THE FSBO PLAYBOOK

A Step-by-Step Home Seller's Marketing & Transaction Guide

Prepare • Price • Market • Show • Negotiate • Close

MICHIGAN EDITION

Created as an educational resource for homeowners who want to understand what it takes to sell without a real estate agent.

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Before You Put the Sign in the Yard

Selling your own home can be done, but you are taking on several jobs at once: pricing analyst, marketer, photographer, showing coordinator, security screener, negotiator, transaction coordinator and closing organizer. This guide gives you a practical order of operations so important steps do not get missed.

IMPORTANT - EDUCATIONAL GUIDE, NOT LEGAL ADVICE
Real-estate forms, tax requirements and local practices can change. Use a reputable Michigan title company and consider having a Michigan real-estate attorney review your purchase agreement, addenda and unusual terms before you sign. Never use a generic internet contract you do not fully understand.

Your FSBO Road Map

Step	Phase	Primary Objective
1	Research & pricing	Know your competition, likely value and net proceeds.
2	Prepare the property	Repair, clean, declutter, stage and create a showing-ready home.
3	Build the document file	Gather disclosures, title information and transaction forms.
4	Create the marketing	Photography, video, signs, ads and online distribution.
5	Launch & show	Screen prospects, manage showings and hold open houses safely.
6	Qualify the buyer	Verify lender preapproval or cash funds before accepting risk.
7	Negotiate & contract	Evaluate price, terms, contingencies, timing and net proceeds.
8	Due diligence	Inspection, appraisal, title work, repairs and amendments.
9	Close	Final walkthrough, settlement figures, deed/signatures and keys.

Create a Sale File Before You Start

☐ One physical binder and one secure digital folder

☐ A contact log for every inquiry and showing

☐ A copy of every signed document and revision

☐ Receipts/invoices for improvements and major repairs

☐ A transaction calendar with every deadline

☐ A showing log and feedback notes

☐ A final closing folder with settlement documents

1. Price the Home Like a Buyer and Appraiser Will

The most expensive FSBO mistake is usually not an advertising mistake - it is a pricing mistake. Buyers compare your home against everything else available, and a financed buyer's lender may require an appraisal.

Build a Comparable-Sales Set

☐ Start with recent closed sales, ideally within roughly 3-6 months when enough data exists.

☐ Stay close geographically and within the same school/market area when possible.

☐ Match property type, style, approximate square footage, age, lot, garage, basement and condition.

☐ Separate active listings (your competition) from closed sales (evidence of value).

☐ Study days on market, price reductions and seller concessions when available.

☐ Adjust mentally for major differences instead of simply averaging sale prices.

> **PRICE FOR THE MARKET, NOT FOR YOUR MORTGAGE BALANCE**
> Your payoff, renovation cost or desired profit does not determine market value. The buyer compares alternatives; the appraiser compares market evidence.

Calculate Your Estimated Net

Line Item	Estimate
Expected sale price	$_________
Mortgage / lien payoff(s)	- $_________
Title / closing charges	- $_________
Transfer taxes / recording / local charges	- $_________
Buyer concessions, if any	- $_________
Repairs / credits	- $_________
Moving / occupancy costs	- $_________
Estimated seller net	$_________

2. Prepare the Home for Sale

Buyers form an opinion quickly. Your goal is not to make the home look “lived in”; it is to make the home easy to evaluate, photograph and imagine owning.

Exterior / Curb Appeal

☐ Mow, edge, trim shrubs and remove dead landscaping.

☐ Pressure wash siding, walks, porch and deck where appropriate.

☐ Clean gutters; touch up peeling trim and front-door paint.

☐ Repair loose handrails, steps, screens, latches and obvious trip hazards.

☐ Remove excess vehicles, trash cans, toys and yard clutter for photos/showings.

☐ Make the house number visible from the street.

Interior

☐ Deep-clean kitchens, baths, floors, windows and light fixtures.

☐ Declutter counters, closets, basement and garage. Aim to show storage space.

☐ Remove excess personal photos, collections and valuables.

☐ Repair dripping faucets, running toilets, loose handles, burned-out bulbs and obvious deferred maintenance.

☐ Use neutral bedding/towels and reduce oversized furniture when rooms feel small.

☐ Address strong pet, smoke, moisture or cooking odors at the source.

☐ Collect permits, warranties, manuals and invoices for major improvements.

Pre-Listing Optional Inspections

A seller may choose a pre-listing home inspection, sewer scope, well/septic evaluation, radon test, roof/HVAC review or other specialty inspection. The benefit is fewer surprises; the tradeoff is that findings may create disclosure obligations. Discuss material findings with an attorney or qualified professional rather than hiding them.

3. Build the Document & Contract File

Do this before marketing. A buyer can appear quickly, and a rushed seller is more likely to sign the wrong form or miss a deadline.

Seller / Property Documents to Gather

☐ Current deed and complete legal description

☐ Most recent property-tax bills and parcel identification number

☐ Current mortgage statements and lender contact information

☐ Homeowners association / condo documents, rules, budgets, fees and assessments, if applicable

☐ Survey, if available

☐ Well / septic records, permits and test results, if applicable

☐ Certificates of occupancy, building permits and warranties, when available

☐ Invoices for roof, HVAC, windows, foundation, waterproofing, electrical, plumbing or other major work

☐ Rental/lease documents if the property is tenant occupied

☐ Any existing title policy or prior closing documents

Core Transaction Documents to Discuss With Your Attorney / Title Company

Document	What It Controls
Purchase Agreement	Price, earnest money, financing, contingencies, deadlines, possession, included/excluded items, default remedies and closing terms.
Seller Disclosure Statement	Michigan's Seller Disclosure Act generally requires a written disclosure for covered residential transfers; statutory exemptions exist.
Lead-Based Paint Disclosure	Generally required under federal law for most housing built before 1978, together with the required lead information.
Addendum / Addenda	Adds agreed terms not fully addressed in the main purchase agreement, such as occupancy, appraisal gap, sale-of-home, well/septic or personal property.
Amendment	Changes a signed contract after acceptance - for example, price, repair credit, closing date or financing terms.
Inspection Response / Repair Agreement	Documents repairs, credits, price changes or acceptance following inspections.
Financing Addendum	Clarifies loan type, loan amount, financing deadline and consequences if financing fails.
Seller Concession Addendum	Documents closing-cost credits or other seller-paid amounts, subject to lender rules.
Possession / Occupancy Agreement	Used when possession is before or after closing; should address rent/holdover, insurance, utilities, condition and risk.
Personal Property Addendum	Separates or clarifies items such as appliances, furniture or equipment when appropriate.

Document	What It Controls
Title / Closing Documents	Deed, affidavits, settlement statement, tax forms, payoff authorizations and other closing-company documents.
Cancellation / Release	Documents termination and handling of earnest money when a contract is cancelled.

DO NOT “PATCH” A CONTRACT WITH TEXT MESSAGES

If a signed contract changes, use a written amendment or other appropriate signed document. Keep one clearly labeled final contract file so everyone knows which terms control.

4. Michigan & Federal Disclosure Checkpoints

For many Michigan one-to-four-unit residential transfers, the Michigan Seller Disclosure Act requires a written disclosure statement, subject to statutory exemptions. The statute also addresses when the disclosure is delivered and the form/content of the statement.

For most housing built before 1978, federal lead-based-paint rules require sellers to disclose known lead information, provide available records/reports, give the buyer the required EPA lead-hazard information and include required contract language before the buyer is obligated under the contract.

Fair housing laws also apply to advertising and the sale of housing. Avoid language or screening practices that indicate a preference or limitation based on a protected class.

Disclosure File Checklist

☐ Complete the Michigan Seller Disclosure Statement carefully and truthfully when applicable.

☐ Do not guess. If you do not know an answer, use the form’s permitted response and obtain advice if needed.

☐ Update disclosures if you learn of a material change before closing.

☐ If the home was built before 1978, complete the federal lead disclosure process when applicable.

☐ Provide existing reports you are required to provide; do not selectively hide unfavorable pages.

☐ Keep dated copies showing what was delivered to the buyer and when.

☐ Ask the title company / attorney about local well, septic, point-of-sale, municipal, condo/HOA or other requirements.

5. Professional Photography & Video

Your first showing usually happens on a phone screen. Poor photos can make a good house look overpriced before the buyer ever visits.

Photography Standards

☐ Shoot after decluttering and cleaning - not before.

☐ Use a professional real-estate photographer when possible.

☐ Photograph during good daylight; turn on interior lights and open blinds consistently.

☐ Keep vertical lines straight; avoid extreme wide-angle distortion.

☐ Use a logical photo order: hero exterior, key living spaces, kitchen, primary bedroom/bath, secondary rooms, basement, garage, outdoor features.

☐ Show the actual condition. Do not digitally remove permanent defects or misrepresent features.

☐ Remove people, pets, family photos, medications, valuables, license plates and sensitive paperwork from view.

☐ Include important selling features: lot privacy, finished basement, updates, workshop, views, patio/deck, etc.

Video Plan

☐ Create a 60-120 second vertical walk-through for social media.

☐ Create a slower horizontal property tour for website/YouTube use.

☐ Start with the strongest feature in the first few seconds.

☐ Move slowly; avoid fast pans and shaky footage.

☐ Use simple on-screen facts: price, beds, baths, square footage, major updates and contact method.

☐ Do not use copyrighted music unless licensed for your use.

PHOTO RULE OF THUMB
If a room does not look appealing in the photo, fix the room before trying to “fix” the photo.

6. Write an Ad That Sells the Benefit, Not Just the Features

A strong property ad should be specific, easy to scan and accurate. Avoid exaggerated claims you cannot support.

Recommended Ad Formula

1. Lead with the strongest reason to care: location, setting, layout, condition, update or value.
2. State the essential facts: price, bedrooms, baths, approximate square footage and major property type.
3. Describe 3-5 meaningful benefits, not a room-by-room inventory.
4. Call out recent improvements with dates when known.
5. Explain showing/open-house instructions and how to contact you.
6. Use neutral, inclusive language and avoid statements that suggest a preference for a type of buyer or household.

Ad Template

COPY-AND-CUSTOMIZE TEMPLATE
FOR SALE BY OWNER - [CITY / NEIGHBORHOOD]

Priced at $[PRICE], this [STYLE] home offers [BEDS] bedrooms, [BATHS] baths and approximately [SQ FT] sq. ft. The standout features include [FEATURE 1], [FEATURE 2] and [FEATURE 3]. Recent improvements include [UPDATES]. Enjoy [LOCATION / LOT / LIFESTYLE BENEFIT].

Private showings available to qualified buyers. Buyers using financing should be prepared to provide a current lender preapproval; cash buyers should provide reasonable proof of funds before contract acceptance. Contact [NAME / PHONE] for details and showing availability.

Facts to Verify Before Publishing

☐ Legal address and municipality

☐ School district (verify; do not assume)

☐ Property taxes and exemptions

☐ Square footage and source

☐ Bedroom/bath count

☐ Lot size / acreage

☐ HOA/condo dues and assessments

☐ Included appliances / fixtures

☐ Year built

☐ Public vs. well/septic utilities

☐ Any claims such as “new roof,” “waterfront,” “finished basement” or “walkable”

7. Signs, Directionals & Showing Information

Signs should make the next action obvious. A sign overloaded with ten selling points is harder to read from a moving car than one with a strong headline and one contact method.

Main Yard Sign

☐ Large “FOR SALE BY OWNER” or “FOR SALE” headline

☐ Readable phone number

☐ Optional short URL or QR code to property details

☐ Use a rider for “OPEN HOUSE” rather than crowding the main sign

☐ Check city/township, subdivision/HOA and right-of-way sign rules before installation

☐ Do not place directionals where prohibited or where they create a traffic hazard

Open House Signs

☐ Use high-contrast directional arrows.

☐ Put signs out shortly before the event and retrieve them immediately after.

☐ Place an “OPEN HOUSE - PLEASE COME IN” sign at the entrance.

☐ Keep valuables, prescriptions, mail, financial records, spare keys and portable electronics secured.

☐ Have at least one other adult present when possible.

8. Launch the Marketing

The objective is concentrated exposure, not random posting. Buyers should see consistent price, facts, photos and contact instructions everywhere the property appears.

Launch Checklist

☐ A dedicated property page or website page

☐ Major consumer real-estate portals that permit owner listings

☐ Facebook Marketplace / appropriate local groups, where allowed

☐ Your personal social media network

☐ Neighborhood/community channels that allow real-estate posts

☐ Local employer / relocation / community bulletin channels where appropriate

☐ Printed feature sheets at the property

☐ Email/text outreach to personal contacts without spamming or violating platform rules

☐ A scheduled first-weekend open house

Track Marketing Performance Weekly

Metric	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Online inquiries	___	___	___
Showing requests	___	___	___
Completed showings	___	___	___
Open-house visitors	___	___	___
Offers received	___	___	___
Most common feedback	________	________	________

WHEN TO REACT
Lots of views but few showings usually points to price, photos, property presentation or a major objection visible in the listing. Showings but no offers often means buyers do not see enough value at the current price/terms.

9. Showings & Open Houses

Before Every Showing

☐ Confirm the appointment and names of expected visitors.

☐ For a financed buyer, consider requesting a current lender preapproval before private showings, especially when security or seller disruption is a concern.

☐ For cash buyers, ask whether they can provide proof of funds before contract acceptance.

☐ Turn on lights; open blinds; set comfortable temperature.

☐ Secure valuables, weapons, prescriptions, financial documents and personal information.

☐ Remove or secure pets.

☐ Have property fact sheet and disclosure process ready.

☐ Leave buyers enough space to look, but maintain safe procedures.

Open House Flow

7. Set a defined 2-hour window and advertise it consistently.
8. Use directionals legally and make the entrance obvious.
9. Ask visitors to sign in with name, phone/email and whether they are working with an agent; protect the list and do not publicly expose contact information.
10. Let visitors tour, then answer property questions factually.
11. Ask what they liked, what concerned them and whether the home fits their timeframe.
12. Follow up promptly with serious prospects.

> **SAFETY**
> Do not advertise that the home will be vacant or that you are alone. Never leave jewelry, cash, medication, checkbooks, identity documents or firearms accessible during a showing.

10. Make Sure the Buyer Can Actually Close

A high offer from an unqualified buyer can cost you weeks. Financing strength is part of the offer - not an afterthought.

Financed Buyer

☐ Request a current preapproval letter from a legitimate lender before accepting the offer.

☐ Confirm that the letter is for an amount sufficient for the purchase price or expected loan amount.

☐ With the buyer’s permission or through the buyer, verify the lender/loan officer contact information independently.

☐ Ask whether the lender has reviewed income, assets and credit, while respecting the buyer’s privacy and avoiding discriminatory questions.

☐ Understand the proposed loan type (conventional, FHA, VA, USDA or other) because property-condition and appraisal requirements can differ.

☐ Confirm the buyer has funds for down payment, closing costs and any appraisal gap not covered by financing.

☐ Use clear financing and appraisal deadlines in the contract.

A preapproval is useful evidence that a lender is tentatively willing to lend up to a stated amount, but it is not a loan guarantee. The buyer still must satisfy underwriting and property-related requirements.

Cash Buyer

☐ Request reasonable proof of liquid funds or accessible funds sufficient to close.

☐ Redact account numbers and unnecessary private information; you only need credible evidence of ability to perform.

☐ Confirm whether funds depend on selling another property, liquidating investments or another event.

☐ Use a reputable title/closing company and independently verify wiring instructions.

11. Compare Offers by Net, Risk and Timing

The best offer is not automatically the highest price. Compare the whole package.

Offer Factor	Questions to Ask
Price	What is the gross price and realistic seller net?
Financing	Loan type? Down payment? Strong preapproval?
Cash	Verified funds? Any hidden financing dependency?
Earnest money	How much, who holds it, when due and under what release terms?
Inspection	How long is the period and what termination/renegotiation rights exist?
Appraisal	Is there an appraisal contingency? Any appraisal-gap commitment?
Sale contingency	Must the buyer sell another property first? Is it already under contract?
Closing date	Does it fit your payoff, move and next-home timeline?
Possession	At closing or later? If later, what safeguards apply?
Seller concessions	How much are you paying toward buyer costs? Is lender approval required?
Included items	Are appliances, fixtures or personal property clearly identified?
Other terms	Home warranty, repairs, occupancy, rent-back, special tests or unusual conditions?

Offer Comparison Worksheet

	Offer A	Offer B	Offer C
Price	$___	$___	$___
Seller concessions	$___	$___	$___
Estimated repairs/credits	$___	$___	$___
Estimated net	$___	$___	$___
Financing strength	___	___	___
Inspection risk	___	___	___
Appraisal risk	___	___	___
Closing / possession	___	___	___

	Offer A	Offer B	Offer C
Overall risk: L/M/H	___	___	___

12. Negotiate Without Giving Away Your Position

Negotiation is easiest when you decide your priorities before the offer arrives. Know your preferred price, minimum acceptable net, ideal closing date, possession needs and which terms matter most.

Negotiation Method

13. Acknowledge the offer and determine its expiration time.
14. Calculate estimated net proceeds, not just sale price.
15. Identify the 1-3 terms that create the most risk or cost.
16. Verify financing/proof of funds before making major concessions.
17. Trade concessions rather than simply giving them away: price for closing date, credit for as-is terms, etc.
18. Put every accepted change in the written contract or amendment.
19. Do not rely on "the lender said it should be fine." Get material financing terms documented through the buyer/lender and contract.

Useful Negotiation Questions

- What is most important to the buyer besides price?
- How much cash does the buyer have available for down payment, closing and appraisal difference?
- Is the buyer flexible on closing or possession?
- Is the buyer asking for a credit because of cash constraints or because of a specific defect?
- If I agree to this concession, what will the buyer improve in return?
- Which contingency can be shortened, clarified or removed without creating unreasonable risk?

COUNTEROFFERS

A counteroffer can change the legal posture of an offer. Use a proper written counter / amendment process and understand expiration, acceptance and delivery rules before assuming you have a deal.

13. Inspection Period & Repair Negotiations

Once under contract, immediately calendar the inspection deadline and exactly what the contract permits the buyer to do.

Common Inspection Types

☐ General home inspection

☐ Radon

☐ Sewer scope

☐ Well / water quality

☐ Septic system

☐ Pest / wood-destroying insects

☐ Roof specialist

☐ HVAC

☐ Electrical / plumbing specialist

☐ Foundation / structural engineer

☐ Environmental / mold assessment when warranted

After the Inspection

Depending on the signed contract, the buyer may accept, request repairs/credits, renegotiate, or exercise a termination right. Do not assume the buyer has a right that is not in the contract, and do not assume you can simply refuse without consequences. Read the exact inspection language.

☐ Require repair requests and responses in writing.

☐ Use licensed/qualified contractors when the agreement requires it or the work warrants it.

☐ Keep invoices, paid receipts, permits and warranties.

☐ If giving a credit, confirm the buyer's lender allows it.

☐ Use a signed amendment to change price, credits, repairs or deadlines.

☐ Update disclosures if inspection findings create new material knowledge that must be disclosed.

14. Appraisal & Financing Underwriting

If the buyer is financing, the lender generally orders the appraisal. Your job is to provide access and make sure the property is ready to be evaluated.

Prepare for Appraisal

☐ Make all agreed repairs that must be completed before appraisal/reinspection.

☐ Provide safe, unobstructed access to all rooms, attic/crawl/basement areas as appropriate.

☐ Make utilities operational when required for the loan/appraisal process.

☐ Prepare a concise improvement list with dates and permit information when available.

☐ Have relevant comparable-sale information ready, but do not pressure or attempt to improperly influence the appraiser.

If the Appraisal Is Low

Possible outcomes depend on the contract: buyer brings additional cash, seller reduces price, the parties split the difference, another contractual remedy applies, or the transaction terminates if the contingency permits. Do not agree to a price change verbally - document it.

> **FINANCING IS NOT DONE UNTIL IT IS DONE**
> Continue tracking loan commitment/approval, appraisal, underwriting conditions, title conditions, insurance and closing disclosure timing. A preapproval at the start is not the same as final approval to close.

15. Title Work, Liens & Closing Preparation

Open the title order promptly after contract acceptance with a reputable Michigan title/closing company. Do not wait until the end of the inspection period unless your attorney advises otherwise.

Title Company Typically Helps Coordinate

☐ Title search / commitment

☐ Payoff statements for mortgages and certain liens

☐ Review of ownership / vesting and deed preparation process

☐ Settlement / closing statement

☐ Transfer-tax and recording items

☐ Required affidavits and closing documents

☐ Signing and disbursement

☐ Recording the deed and other recordable instruments

Seller Items to Resolve Early

☐ Name changes, deceased owners, trusts, estates, divorce or powers of attorney

☐ Old mortgages, liens, judgments or unreleased interests

☐ Boundary / survey disputes

☐ Unpaid property taxes or special assessments

☐ HOA/condo balances or pending assessments

☐ Open permits / municipal violations

☐ Tenant rights or occupancy issues

☐ Solar leases, security-system contracts or equipment liens

☐ IRS/state liens or bankruptcy issues

Michigan property-tax and Principal Residence Exemption (PRE) issues can require forms or action around a transfer. A seller who no longer uses the property as a principal residence generally has a Michigan PRE rescission obligation; ask the closing company or assessor what applies to your facts.

Wire-Fraud Protection

☐ Never rely on an emailed “updated” wiring instruction without independent verification.

☐ Call the title company using a trusted number - not the number in the suspicious email.

☐ Confirm wiring information verbally before sending funds.

☐ Be suspicious of urgency, changed account numbers, new domains or last-minute requests.

16. Final Walkthrough & Closing Day

24-48 Hours Before Closing

☐ Confirm repairs are complete and receipts available.

☐ Remove all personal property not included in the sale.

☐ Clean the home to the agreed condition.

☐ Confirm included appliances/fixtures remain and are in agreed condition.

☐ Verify utilities remain on through the required time.

☐ Gather keys, remotes, access codes, manuals and warranties.

☐ Review closing figures and ask questions before signing day.

☐ Confirm exact possession/key-transfer timing.

At / Around Closing

☐ Bring required government-issued identification.

☐ Sign only documents you understand.

☐ Verify sale price, credits, payoffs, taxes, fees and net proceeds.

☐ Confirm how and when proceeds will be delivered.

☐ Do not hand over keys before the contract/closing company says possession is due.

☐ Keep the final signed closing package permanently with tax records.

AFTER CLOSING

Keep copies of the purchase agreement, amendments, disclosures, settlement statement, deed-related documents, improvement receipts and other records. Ask a tax professional how long to retain documents relevant to basis, gain and exclusions.

17. 30-Day FSBO Marketing Calendar

Timing	Focus	Action
Days 1-3	Pricing & prep	Build comps; estimate net; order repairs/cleaning; choose title company / attorney.
Days 4-6	Documents	Gather deed, taxes, payoff info, disclosures, HOA/condo documents, permits and warranties.
Days 7-8	Staging	Declutter, clean, landscape, finish repair punch list.
Day 9	Media	Professional photos, video and floor plan if available.
Day 10	Ad build	Write verified description; prepare feature sheet; property page/QR.
Day 11	Launch	Publish simultaneously; install sign; announce first open house.
Days 12-14	Showings	Respond quickly; pre-screen; conduct private showings.
Day 14	Open house	2-hour event; collect feedback; follow up same day.
Days 15-17	Analyze	Review inquiries/showings/feedback; adjust presentation or price if market evidence supports it.
Days 18-21	Second push	Refresh social posts; target new channels; second open house if useful.
Days 22-24	Offer focus	Re-contact serious prospects; compare offers by net/risk.
Days 25-30	Decision point	If traffic/offer quality is weak, make a meaningful change rather than letting the listing go stale.

18. Master FSBO Checklist

Pricing

☐ Comparable sales reviewed

☐ Active competition reviewed

☐ Estimated net sheet completed

☐ Pricing strategy chosen

Property Prep

☐ Repairs completed

☐ Deep clean completed

☐ Decluttering/staging completed

☐ Curb appeal completed

☐ Valuables/security plan completed

Documents

☐ Deed/legal description

☐ Tax information

☐ Mortgage/payoff information

☐ Seller disclosure

☐ Lead disclosure if applicable

☐ HOA/condo documents if applicable

☐ Survey/permits/warranties

☐ Purchase agreement source reviewed by attorney/title professional

☐ Addenda/amendment forms ready

Marketing

☐ Professional photos

☐ Video tour

☐ Ad copy proofread and facts verified

☐ Property page / QR code

☐ Yard sign

☐ Open-house directionals

☐ Feature sheets

☐ Online listings / social launch

Buyer Qualification

☐ Preapproval or proof of funds

☐ Lender contact verified

☐ Loan type understood

☐ Down payment / closing funds considered

☐ Sale-of-home dependency identified

Contract

☐ Earnest money amount / holder / deadline

☐ Inspection contingency/deadline

☐ Financing deadline

☐ Appraisal terms

☐ Closing date

☐ Possession

☐ Seller concessions

☐ Included/excluded items

☐ All signatures and dates complete

Under Contract

☐ Earnest money received/confirmed

☐ Title order opened

☐ Inspection tracked

☐ Repairs/credits documented

☐ Appraisal access provided

☐ Loan progress tracked

☐ Title issues cleared

☐ Closing statement reviewed

Closing

☐ Final walkthrough ready

☐ Home cleared/clean

☐ Keys/remotes/codes ready

☐ Utilities handled

☐ ID/signing requirements confirmed

☐ Funds/wiring independently verified

☐ Final documents saved

19. Common FSBO Mistakes to Avoid

☐ Overpricing because of emotion, payoff balance or renovation cost

☐ Using poor photos or publishing before the house is ready

☐ Inconsistent price/facts across websites

☐ Failing to disclose known material conditions

☐ Letting unverified strangers tour without a security process

☐ Accepting an offer without verifying financing or funds

☐ Focusing only on price and ignoring contingencies and seller net

☐ Using a generic purchase agreement without understanding deadlines/default provisions

☐ Missing inspection, appraisal, financing or closing deadlines

☐ Making contract changes by text instead of signed amendments

☐ Waiting too long to order title work

☐ Agreeing to repair credits that the lender will not permit

☐ Turning off utilities before appraisal/final walkthrough/closing

☐ Following emailed wire instructions without independent verification

☐ Handing over keys before possession is actually due

20. When You Should Bring in a Professional

Selling without an agent does not mean doing every technical job yourself. Use specialists where the risk justifies it.

Situation	Professional to Consider
Contract drafting, unusual addenda, disputes	Michigan real-estate attorney
Title defects, deed, lien/payoff/closing	Title / escrow company and attorney as needed
Pricing uncertainty	Independent appraiser or licensed real-estate professional
Property defects	Licensed home inspector / qualified contractor / specialist
Well/septic/environmental	Qualified licensed/approved specialist
Tax consequences	CPA / tax attorney / qualified tax professional
Mortgage qualification	Licensed mortgage lender / loan officer
Boundary/legal-description issue	Licensed surveyor and attorney
Estate/trust/divorce/bankruptcy	Attorney experienced in the applicable area

THE COSTLIEST PROBLEMS ARE OFTEN NOT MARKETING PROBLEMS
They are contract, title, disclosure, financing, appraisal, deadline and negotiation problems. Bring in the right professional before a small issue becomes a closing failure.

Need a Second Opinion?

Even if you plan to sell on your own, you can still get a professional perspective on pricing, marketability, buyer objections or why the home is not producing the response you expected.

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Official Sources & Update Notes

This guide was prepared as an educational checklist and was reviewed against official sources available in August 2026. Laws, forms and local requirements can change. Confirm the current version before use.

Michigan Legislature - Seller Disclosure Act, 1993 PA 92
https://www.legislature.mi.gov/Laws/MCL?objectName=mcl-act-92-of-1993

Michigan Legislature - statutory Seller Disclosure Statement language (MCL 565.957)
https://www.legislature.mi.gov/Laws/MCL?objectName=mcl-565-957

U.S. EPA - Real Estate Disclosures About Potential Lead Hazards
https://www.epa.gov/lead/real-estate-disclosures-about-potential-lead-hazards

U.S. EPA - Seller Lead-Based Paint Disclosure information/form resources
https://www.epa.gov/lead/sellers-disclosure-information-lead-based-paint-andor-lead-based-paint-hazards

HUD - Fair Housing Rights and Obligations
https://www.hud.gov/stat/fheo/rights-obligations

CFPB - Get a Preapproval Letter
https://www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/explore/get-a-preapproval-letter/

Michigan Treasury - Changes in Ownership and Uncapping of Property
https://www.michigan.gov/taxes/property/change-ownership

Michigan Treasury - Principal Residence Exemption guidance
https://www.michigan.gov/taxes/property/principal

FTC Consumer Advice - verify unexpected wire-instruction changes
https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/home-equity-loans-and-home-equity-lines-credit

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Expanded FSBO Marketing Plan: From Pricing to a Successful Open House

Purpose. This section is a detailed operating plan for a homeowner who intends to market and sell a Michigan home without a listing agent. Treat it like a campaign: establish value, prepare the product, build professional marketing, create maximum exposure, screen prospects, conduct safe showings and open houses, and maintain a transaction file from first inquiry through closing.

1. Determine Market Value Before You Advertise

Overpricing is one of the most expensive FSBO mistakes because the first weeks on the market are usually when a new listing receives the most attention. A seller should establish a defensible price before ordering signs, publishing ads, or scheduling an open house.

1. Gather the basic facts: finished above-grade square footage, bedrooms, bathrooms, garage, basement finish, lot size, year built, major updates, school district, property taxes, acreage, waterfront or other special features.

2. Locate 3-6 recently SOLD comparable properties. Give the greatest weight to sales in the same neighborhood or school district, similar style, similar size and similar condition. Pending and active listings help show current competition, but they do not prove what buyers actually paid.

3. Prefer recent sales. Start with roughly the prior 90 days when enough comparable sales exist; expand the time period or distance only when necessary.

4. Compare condition honestly. A remodeled kitchen, newer roof, finished basement, extra garage, acreage or major deferred maintenance can materially affect value. Do not simply average prices per square foot.

5. Check public property and tax records for factual data, but remember that taxable value, assessed value and market value are different concepts.

6. Review consumer valuation websites only as a secondary reference. Automated estimates cannot see interior condition, workmanship, odors, deferred maintenance, views, layout or buyer reaction.

7. Consider paying for an independent appraisal before listing when the home is unusual, comparable sales are scarce, the price is uncertain, or the seller wants an objective professional opinion.

8. Create a price range rather than one magic number: likely market value, aggressive/high end, and quick-sale range. Then select a list price that competes with the homes buyers will see online alongside yours.

9. Reassess after 10-14 days. If marketing is strong but there are few inquiries or showings, price is one of the first variables to review.

Pricing warning: Do not use the amount you need to net, what you paid, the cost of improvements, an old appraisal, or a neighbor's asking price as the primary basis for market value.

2. Build a Professional Marketing Package Before Going Live

- Professional-quality exterior and interior photography. Clean, declutter, turn on lights, open blinds, remove vehicles from the driveway when possible, close toilet lids, hide trash cans and pet items, and photograph rooms from angles that show layout.
- A short horizontal property video that walks the viewer through the home logically, plus several vertical clips for social media.
- A floor plan or room-measurement sheet when possible.
- A one-page feature sheet with price, address, bedrooms, baths, square footage, major improvements, financing/contact instructions and a QR code to the full listing.
- A strong primary yard sign with a readable phone number or QR code. Drivers should understand 'FOR SALE' and how to get details within seconds.
- A dedicated inquiry log or spreadsheet recording name, phone, email, source of lead, financing status, showing date, feedback and follow-up.
- A showing packet containing the Seller's Disclosure Statement, lead disclosure when applicable, feature sheet, utility/upgrade information, offer instructions and contact information.

3. Write an Advertisement That Sells the Experience, Not Just the Specifications

Use a headline that gives the buyer a reason to stop scrolling. The first paragraph should communicate the strongest differentiator, followed by the facts buyers need to decide whether to schedule a showing.

- Headline formula: strongest feature + property type/location + benefit. Example: 'Updated Grand Blanc Ranch With Finished Basement, Large Yard and Easy Expressway Access.'
- Lead with 3-5 compelling benefits rather than a long list of adjectives.
- Include accurate bedrooms, baths, square footage, lot/acreage, garage, basement, major mechanical updates and notable improvements.
- Describe lifestyle benefits factually: private backyard, first-floor primary suite, walkable amenities, workshop space, home-office potential, etc.
- State showing procedure and whether proof of funds or lender preapproval is required before a private showing.
- Use a clear call to action: 'Call/text to receive the property information packet and schedule a showing.'
- Never use discriminatory language or indicate a preference for buyers based on protected characteristics. Focus advertising on the property, not the type of person you want living there.

4. Where to Advertise a FSBO

A FSBO should use multiple channels because no single website reaches every serious buyer. The biggest exposure gap is often the local MLS and the agent community that relies on it.

Zillow FSBO - A homeowner can create a For Sale By Owner listing and reach consumers searching Zillow. Visit resource

FSBO.com - Offers FSBO listing options and paid MLS exposure options. Verify current package terms and local MLS rules before purchasing. Visit resource

Facebook Marketplace - Useful for local exposure. Also share the listing into legitimate neighborhood, community and local real-estate groups where rules permit. Visit resource

Craigslist - Can provide additional local exposure, but screen inquiries carefully and watch for scams. Visit resource

Nextdoor - Neighborhood-oriented exposure may help reach local residents who know someone wanting to move into the area. Visit resource

Also consider a reputable flat-fee MLS service. Before paying, confirm exactly which MLS will contain the listing, how long it will remain active, where it syndicates, how showing requests are handled, whether changes cost extra, how buyer-agent compensation/concessions are communicated under current rules, and what forms/support are included.

5. Why Buyer Agents Matter to a FSBO

The National Association of REALTORS® reported that 88% of buyers purchased through a real estate agent or broker in its 2025 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers. That means a FSBO who makes the property difficult for buyer agents to access can reduce the pool of represented buyers.

A buyer's agent may be cautious about a FSBO when the seller has no established showing system, is unfamiliar with disclosures and deadlines, expects the buyer's agent to prepare or manage seller-side paperwork, will not provide clear access, has not decided how buyer-agent compensation will be handled, or cannot answer normal transaction questions. It is more accurate to say these factors can make some agents less likely to prioritize the property - not that agents universally refuse to show FSBOs.

- Respond promptly and professionally to agent inquiries.
- Have disclosures and property information ready before the showing.
- Ask the agent to provide buyer qualification consistent with your showing policy.
- Provide straightforward showing instructions and a safe access process.
- Do not expect the buyer's agent to represent you. The buyer's agent owes duties to the buyer.
- Discuss any buyer-agent compensation or seller concessions clearly and in writing as part of the transaction, consistent with applicable rules and the parties' agreements.
- When unsure about contract language or legal obligations, use a Michigan real-estate attorney rather than relying on the buyer's agent for seller advice.

6. The 7-Day Open House Marketing Countdown

1. 7 days before: choose a 2-3 hour window, confirm local sign/HOA/municipal rules, create the online event and begin promoting the date and time.

2. 6 days before: order/prepare directional signs, open-house signs, sign-in materials, property flyers, QR codes, shoe covers if desired, bottled water and balloons if allowed.

3. 5 days before: post the event to your listing sites and social channels; invite neighbors because neighbors often know potential buyers.

4. 4 days before: deep clean, declutter, secure valuables, medications, firearms, financial records, mail, keys, checkbooks, small electronics and identity documents.

5. 3 days before: confirm all smoke/CO alarms, handrails, exterior steps, walkways and lighting are safe; fix obvious trip hazards.

6. 2 days before: print disclosures, feature sheets, offer instructions and a sign-in sheet. Charge your phone and arrange for another adult to be present.

7. 1 day before: send reminders to everyone who inquired, ask serious prospects about financing, mow/edge as appropriate, remove pet waste, stage the entry and bathrooms, and check odors.

8. Open-house morning: open blinds, turn on lights, set a comfortable temperature, put pets elsewhere, remove vehicles when practical, set out marketing materials, and install the directional sign route.

9. After the event: remove every temporary sign promptly, follow up with each serious visitor, request feedback, document interest and schedule second showings only after appropriate screening.

7. The 30-Sign Open House Traffic Plan

For a high-visibility open house, plan a route of approximately 30 directional/open-house signs where lawful and practical. The goal is not to scatter signs randomly; it is to create an easy-to-follow trail from major traffic points to the property.

- Drive the route first. Identify the major road, neighborhood entrances, turns and intersections where a driver could become confused.
- Use large, simple signs with 'OPEN HOUSE' and a bold directional arrow. A moving driver cannot read a paragraph.
- Place repeated confirmation signs on longer stretches so drivers know they are still on the correct route.
- Use several signs close to the home and a prominent sign/balloon cluster at the property so visitors know they arrived.
- Use balloons as attention-getters only where local rules and weather allow. Secure them so they do not obstruct sidewalks, roads, signs or neighboring property.
- Do not place signs where prohibited, on private property without permission, or where they create a traffic or visibility hazard. Check city/township, road commission, HOA and subdivision rules first.
- Number the back of the signs 1-30 and photograph or map each placement. This makes removal faster and reduces the chance of leaving signs behind.
- Have one person place signs while another verifies arrows from the driver's perspective. A wrong arrow can destroy the entire route.
- Install signs early enough to catch traffic but remove them immediately after the open house as required by local rules.

8. Where to Buy Professional Open House and Directional Signs

Staples Print & Marketing Services - Custom weather-resistant real-estate yard signs and H-stakes; useful for branded directional and open-house signs. Visit resource

Signs.com - Custom yard signs, directional signage and other printed sign products. Visit resource

BuildASign - Custom yard signs and real-estate sign products. Visit resource

VistaPrint - Custom signs, flyers, postcards and other marketing materials. Visit resource

Tip: For a 30-sign route, reusable corrugated-plastic arrow signs with wire stakes are usually more practical than elaborate one-time signs. Keep the design consistent and make the arrow the largest element.

9. Prescreen Buyers Before Private Showings

An open house and a private showing are different. A seller can use a reasonable, consistently applied screening process for private appointments to reduce wasted time and improve safety.

1. Get the prospect's full name, mobile number and email address before confirming a private appointment.

2. Ask whether the buyer is already working with an agent. If yes, coordinate through the agent when appropriate.

3. Ask whether the purchase will be financed or cash.

4. For financed buyers, request a current lender preapproval/prequalification appropriate to your policy. A preapproval is not a guarantee of final loan approval.

5. For cash buyers, request reasonable proof of funds with sensitive account numbers redacted.

6. Ask the buyer's target move date and whether they have a home to sell first.

7. Confirm the appointment by text/email and keep the contact information in your showing log.

8. Apply your screening policy consistently. Do not use screening questions to discriminate based on protected characteristics.

10. Open House Safety: You Are Letting Strangers Into Your Home

- Never host alone if you can avoid it. Have at least one other adult present and tell a trusted person the event schedule.
- Remove or lock up prescription medication, jewelry, cash, firearms, documents containing Social Security/account information, spare keys, collectibles and small valuables.
- Do not allow visitors to wander unmonitored into isolated areas when avoidable. Position hosts so the main entry and traffic flow can be observed.
- Use a sign-in procedure. Ask visitors for name and contact information; explain it is for property follow-up and security. Do not leave a completed sign-in sheet where later visitors can see other people's information.
- Keep exterior doors that are not part of the showing route secured. Do not advertise hidden keys, alarm codes or lockbox combinations.
- Keep children and pets away from the event.
- Have a charged phone accessible at all times. If someone behaves suspiciously, prioritize personal safety and end the showing.
- After the final visitor leaves, walk the entire home with the second host, verify windows/doors, check valuables and reset locks/alarms.
- Be cautious of a common distraction tactic in which one visitor occupies the host while another asks to tour a different area.

11. Run the Open House Like a Professional

1. Greet each visitor at the door and determine whether they are a buyer, neighbor, agent or other visitor.

2. Have them sign in before touring. Keep prior entries private.

3. Give a 20-30 second orientation: key features, areas to see, disclosures available and where questions can be answered.

4. Allow buyers enough space to imagine themselves living there, but maintain awareness of where people are in the home.

5. Do not follow visitors room-to-room giving a sales pitch. Be available for factual questions.

6. Ask open-ended feedback questions at the end: 'What did you like best?' 'Is there anything that would keep this home from making your short list?'

7. For interested buyers, ask about financing status and whether they have an agent before discussing next steps.

8. Provide written instructions explaining where and how offers should be submitted and that verbal statements are not a substitute for a signed written agreement.

9. Follow up with serious prospects the same day or next morning.

12. Contract and Disclosure Resources for a Michigan FSBO

A seller should not download random contracts from an unknown website and assume they are appropriate. Real-estate contracts create legal obligations, deadlines and remedies. Michigan sellers should consider having a Michigan real-estate attorney or qualified title/closing professional review the transaction.

Michigan Legislature - Seller's Disclosure Statement - Michigan law contains the statutory Seller's Disclosure Statement form and instructions. Visit resource

U.S. EPA - Lead-Based Paint Seller Disclosure - Official federal seller disclosure form and lead-paint resources for applicable pre-1978 housing. Visit resource

FSBO.com - A commercial FSBO service offering listing and transaction-related resources; confirm what state-specific contracts/forms are included in the selected package. Visit resource

Documents commonly encountered may include: purchase agreement, Seller's Disclosure Statement, lead-based-paint disclosure and pamphlet when applicable, financing contingency, inspection contingency/addendum, appraisal provisions, sale-of-buyer's-home contingency, occupancy agreement, personal-property addendum, well/septic or other property-specific disclosures, amendments/extensions, repair agreements, title commitment and exceptions, closing statement, deed and other title-company closing documents. The exact documents depend on the property and deal.

Important: Forms created by REALTOR® associations or brokerages may be copyrighted or restricted to members/licensees. Do not assume a form found online is authorized for your use. An attorney can draft or review a purchase agreement and transaction-specific addenda.

13. Marketing Follow-Up System

- Respond to new inquiries quickly during normal waking hours. Buyers often contact several listings at once.
- Use a saved response containing price, key facts, showing requirements and a link to the property information.
- Track where every inquiry came from so you know which advertising channels are producing real buyers.
- After every showing, request feedback within 24 hours.
- Review weekly: number of online views, inquiries, qualified inquiries, showings, second showings and offers.
- High views + low inquiries may indicate weak photos, description or price. Inquiries + no showings may indicate qualification, condition, location or price concerns. Showings + no offers often justify reviewing price, condition and buyer feedback.
- Refresh marketing when appropriate, but do not disguise days on market or make misleading claims.

14. FSBO Marketing Budget Worksheet

Item	Estimated Cost	Actual Cost
Professional photography	$________	$________
Video / virtual tour	$________	$________
Primary FOR SALE sign	$________	$________
30 directional/open-house signs	$________	$________
Balloons / open-house supplies	$________	$________
Flyers / feature sheets	$________	$________
Flat-fee MLS / listing service	$________	$________
Attorney / contract review	$________	$________
Pre-listing appraisal (optional)	$________	$________

Inspection / repair preparation (optional)	$________	$________
Other marketing	$________	$________

15. FSBO Open House Master Checklist

- ☐ Confirm open-house date/time and local sign rules.
- ☐ Create online open-house advertisements and social posts.
- ☐ Map approximately 30 lawful directional sign locations.
- ☐ Number signs and verify every arrow from the driver's perspective.
- ☐ Purchase balloons/supplies where appropriate and permitted.
- ☐ Deep clean, declutter and stage the home.
- ☐ Secure valuables, medication, firearms, financial documents and spare keys.
- ☐ Arrange for a second adult to host with you.
- ☐ Print feature sheets, disclosures, sign-in materials and offer instructions.
- ☐ Prepare QR code/link to property details.
- ☐ Contact prior inquiries and invite neighbors.
- ☐ Verify lighting, temperature, odors, exterior appearance and safety hazards.
- ☐ Place signs and arrival balloons shortly before the event.
- ☐ Keep completed visitor information private.
- ☐ Monitor visitor traffic and do not leave strangers unsupervised in isolated areas.
- ☐ Identify serious prospects and discuss financing/agent status appropriately.
- ☐ Remove all signs immediately afterward.
- ☐ Walk through and secure the property after the last visitor.
- ☐ Follow up with serious prospects and agents within 24 hours.
- ☐ Record feedback and adjust marketing or price when the evidence supports it.

Sources and Helpful Resources

Michigan Seller Disclosure Act - statutory disclosure form

Michigan Seller Disclosure Act - timing of delivery

U.S. EPA lead-based-paint disclosure resources

National Association of REALTORS® - 2025 Profile overview (buyer agent usage / FSBO share)

Zillow FSBO listing resource

FSBO.com

Staples real-estate yard signs

Legal and safety disclaimer: This guide is educational and is not legal, tax, lending, appraisal, title, fair-housing or safety advice. Laws, forms, local sign ordinances, MLS rules and transaction practices can change. A seller should consult appropriate Michigan professionals for the specific property and transaction.