



Seattle

**HOME  
BUYERS  
GUIDE**

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# HOME BUYING GUIDE

## A GUIDE TO THE HOME BUYING PROCESS

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Welcome!

Most buyers who begin the process of looking for a home begin the journey filled with excitement and a bit of trepidation.

This is understandable when you consider that purchasing a home is one of the biggest financial decisions you will make during your lifetime.

Not only do we understand this, we believe that home ownership is something you can be proud of. We believe, it's an honor and privilege to ensure that the home buying process is the most pleasurable experience possible.

Whether this is your first home or your tenth, this guide is intended to help you navigate the home buying process.

Let's get started on the journey of getting you the home you want!



Ben Kakimoto  
Keller Williams Greater Seattle

# TOP 10 REASONS TO BUY A HOME

1. **Quality of Life** - Home ownership is part of a better quality of life for most buyers. The quality of our living situation directly impacts how we feel.
2. **Avoid the Tax Man | Tax Deductions** - Buying a home helps you avoid the tax man with tax deductions for both mortgage interest and property taxes. Property taxes and qualified interest are deductible on an individual's federal income tax return.
3. **Spend Money to Make Money** - With the right real estate consultant, home ownership and the potential for appreciation means that ultimately you have the opportunity to get a return on your investment.
4. **Deferred Gain and Capital Gain Treatment** - A homeowner can exclude up to \$500,000 of capital gain tax if married and filing jointly or up to \$250,000 if single or filing separately when you sell your home. The home must have been the taxpayer's principal resident for the previous two years.
5. **Principal Accumulation** - As a homeowner, a portion of each amortized mortgage payment typically goes to principal, which in the long run is an investment.
6. **It's The American Dream** - Owning a home is THE American Dream. We work with many first time home-buyers; and it truly is a dream come true for them.
7. **Independence** - For many homeowners, one of the greatest freedoms is acquired through home ownership. They can get rid of their landlord and are no longer surrounded by neighbors in an apartment with thin walls. The freedom to do whatever they wish with their homes is a big incentive for many new homeowners.
8. **Leverage** - At the current interest rates, you can put your money to work somewhere else. These days you can still purchase a home for as little as 3.5% down.
9. **Why rent when you can own?** The real cost of renting at \$1,000 per month with 6% rental increase per year means you will pay \$163,000 over 10 years. Just think, you could almost pay off a home for that amount!
10. **Because you get to work with us!**

# 5 Buying Tips

## WHEN PURCHASING A HOME

*These 5 buying tips will save you time, money, and headaches.*

1. **Get Pre-Qualified** – before you can seriously consider purchasing a home, it's important to know exactly how much you can afford. This can be the scariest part of the buying process for some. It's perfectly natural to be nervous, but we can put you in touch with someone you can trust to help get you pre-qualified.
2. **Always Think Resale** – In the US, due to the mobility of our economy, the length of ownership is about 5 to 7 years. This is important to keep in mind when looking for your next home. For instance, homes backing up to a busy street or railroad sell for less, and take longer to sell than other homes in the neighborhood.
3. **Aesthetics Can Be Changed** – flooring, light fixtures, plumbing, paint colors and wallpaper can all be changed. Don't let the lime green wallpaper turn you off of your potential dream home. Think of how much fun it will be to make a home yours!
4. **Don't WAIT!** – too often, we have seen home buyers fall in love with a property, wait a few days to make a decision because they are nervous, and the home that they fell in love with SOLD! If you love the home, don't wait for someone else to live in YOUR home – be prepared to write an offer!
5. **Compare Sales** – to determine the best price to offer, or to know if the asking price is correct, look at the recent sales of similar homes, called "comparable sales." Comparable sales are recent sales of homes that compare closely to the one you are looking to purchase, usually sold in the past few months. Specifically, you want to compare prices of homes that are similar in square footage, garage spaces, number of bedrooms and baths, lot size, etc. Let us help you with a Buyer's Market Analysis.



# 12 Critical Questions

## TO ASK AN AGENT BEFORE YOU BUY

Now that you have a background regarding the *Reasons to Buy a Home* and *5 Buying Tips*, the question is how will you be able to make sure that you not only find your dream home but that you ensure that the real estate agent you choose to represent you has the knowledge and expertise to help you with the biggest financial decision you will make in the next 5 years?

Unfortunately, many people choose a real estate professional based on the idea that all real estate agents are basically the same. They sign with the first agent to come along, only to realize too late that they should have "shopped around."

The following questions are designed to help you avoid that mistake by equipping you with what to look for when selecting an agent to represent you.

First, start by asking friends, acquaintances and/or family for the names of real estate agents they know. A personal referral is the absolute BEST manner in which to select your professional real estate agent. Once you have compiled a list of names referred to you based upon a great experience, use this guide to help you determine which agent is the best for YOU. We recommend interviewing at least 2-3 real estate agents.

Here are the questions you should ask each agent:

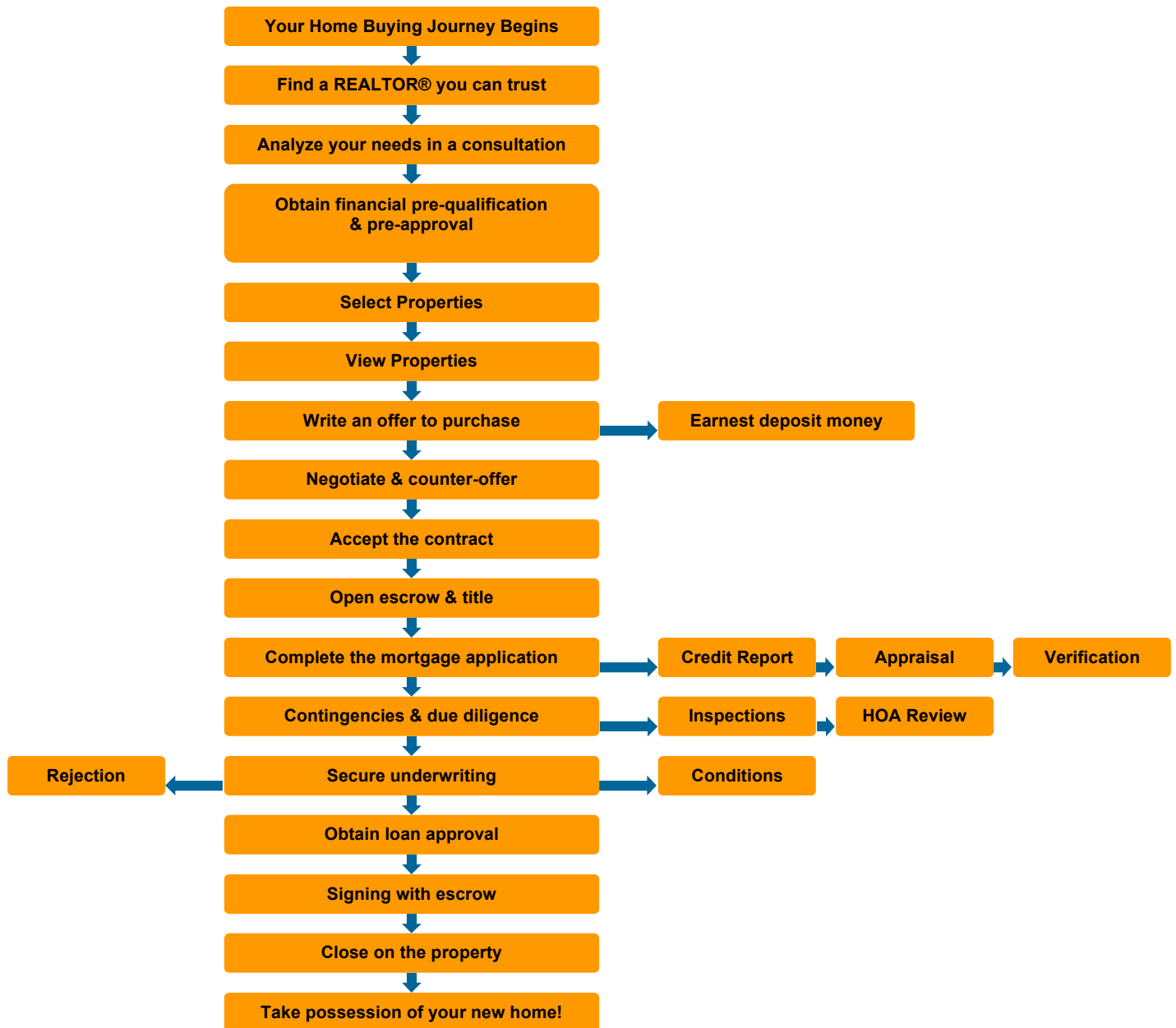
1. **Can you send me some information about yourself?**  
Look for professionalism and consistency. What are their professional accomplishments?
2. **How do you approach your work?**  
Look for a businessperson that has a strategy and a team to work with.
3. **How many homes have you closed in the past year?**  
Look for an agent who is active in your area and at the top of their industry. Part-time agents are simply unable to keep up with the ever-changing demands of the market. A good rule of thumb is a minimum of 8-10 transactions. Why settle for less?
4. **What is the dollar volume of homes you have sold in the last year?**  
Beware of agents who use their company status vs. their own.
5. **How long have you been in business?**  
Longevity in the industry does not always mean success. However, look for an agent that has been in the business for a minimum of three years. The fall-out ratio for agents in the business less than 3 years is over 80%. While experience is important, accomplishments are more important.

## 12 Critical Questions to Ask an Agent Before You Buy (continued from previous page)

6. ***Do you have a team or other staff working for you?***  
Many agents who employ large teams may not provide one-to-one personalized service to their clients. Often, they may meet with a new buyer initially, but then have another agent show homes with another member of their staff handling the transaction process. How can your agent understand your needs and be there for you if they're passing you among a number of people? Things will fall through the cracks and that could cause critical problems for you.
7. ***What will you do keep me informed?***  
Do you want daily or weekly reports from your agent? Will the agent be able to meet these expectations? Determine how much communication you want, and then find an agent who will give you the attention and time you want and deserve.
8. ***Can you provide me with further resources I may need?***  
The best agents have built strong relationships and can often get expedient service or be able to "cash in a favor" for you should a crunch or problem arise.
9. ***Can you give me some references from other clients you have worked with?***  
Don't be afraid to ask for references. An agent who provides raving fan service and is proud of their work will be happy to provide references. Look at their ratings and reviews on sites like Google, Zillow and Yelp.
10. ***What is the best way for me to get in touch with you?***  
You should know exactly how to get through to your agent.
11. ***What if I'm unsatisfied with your service?***  
Make sure that your agent is a professional. They will be more knowledgeable and will be able to best represent your interests based on experience and reputation. But, if you're unsatisfied with their service, will they allow you to part ways obligation free?
12. ***Are you a fiduciary? And how will you represent my best interests?***  
Absolutely do not hire someone that you don't believe will represent YOUR best interests at all times. Have your agent give you examples of how they represent their client. Remember that finding the home is the easy part, true representation begins when you sign a contract and continues through negotiation and closing. Ask around for horror stories and you will find that they don't involve the home search BUT after the contract was signed!

# Home Buying Process

## 10 Steps to Buying a Home



# Home Buying Process

## 10 Steps to Buying a Home

1. Get pre-qualified with a lending specialist
2. Shop for your dream home with an accomplished real estate professional
3. Choose a top 2 list
4. Place an offer on #1
5. Be prepared for a counter offer and negotiation
6. Sign and date the effective contract
7. Order inspections and negotiate repairs
8. Review HOA documentation (for condos)
9. Terminate or proceed with the contract
10. After final loan approval, go to closing to sign and own your new home

In addition to the 10 steps to buying a home you will need to consider the following up-front costs in order to determine if you have the appropriate cash reserves to get started:

- Earnest money: typically 1-3% of sales price - the amount of earnest money is negotiable and varies with the value of the property
- Inspection fee: single family / townhome \$400 - \$450, condo \$275
- Sewer scope fee: \$200 - \$250 (for single family homes)
- Appraisal - \$400 - \$500
- Credit report - \$75

Now that you know the upfront costs, let's explore what you will need in order to determine your buying power and how to get pre-qualified for financing.



# The Pre-Qualification & Pre-Approval Processes

Now that you know you want to buy a house, how do you know how much you can afford and if you can qualify for a loan? The way to get started is to go through the pre-qualification and pre-approval process with a lending specialist.

## Pre-Qualification versus Pre-Approval

1. Pre-Qualification is how much money a bank will lend you based on your income, assets, and debts. Pre-Qualification is typically done over the phone with a lending specialist. This is the first step to get started in the buying process. The lending specialist will do a minimal credit review over the phone, which means discussing your credit background. When you begin the Pre-Approval process the lending specialist will actually check your credit but during Pre-Qualification they will simply gather basic information regarding your financial and credit situation.
2. Pre-Approval is a more formal process and includes completing a loan application on-line and providing documentation regarding income and assets. During the Pre-Approval process the lending specialist will ask for authorization to check credit in order to analyze debt ratios. Pre-Approval is typically done when you start looking for houses with a real estate agent or prior to writing an offer.

## What Factors Affect What I Can Afford?

There are three factors that affect how much you can afford when you decide you would like to buy a home.

1. The down payment - do you have enough liquid cash to make a down payment?
2. Your ability to qualify for a loan - as mentioned earlier this is determined during the Pre-Qualification & Pre-Approval Process
3. The associated closing costs on your home.

## How Much is My Down Payment?

Most loans today require a down payment between 3.0% to 20%. Contrary to what many people think, there are still loans that have lower down payment requirements depending on the type and terms of the loan. Keep in mind, if you are able to come up with 20-25% down you will eliminate mortgage insurance.

## The Pre-Qualification & Pre-Approval Processes (continued from previous page)

### How Much are Closing Costs?

You will be required to pay fees for acquiring the loan and other closing costs (settlement and pre-pays). These fees must be paid in full at the closing unless you are able to include them in your financing. Typically, closing costs will range between 3-6% of your mortgage loan.

Settlement fees include title insurance and escrow transaction fees. Pre-pays include pro-rated property taxes, homeowners insurance and HOA dues.

For condo purchases, there are additional fees due at closing. These include an HOA reserve contribution (up to 2 months worth of HOA dues), Homeowner Transfer fee and a Move-in/out fee.

### What Does my Monthly Mortgage Payment Include?

Most lenders require that your monthly payment range between 29-36% of your gross monthly income. Your mortgage payment to the lender includes the following:

- The principal on the loan (**P**)
- The interest on the loan (**I**)
- Property taxes (**T**)
- The homeowner's insurance (**I**)

This is what we call **PITI** and your total monthly PITI and all debt (from installments to revolving charge accounts) should range between 36-45% of your gross monthly income. These key factors determine your ability to secure a home loan: Credit, Assets, Income and Debt Ratios.

# How Much Home You Can You Afford

Use the following chart to determine your monthly principal and interest payments at various interest rates for either a 15 or 30-year term:

Interest Rate Factors Per \$1,000					
Interest Rates	Term 15 Years	Term 30 Years	Interest Rates	Term 15 Years	Term 30 Years
4	7.40	4.77	8	9.56	7.34
4 ¼	7.52	4.92	8 ¼	9.70	7.51
4 ½	7.65	5.07	8 ½	9.85	7.69
4 ¾	7.78	5.22	8 ¾	9.99	7.87
5	7.91	5.37	9	10.14	8.05
5 ¼	8.04	5.52	9 ¼	10.29	8.23
5 ½	8.17	5.68	9 ½	10.44	8.41
5 ¾	8.30	5.84	9 ¾	10.59	8.59
6	8.44	6.00	10	10.75	8.77
6 ¼	8.57	6.16	10 ¼	10.90	8.96
6 ½	8.71	6.32	10 ½	11.05	9.15
6 ¾	8.85	6.48	10 ¾	11.21	9.33
7	8.99	6.65	11	11.36	9.52
7 ¼	9.13	6.82	11 ¼	11.52	9.71
7 ½	9.27	6.99	11 ½	11.68	9.90
7 ¾	9.41	7.16	11 ¾	11.84	10.09

1. Find the appropriate interest rate from the chart above.
2. Look across the column to the appropriate term to determine your interest rate factor.
3. Multiply the interest rate factor by your loan amount in \$1,000s.

Example:

- Interest Rate = 6.5%
- Desired term = 15 years
- Interest rate factor per \$1,000 = 8.71
- Mortgage = \$200,000
- Monthly Principal & Interest = \$1,742 (8.71 x 200)

Add your monthly insurance premium and your property tax to your principal and interest to determine your total monthly payment.

The above information is provided as a guide. We strongly recommend that you contact our lending specialist to determine exactly home much you can afford.

# Loan Application

## CHECKLIST

Most lenders will have you go online to apply in order to gain pre-approval. Following is the information you need to provide during the loan application process (these documents are usually uploaded to the lending specialist through a secured link):

### General

- Non-expired Government ID and Social Security Number
- Name and complete address for past 2 years of residence

### Income

- Employment history, including names, addresses, phone numbers for the past 2 years.
- Copies of your most recent pay stubs and W-2 forms (past 2 years).
- Verification of other income (social security, child support, retirement).
- Copies of signed tax returns including all schedules (past 2 years).
- Social Security & Pension Award letters.
- If you have rental property income: Copies of all signed lease agreements.

### Assets

- Copies of all bank statements from checking/savings accounts (past 2 months).
- CD certificates and statements for retirement accounts (most recent 2 months or quarterly statement).
- Gift funds will need gift letter of proof of gift.

### Creditors

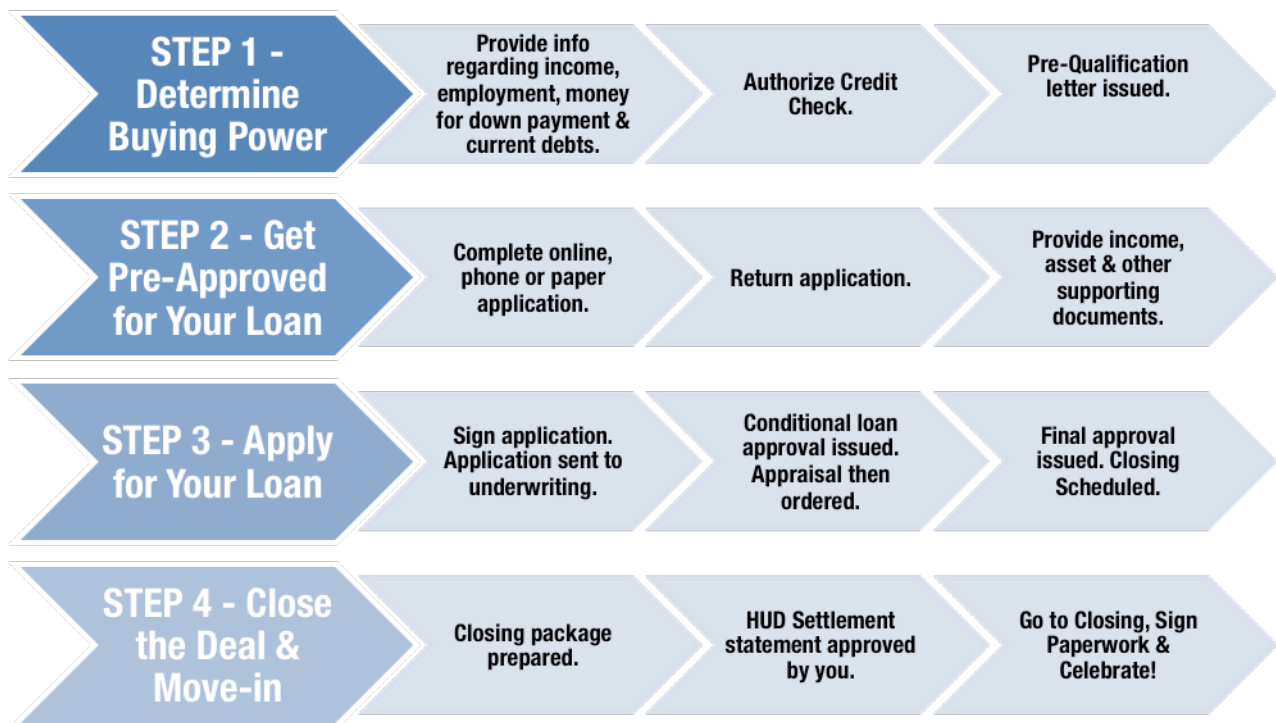
- Credit cards (current balances and monthly payments).
- Installment loans (car, student, etc.).
- Mortgage loans (property address, lender with address, account numbers, monthly payment and balance owed on all properties presently owned or sold within the last 2 years). Bring proof of sale for properties sold..
- Childcare expense/support (name, address, phone number). [VA loans only]

### Other

- Bankruptcy – bring discharge and schedule of creditors.
- Adverse credit – bring letters of explanation.
- Divorce – bring your Divorce Decrees, property settlements, quitclaim deeds, modifications, etc.
- VA only – bring Form DD214 and Certificate of Eligibility.
- Retires – bring retirement and/or Social Security Award Letter.

# HASSLE-FREE LOAN PROCESS

Our preferred lending specialist provides the following 4-step process:





# 10 COMMANDMENTS

## WHEN APPLYING FOR A REAL ESTATE LOAN

Last but not least, these are important rules to follow to ensure a smooth loan process.

1. Thou shalt not change jobs, become self-employed or quit your job.
2. Thou shalt not buy a car, truck or van (or you may be living in it)!
3. Thou shalt not use charge cards excessively or let your accounts fall behind.
4. Thou shalt not spend money you have set aside for closing.
5. Thou shalt not omit debts or liabilities from your loan application.
6. Thou shalt not buy furniture.
7. Thou shalt not originate any inquiries into your credit.
8. Thou shalt not make large deposits without first checking with your loan officer.
9. Thou shalt not change bank accounts.
10. Thou shalt not co-sign a loan for anyone.

# Making an Offer

## Process

Once you have found the property you want, we will write a purchase offer. Reading over a sample purchase and sale contract ahead of time will add to your confidence when we draft an offer.

### How much do I offer?

What you offer on a property depends on a number of factors, including its condition, length of time on the market, buyer activity, and the urgency of the seller. Other considerations include how motivated you are to buy this property and sold prices of recent sales of comparable properties. We'll research this information to help guide you to decide an offer price.

We will write the purchase offer after discussing:

- The offer price
- Earnest money amount: A deposit you make at the time of the offer, usually 1-3% of the offer price
- Financing considerations, if you'll use a mortgage to purchase the property
- Closing date: usually 4-6 weeks from the time your offer is negotiated
- Escrow & Title company options

We will then submit the offer to the sellers through their listing agent and may include a cover letter to substantiate the reasoning behind your offer, or when appropriate, arrange to present the offer to the sellers.

### Negotiating the offer

The seller may accept the offer, reject it or make a counter offer. By far the most common is the counter offer. In these cases, our experience and negotiating skills become powerful in representing your best interests. When a counteroffer is presented, you and I will work together to review each specific area of it, making sure that we move forward with your goals in mind and ensuring that we negotiate the best possible price and terms on your behalf.

When buyer and seller agree on all terms and have signed off on the contract, this is considered **Mutual Acceptance**. All timelines begin the day after mutual acceptance is reached.

# Contingencies

## Protect you during the transaction

Contingencies are conditions that must be satisfied before completing the transaction. Usually, the buyer's offer results in contingencies upon certain things, like financing or inspection.

Common contingencies include:

- Inspection - a professional review of the condition of the improvements
- Financing - even with pre-approval there may be a need for this condition
- Homeowner Review - for condos, a review of the management & financial health of the HOA

### Home Inspection

Usually, the seller will provide a property disclosure for buyers that declare the material facts about the physical condition of the property. The property disclosure does not take the place of a buyer's inspection that is usually made after an offer has been accepted.

A provision for a home inspection can be added to the sales contract identifying the areas to be inspected by a professional inspector. The purpose of the inspection is to find major defects in the home.

### Financing

There can be a number of factors that may affect the lender's final approval for a mortgage loan, even with a pre-approval. For condos, there is an added requirement for approval of the condominium complex in addition to the borrower.

### Homeowners Review (Condos)

Once you are under contract to purchase a condo, you'll have an opportunity to review the HOA documents commonly referred to as a Resale Certificate. These documents will provide information about the building, homeowners association and its finances, and the rules and regulations of the condo complex.

For existing condos, a Reserve Study may be included that provides an assessment of ongoing maintenance needs.

# Closing

## Final steps to owning your home

There are three events that commonly occur during closing: signing, recording and possession.

### Signing

Several days prior to closing, escrow will schedule a signing. During the signing process, the escrow agent will review all of the necessary forms to complete and finalize the sale, including loan documents.

Upon final loan approval, the lender will forward loan documents to escrow. The escrow officer will prepare a settlement statement that shows everyone's costs and credits for lender approval.

You have a choice of bringing funds to your signing as a cashier's check or having funds wired to escrow from your bank.

### Recording

On the day of closing, transfer of title moves ownership of the property from the seller to you. The two events that make this happen are:

1. Loan funding and seller receipt of payment, and
2. Recording of the documents and deed with the local property records office.

### Possession

After the property sale has been recorded with the county, the home is now yours. Under the standard purchase contract in Washington state, the new owner officially takes possession at 9:00 PM on the day of closing, though we'll negotiate to transfer keys to you sooner.

**We hope you have found this guide valuable. When you are ready, give us a call!**