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Everything you need to know

Your Home *Buying Guide*

A step-by-step walkthrough of the home buying process — from your first search to the day you get your keys.

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Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to read my Home Buying Guide — I hope you learn something new and find it beneficial! To those who have chosen me as their real estate agent, I extend my gratitude and assure you that I am committed to helping you surpass your real estate goals.

My goal is to prioritize your best interests at every step. I'm driven by a personal commitment to exceed your expectations during the purchasing process and to build a lasting relationship with you as a lifelong client — from skillful price negotiation and gauging property value growth, to smaller details like utility transfers or recommending movers. Working with me means more confidence in your decisions, and more of your time back.

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7 Benefits of Home Ownership

- **Tax breaks.** The U.S. Tax Code lets you deduct mortgage interest, property taxes, and some home-buying costs.
- **Appreciation.** Real estate has long-term, stable growth — median home prices rise roughly 4% a year on average.
- **Equity.** Rent money is gone for good; mortgage payments build ownership you keep.
- **Savings.** Home equity is a built-in savings plan, and sellers can often exclude up to $250,000 ($500,000 for married couples) of gain from federal tax.
- **Predictability.** Fixed mortgage payments don't rise with the market, though taxes and insurance may.
- **Freedom.** It's yours — renovate, decorate, and modify the space as you like.
- **Stability.** Staying put builds community ties and gives kids continuity in school.

> Curious if buying is the right financial move? Try the "Buy vs. Rent" calculator at Fidelity.com.

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The home buying process

Here's the path from first conversation to keys in hand.

1. **Consult with your Realtor to analyze your needs and goals**
2. **Talk with a lender for the pre-approval process**
3. **Create your home search**
4. **Write an offer**
5. **Your Realtor negotiates terms on your behalf**
6. **Seller accepts offer**
7. **Earnest money, home inspection, and full mortgage application**
   Inspection fee due to your inspector · appraisal fee wrapped into closing costs
8. **Loan moves to underwriting**
9. **Schedule closing, review closing documents & final walkthrough**

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Home search and writing offers

1. After determining your real estate needs, I'll search the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) for homes that fit and send you everything relevant — I can also set you up on an MLS subscription.
2. When you're ready to view a home, I'll coordinate the tour.
3. I'll help answer important questions about any home you're interested in.
4. When you find the right home, we'll write an offer together, including: the sales price, closing and possession dates, your right to a home inspection, seller contributions, and which items stay with the home.
5. I'll negotiate with the seller on your behalf.

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What happens after your offer is accepted?

1. You pay your earnest money — usually 1% of the sales price, held for you and credited back at closing.
2. I send your accepted offer to your lender and make sure everything's in order to move forward smoothly.
3. **Inspections.** You have the right to a home inspection. Inspections run $450 and up, charged the day of by your inspector. I review the report and negotiate any major or costly repairs.
4. **Appraisal.** Your lender orders this on your behalf, typically around $500, wrapped into closing costs. If it comes in below purchase price, I negotiate with the seller's agent to protect your deal.
5. You order a homeowners' insurance policy.
6. You coordinate any utility switchovers you'll need.
7. I make sure your title work and closing paperwork are ordered and ready by closing.
8. We do a final walkthrough of the home prior to closing.
9. I keep you informed throughout, and attend your closing with you.

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Home inspections

Why get an inspection? You have the right to hire an independent inspector to identify major or expensive defects — roof leaks, faulty appliances, and more. Afterward, I negotiate to make sure the seller repairs major, costly defects.

What does it cost? Typically $450 and up, depending on the size of the home. You're welcome to attend the end of your inspection (recommended) — I always try to attend with you. You can also wait and review the inspector's report.

What kinds of inspections are available?

- **General Inspection** — the home & grounds (most common)
- **Termite / Wood-Destroying Organism (WDO)** — termites and carpenter ants
- **Radon** — unacceptable levels of this natural gas
- **Well and Septic** — any wells or septic systems
- **Mold** — the home and indoor air for mold or mold-like substances

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Your monthly house payment

What makes up my monthly payment? Principal, Interest, Taxes, and Insurance — remember the acronym **PITI**.

How will I know what a home costs each month before I buy? Once you've met with your lender, we can work with them to calculate your approximate monthly payment.

How does a down payment affect my monthly payment? The bigger your down payment, the lower your monthly payment. When your down payment is less than 20% of the sales price, lenders typically charge PMI (private mortgage insurance) to protect themselves.

> **PITI at a glance:** Principal · Interest · Taxes · Insurance

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Your closing & closing costs

What is a closing? You'll meet with the seller, the Realtors, and your closing (title) company to sign your loan, sign legal documents recording the sale, and take possession. This is also when you make your down payment and pay closing costs.

What are closing costs? The costs of financing your home and transferring ownership — sometimes negotiable with the seller. Here's a look:

- **Down Payment** — not a closing cost, but paid at closing if you make one.
- **Prepaid Items** — a few months of property taxes and homeowners insurance to start your escrow account, plus possibly prepaid loan interest.
- **Lender Fees** — application, appraisal, origination, underwriting, and processing fees.
- **Recording Fees** — small local government fees for public record.
- **Title Insurance** — protects you and your lender against title disputes.

Other possible fees: prepaid HOA dues, HOA transfer fees, courier and bank wire fees.

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Your Realtor & how they're paid

My responsibilities as your Realtor. As a buyer, you have the right to a Realtor who represents your best interests, including these fiduciary duties:

- Loyalty
- Confidentiality
- Disclosure
- Obedience
- Reasonable care & diligence
- Accounting

How Realtors are paid. A buyer's agent is typically compensated through a commission paid at closing, most often from the seller's proceeds. In many cases, the commission is included in the buyer's offer, asking the seller to cover it; otherwise it's agreed upon between the seller and their listing agent and shared with the buyer's agent. Because of this, buyers generally don't have an out-of-pocket fee to work with a Realtor — that said, every transaction is unique, and I'll always be transparent about how I'm compensated and any costs that may apply in your situation.

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Why you need a buyer's agent: confidence

Buying a home requires expertise, market knowledge, and diligent support through the search, negotiating, forms, and paperwork — helping you avoid delays or costly mistakes, while saving you time and money.

Get objective information and opinions. I can share local community information on utilities, zoning, and more, plus objective insight on each property — will it provide the environment you want, and will it hold resale value when you're ready to sell?

Find the best property out there. It takes real investigation to surface every available property — that's my job.

Benefit from my negotiating experience. Negotiations touch price, terms, possession dates, repairs, and what stays or goes with the home. I'll guide you through every aspect, making sure your interests are represented and nothing important gets overlooked.

> **At an open house:** the agent hosting represents the seller — anything you say can be used in negotiations. A buyer's agent always has your best interest in mind. If you're already working with one, let the open house agent know.

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Reviews, referrals & resources

After we close on your dream home, I'll send you links to leave my business a review — it means a lot to the growth of my business and helps others decide if I might be a good fit for them.

If you know anyone currently looking to buy, sell, or invest in real estate, I'd greatly appreciate any referrals you can send my way. Your business and loyalty matter — thank you!

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Helpful resources for homebuyers

- Xcel Energy — wi.my.xcelenergy.com/s/
- Riverland Energy Coop — riverlandenergy.com
- USPS — usps.com
- Spectrum — spectrum.net
- WI Homeownership Assistance — hud.gov/states/wisconsin
- Winding Rivers Library System — wrlsweb.org
- Diggers Hotline — diggershotline.com
- School District of La Crosse — lacrosseschools.org
- School District of Onalaska — onalaska.k12.wi.us
- School District of Holmen — holmen.k12.wi.us
- School District of West Salem — wsalem.k12.wi.us
- La Crescent-Hokah Schools — isd300.k12.mn.us
- La Crosse Area Chamber — lacrossechamber.com
- Explore La Crosse — explorelacrosse.com