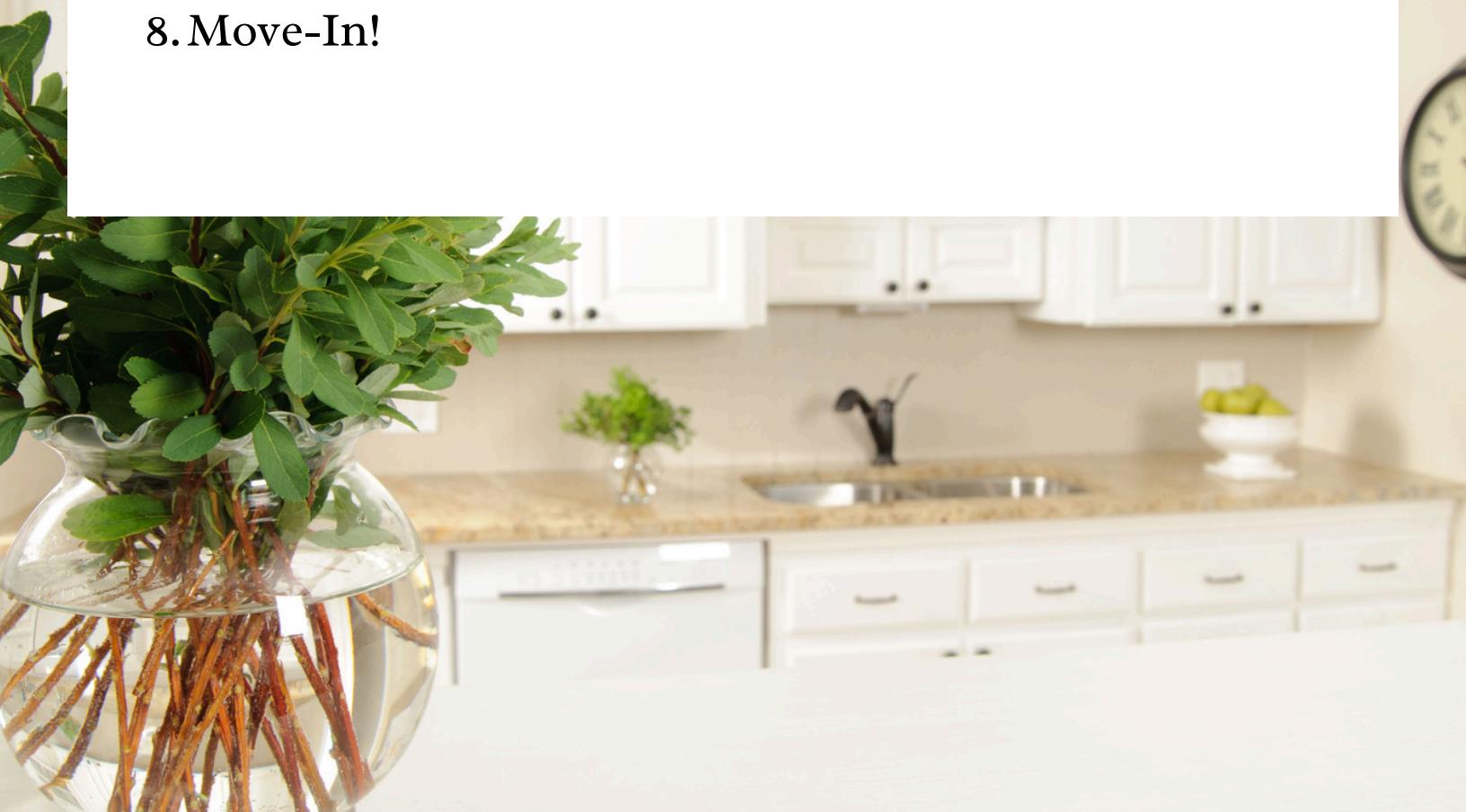
## First-Time Buyer Assistance

Maryland offers a variety of programs to help first-time buyers with down payments, closing costs, and low-interest loans. Programs like the Maryland Mortgage Program (MMP) can make homeownership more accessible.

# 8 STEPS TO HOME OWNERSHIP

(quick overview)

1. Get Pre-Approved for a Loan
2. Sign Buyer's Agreement with your Realtor (Me!)
3. Search for Homes
4. Make an Offer
5. Home Inspection & Appraisal
6. Loan Processing & Underwriting
7. Closing
8. Move-In!



# *Understanding the Maryland Real Estate Market*

## Location & Neighborhood Demand

- Proximity to major cities like Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Annapolis significantly affects home values.
- Highly rated school districts, low crime rates, and access to amenities (parks, shopping, dining) drive up demand.
- Waterfront properties, particularly along the Chesapeake Bay, tend to have higher prices due to their desirability.

## Market Conditions (Buyer's vs. Seller's)

- In a **seller's market**, where demand exceeds supply, home prices rise due to bidding wars and limited inventory
- In a **buyer's market**, where there are more houses available than buyers, prices tend to stabilize or decrease.

## Property Taxes & Local Regulations

- Maryland's property tax rates vary by county, affecting affordability and influencing where buyers choose to purchase.
- Zoning laws, environmental regulations (e.g., Chesapeake Bay protections), and development restrictions can impact home values.

## Seasonal Trends

- The housing market is often more competitive in spring and summer, leading to higher prices.
- Fall and winter typically see fewer buyers (but also fewer homes for sale), which can create opportunities for better deals.

# Buyer's Roadmap



## 1.

### FIND AN AGENT

This is where I come in!

**Why it matters:** An experienced agent helps you navigate the market, negotiate, and handle paperwork.

**What I do:** I advocate for you, protect your interests and guide you through each step.

## 2.

### PRE-APPROVAL

Before looking at homes, it's important to know what you can afford.

**Why it matters:** Pre-approval gives you a clear budget and it is submitted with the offer to purchase.

**What's involved:** A lender will review your credit, income, debt, and employment history.

*tip:*

Gather your financial documents early – pay stubs, W-2's, tax returns and bank statements

## 3.

### DEFINE HOME CRITERIA

Create a "must-have" and "nice-to-have" list.

**Consider:** Number of bedrooms, bathrooms, location, school districts, commute times, etc.

*tip:*

Be realistic about your budget, but stay open-minded. Sometimes the "perfect" home isn't what you originally imagined.

## 4.

### START HOUSE HUNTING

This is the fun part!

I'll set up property alerts, private showings or open houses.

**What to look for:** Layout, condition, natural light, storage, and neighborhood vibe.

**Bring:** A notepad to take notes – if you tour more than 3-4 homes, sometimes the details can run together.

## 5.

### MAKE AN OFFER

**We'll discuss:** Price, contingencies (financing, inspection, appraisal) and closing timeline.

I'll draft and submit a competitive offer tailored to the current market conditions.

**In competitive markets, you may need to act quickly or include an escalation clause**

*tip:*

## 6.

### OFFER ACCEPTED – UNDER CONTRACT

Once your offer is accepted, the real work begins.

**Earnest Money Deposit:** You'll submit this within a few days as a show of good faith – this deposit will be applied to your closing costs.

**Next steps:** We'll order inspections and notify your lender to begin processing the loan.

## 7.

### HOME INSPECTION

This protects you from costly surprises.

tip:

Attend the home inspection if possible – it's a great time to learn about your future home.

You'll hire a licensed inspector to evaluate the home's condition (structure, roof, HVAC, plumbing, etc.)

Based on the report, we may negotiate repairs or a credit at closing.

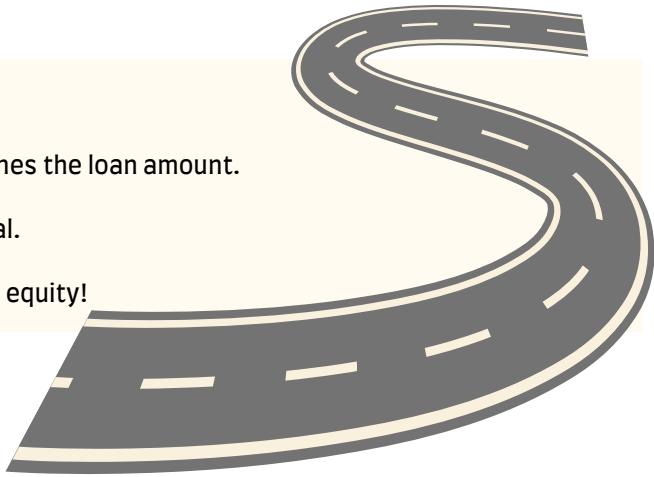
## 8.

### APPRAISAL

Your lender requires this to ensure the home's value matches the loan amount.

If the appraisal comes in low, we may renegotiate or appeal.

If it meets or exceeds the offer price – great news, instant equity!



## 9.

### FINAL LOAN APPROVAL

The lender completes the underwriting and gives a "clear to close".

You'll sign final loan documents and review all financials before settlement.

**Avoid: Major financial changes (like new credit cards or large purchases) until after closing.**

## 10.

### FINAL WALK-THROUGH

Usually 24-48 hours before closing.

We'll check to ensure the home is in the same condition, agreed-upon repairs are completed, and nothing has changed since the contract began.

## 11.

### CLOSING DAY

The big day!

You'll sign all necessary paperwork and pay your closing costs.

The property officially transfers to you and you'll receive the keys.

Celebrate!

## 12.

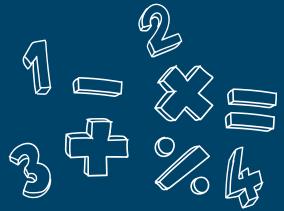
### MOVE IN & STAY CONNECTED

After closing I'm still here to help.

Need a contractor, cleaner or mover? I've got connections.

Keep in touch – whether it's a question about homeownership, a future sale, or just to say hello.

# Financing Your Home



Buying a home is exciting, but unless you're paying all cash, you'll need financing. Here's what you should know to get your mortgage ducks in a row.

## Check Your Credit:

Your credit score plays a big role in what interest rate and loan programs you qualify for. Request a free credit report, check for errors, and avoid taking on new debt before applying for a loan.

## Get Pre-Approved:

Before you start shopping, talk to a lender and get pre-approved. This shows sellers you're a serious buyer and gives you a clear idea of your budget.

## Understand Loan Types

Common mortgage options include Conventional, FHA, VA, and USDA loans. Each has its own down payment requirements, credit score minimums, and benefits.

## Know Your Down Payment Options

While 20% down is traditional, many buyers put down much less. Programs exist for as little as 0%–3.5% down depending on your qualifications.

## Budget for Closing Costs

Closing costs typically range from 2%–5% of the purchase price and cover things like lender fees, title insurance, and prepaid taxes and insurance.

## Maintain Financial Stability

Avoid large purchases, job changes, or opening new credit lines during the loan process. Your lender will re-check your financial situation before closing.

 **Pro Tip:** Work closely with your lender and real estate agent to find the best loan program for your needs. Getting your financing in order early helps ensure a smooth path to closing.

# Working with a Real Estate Agent



Buying a home is one of the biggest financial decisions you'll make, and having the right agent by your side can make the process smoother, less stressful, and more successful. Here's what you should know about working with a real estate agent.

## What an Agent Does

Your agent is your guide, negotiator, and advocate throughout the home buying process. They help you find properties, schedule showings, provide market insights, negotiate offers, and coordinate with all parties to get you to the closing table.

## Representation Matters

A buyer's agent represents your interests, not the seller's. This means they work to get you the best price, terms, and protections.

## Communication is Key

Be open and honest about your needs, budget, and concerns. The more your agent knows, the better they can help you find the right home.

## Understanding the Agreement

You will sign a Buyer Representation Agreement. This outlines your agent's duties and how they are compensated (usually by the seller). Always read and understand the terms before signing. Ask questions!

## Trust the Process

Lean on your agent's expertise. They know the market, understand contracts, and can help you avoid costly mistakes.

 **Pro Tip:** Choose an agent you feel comfortable with, someone who listens, communicates well, and has proven experience in your local market.

# Touring & Selecting Homes



## Before You Tour:

- Narrow your list to your top choices based on your must-haves and deal-breakers.
  - Review property disclosures and photos thoroughly.
  - Map out the locations and research commute times, schools, and amenities.
- Drive by the properties before touring if you can to see what the photos sometimes don't show

## During the Tour:

- Take notes and photos to keep track of what you like or don't like in each home.
  - Pay attention to layout, storage, natural light, and overall condition.
- Think about how your furniture would fit and how the space would feel day-to-day.

## Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Can I see myself living here for at least the next few years?
  - How does this home compare to others I've seen?
  - What would I need to spend on updates or maintenance?

## After the Tour:

- Rank your favorites and discuss pros and cons.
- If time allows, consider revisiting your top choice before making an offer.
  - Don't wait too long - if you love it, let's act quickly.
- I'll help you analyze the home's value and guide you through writing a strong offer.

## Your Real Estate Ally:

I'm here to help you evaluate each home, avoid red flags, and make a confident decision.

**Have questions after the tour? Text, call, or email me anytime – this is a team effort!**

# Making an Offer



## Steps to Making a Strong Offer:

- Review the property's condition, disclosures, and recent comps.
- Decide on your offer price, considering current market conditions and your budget.
- Choose your contingencies wisely (financing, appraisal, etc.) - the fewer, the stronger.
  - Determine earnest money deposit (EMD) amount to show you're serious.
  - Select your settlement date.
- I'll help you draft the offer and present it professionally to the listing agent.

## What Makes a Competitive Offer?

- Strong price backed by solid market data.
  - Pre-approval letter included.
- Clean terms-fewer contingencies, flexible closing.
  - Reasonable (or waived) repair requests.

## Things to Consider Before Submitting:

- Are you emotionally ready to move forward if the offer is accepted?
  - Can you be flexible if there's a counteroffer?
- Are you financially prepared for closing costs and moving expenses?

## After You Submit:

- The seller may accept, reject, or counter your offer.
- We'll review any counteroffers together and respond strategically.
- Once accepted, we go under contract and begin the next phase (inspections, appraisal, etc.).

### 💡 Pro Tip:

In a competitive market, speed and confidence matter. If you're serious about a property, being ready to act quickly can make all the difference.

# Home Inspection & Appraisal



## Home Inspection Basics:

- Paid by buyer upon service performed (not at closing)
- Typically done within 5-10 days after your offer is accepted.
- Conducted by a licensed inspector to assess the home's condition.
- Covers major systems: roof, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, foundation, etc.
  - You'll receive a detailed report of any issues found.
- You can negotiate repairs, credits, or walk away depending on contract terms.



## Common Inspection Findings:

- GFCI outlets not functioning
- Roof age or wear
- Plumbing leaks or corrosion
- Water heater issues
- Termite damage or moisture intrusion
- HVAC system age or lack of maintenance

## What Happens After the Inspection?

- Review the report with me to determine what's worth addressing.
- Submit a repair request, credit request, or notice to terminate (if allowed by contract).
- Seller may agree, counter, or decline requests - we'll strategize accordingly.

## Appraisal Overview:

- Required by the lender to confirm the home's value meets or exceeds your offer price.
  - Paid by buyer at time of appraisal.
- Conducted by a licensed appraiser who evaluates the home and compares recent sales.
  - Ensures the lender isn't over loaning on a property.
- If the appraisal comes in low, we'll negotiate with the seller or reassess your loan options.

### 💡 Pro Tip:

- Attend the home inspection if you can, it's a great chance to learn about the property.
  - Don't panic over small issues, focus on health, safety, and major systems.
  - Appraisals are out of our control, but I'll guide you through every scenario.
- Knowledge is power, and these steps protect you as a buyer. I'm here to break it all down and advocate for you every step of the way!

# The Closing Process



## You're Under Contract – Now What?

- We've negotiated and signed the contract – congrats! Now the real countdown begins.
  - Your lender orders the appraisal and finalizes your loan.
  - Title company begins preparing for settlement (title search, deed, etc.).
- I'll help coordinate all necessary inspections and walk you through next steps.

## What Happens Leading Up to Closing:

- Loan is underwritten – your lender may request additional documentation.
  - Title work is reviewed to ensure there are no liens or issues.
  - Insurance policy must be secured and submitted.
- Settlement statement (CD or ALTA) will be prepared showing final figures.
  - Set up utilities
- Final walk-through is typically done the day of closing to verify condition.

## Closing Day Checklist:

- Bring a valid photo ID.
- Funds to close must be wired or brought in certified form (no personal checks). Title will inform us
  - Review and sign paperwork (loan docs, deed, affidavits, etc.).
- You'll receive the keys once the transaction is funded and recorded – usually same day!

## After You Close:

- You're officially a homeowner – **CELEBRATE!**
- Change the locks, and file your homestead tax credit (if applicable).
- I'm still here for you long after closing – reach out with any questions or future real estate needs.

### 💡 Pro Tip:

Delays can happen – stay responsive, flexible, and keep communication open. I'll be in your corner the entire time, making sure we hit every deadline and avoid surprises.

Let's get you to the finish line smoothly and with a smile!

# MOVING CHECKLIST

Stay organized and stress-free with this step-by-step timeline



## 4-6 Weeks Before Moving

- Hire a moving company or reserve a moving truck
- Create moving binder or folder to track receipts, checklists and documents
- Sort & purge items you no longer need - donate, sell, or toss
- Notify your landlord if renting - check your lease for requirements
- Start using up any pantry, freezer and cleaning supplies



## 2-4 Weeks Before Moving

- Change your address with USPS ([www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com))
- Notify important contacts
  - Banks & credit cards · Insurance Companies
  - Electric, gas, water · Trash /recycling
- Schedule disconnection/set-up of utilities - Electric, gas, water
- Notify your landlord if renting - check your lease for requirements
- Start using up any pantry, freezer and cleaning supplies



## 1 Week Before Moving

- Confirm details with movers or truck rental
- Pack essentials box (clothes, toiletries, chargers, importance docs)
- Refill prescriptions
- Secure valuables (jewelry, personal documents, etc)



## Moving Day

- Do a final walkthrough of your old home
- Check closets, cabinets, and storage areas
- Take meter readings (water, electric, gas)
- Hand off keys or leave them per instructions
- CELEBRATE - you did it!



# Let's Make Your Move Happen



Thank you for taking the time to review this guide. Buying a home is one of the biggest decisions you'll ever make—and having the right agent by your side makes all the difference.

As your trusted buyer's agent, I'm here to protect your interests, guide you through every step, and make the experience smooth, informed, and exciting.

Ready to start your home search? Let's connect.



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