



HOME STRATEGY CONSULTANT

# THE PRE-LIST PREP PLAYBOOK

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*What to fix, clean, clear, and price right before your home goes on the market*

## INSIDE THIS PLAYBOOK

- The one update that returns more than almost anything else you could do
- What to declutter, and why storage matters more than square footage
- The cleaning and showing-day habits buyers actually notice
- The small repairs that quietly cost sellers money at the negotiating table
- A full curb appeal checklist, inside and out
- How to price your home based on what a buyer actually believes it is worth

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# Why Preparation Changes Your Number

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Buyers see your home online before they ever see it in person. The photos and the walkthrough set their first opinion, and that opinion sets the tone for every offer that follows.

Every flaw a buyer notices becomes a lever. They lower their offer to cover it, or they bring it back up during the inspection and ask you to fix it or pay for it. Either way, you pay for it. The only choice is whether you pay on your terms now, or on theirs later.

This playbook exists to put you in control of that timing. Each item below has one job: remove a reason for a buyer to hesitate, ask for money back, or move on to the next listing.

## 01

A buyer forms an opinion of your home from photos, before a showing is ever scheduled.

## 02

Storage, light, and cleanliness are judged within the first minute of a showing, before a buyer says a word.

### HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

Work through each section in order. Check off each item as you finish it. If your timeline is tight, start with paint and repairs. Those two categories affect a buyer's first impression and your inspection outcome, the two moments that set your price.

# 1 Paint

## WHY IT MATTERS

Paint is the highest return update you can make before you list. Buyers picture the cost of a painter as thousands of dollars and the inconvenience of it after they have already moved in, so the home may get skipped. A fresh coat in the right neutral color removes that objection completely. It reads as move-in ready the moment a buyer walks in, and that feeling can lift a buyer's perceived value of your home more than almost any other single update.

- Repaint any wall in a bold, dark, or dated color to a neutral tone  
*A buyer looking at a bright accent wall sees a project, not a room. They mentally price in the cost of repainting it, and that number comes off your offer.*
- Touch up scuffed, marked, or chipped walls and trim throughout the home
- Repaint ceilings that are stained, yellowed, or an outdated color
- Paint or refresh dated kitchen and bathroom cabinets before considering a full replacement
- Use one consistent neutral palette through connected spaces, rather than a different color in every room  
*One flowing neutral color makes a home feel larger and more finished than the same square footage broken into many different colors.*
- Repaint a room even if it looks fine, if the color is bold or highly personal  
*Buyers are picturing their own life in your home. A neutral canvas makes that easy. A bold color makes them picture your life instead of theirs.*

# 1 Paint Colors We Recommend

Pick one palette and carry it through connected spaces. A different color in every room breaks the flow and makes a home feel choppy and smaller than it actually is. Use the shades below as a starting point.

## WHITES & NEUTRALS

<b>White Dove</b> Benjamin Moore, OC-17 Warm white, hint of greige. Living rooms, kitchens.	<b>Chantilly Lace</b> Benjamin Moore, OC-65 Crisp white. Trim, ceilings, modern spaces.	<b>Alabaster</b> Sherwin-Williams, SW 7008 Warm off-white. Bedrooms, baths, kitchens.	<b>Paper White</b> Benjamin Moore, OC-55 Cool white, gray tones. Minimalist, small baths.
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## GRAYS & GREIGES

<b>Revere Pewter</b> Benjamin Moore, HC-172 Warm gray, green tone. Open floor plans.	<b>Collonade Gray</b> Sherwin-Williams, SW 7641 Warm gray-beige. Kitchens, living rooms.	<b>Balboa Mist</b> Benjamin Moore, OC-27 Soft light gray. Bedrooms, foyers.	<b>Agreeable Gray</b> Sherwin-Williams, SW 7029 Warm greige. Works in nearly any room.
<b>Edgecomb Gray</b> Benjamin Moore, HC-173 Soft greige. Living rooms, kitchens.			

## COOL GRAYS

<b>Classic Gray</b> Benjamin Moore, OC-23 Light cool gray. Small spaces, bedrooms.	<b>Repose Gray</b> Sherwin-Williams, SW 7015 Cool gray, blue tone. Calming baths.	<b>Silver Chain</b> Benjamin Moore, 2131-50 Cool medium gray. Dining, living spaces.	<b>Stonington Gray</b> Benjamin Moore, HC-170 True cool gray. Kitchens, dining, offices.
<b>Gray Owl</b> Benjamin Moore, OC-52 Cool gray-green. Fresh baths, kitchens.			

## UNIQUE NEUTRALS

<b>Moonshine</b> Benjamin Moore, 2143-60 Cool gray, hint of green. Airy bedrooms.	<b>Accessible Beige</b> Sherwin-Williams, SW 7036 Versatile beige-gray. Shifts with the light.
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Swatches shown are approximate. Confirm against a physical paint chip in your home's actual lighting before you buy.

## Declutter

### WHY IT MATTERS

A cluttered room reads as a small room. Buyers cannot picture their own furniture or their own life in a space that is still full of yours. Every surface you clear and every closet you thin out is space you are handing a buyer to imagine themselves in.

- Clear kitchen counters down to two or three items  
*Empty counters photograph as more workspace than they actually are.*
- Clear bathroom counters almost completely  
*Personal care products are the fastest way a bathroom reads as small.*
- Remove furniture pieces that block a clear sightline through a room  
*Buyers judge a room's size by how far they can see, not by measurements.*
- Pack away out of season clothing to free up closet space
- Fill closets no more than half full  
*Buyers judge storage by the space left over, not by what already fits.*
- Take down personal photos and personalized wall art  
*This is what lets a buyer picture their own family in the home instead of yours.*
- Clear the garage floor and walkways
- Thin out bookshelves, counters, and displayed collections
- Clear excess items from the pantry and under sink cabinets  
*Buyers open these. A packed cabinet undercuts a decluttered kitchen.*

## 3 Clean

### WHY IT MATTERS

A clean home tells a buyer the house was cared for. A dirty one raises a question buyers cannot un-ask themselves: what else did they skip? Small visible problems make buyers assume there are bigger problems they cannot see.

- Hire a professional deep cleaning service, or set aside a full day to do it yourself  
*A professional cleaner tends to catch details a homeowner walks past every day, like baseboards, vents, and grout lines.*
- Have carpets professionally cleaned, or deep clean them yourself
- Wash all windows, inside and out  
*Clean windows change how much natural light a room appears to have.*
- Scrub grout and re-seal caulking in bathrooms  
*Discolored grout is one of the first things buyers point out on a showing.*
- Wipe down baseboards, doors, and light switches
- Clean inside the oven, refrigerator, and cabinets  
*Buyers open these during a showing. Assume every door will be opened.*
- Clear cobwebs from ceiling corners, eaves, and light fixtures
- Clean or replace an old range hood filter

## Showings: Pets & Smell

### WHY IT MATTERS

Buyers do not mind that you have a pet. They mind the signs of one during a showing. Visible pet items and strong smells are two of the fastest ways a buyer's attention shifts away from your home, and both are avoidable.

- Remove pets from the home during showings whenever possible
- Store pet beds, bowls, toys, and litter boxes in the car or garage before a showing  
*These are the fastest visual cue that reminds a buyer they might inherit pet mess or smell.*
- Scoop litter boxes daily and keep them out of sight before every showing  
*Litter box odor is one of the first things buyers notice, even ones who own cats themselves.*
- If a dog cannot leave the home, crate it in a low traffic area  
*A barking dog in a crate can still cut a showing short, so removing the dog is always the stronger option when possible.*
- Keep cats contained during showings  
*A loose cat makes buyers worry about it slipping out the door as they walk through, which adds stress instead of comfort.*
- Avoid strong cooking, fried food, fish, or heavy spices in the hours before a showing
- Skip plug-ins, candles, and air fresheners  
*A cover-up scent makes a buyer's brain search for what is being covered up. Clean air, with no added scent at all, is what actually reads as clean.*

## 5 Easy Updates: Lighting

### WHY IT MATTERS

Lighting is one of the cheapest ways to make a room look bigger and more finished. Bright, evenly lit rooms photograph better, and better photos are what get a buyer to schedule a showing in the first place.

- Replace every burnt out bulb in the house
- Replace all bulbs with 3000K soft white LED bulbs throughout the home. Do not mix warm and cool light in the same space  
*Consistent lighting is what makes rooms feel calm, clean, and put together. Mixed color temperatures make a home feel unfinished even when everything else is right.*
- Swap out dated fixtures, ceiling fans, and flush mounts that point to a specific decade  
*Builder-grade brass and dome-style flush mounts are two of the fastest updates to make a home feel current.*
- Add a lamp or fixture to any dark corner or hallway
- Clean every fixture and lampshade  
*Dust dulls light output more than most sellers expect.*
- Open blinds and curtains fully for every showing and every photo
- Turn on every light in the house before each showing  
*The extra cost on your electric bill is worth it. Light brings energy to a space, and buyers respond to that energy the moment they walk in.*
- Replace cracked or mismatched switch plates and outlet covers

## 6 Repairs

### WHY IT MATTERS

A buyer who spots five small repairs assumes there are fifty they cannot see. Your inspector will find these regardless, which hands the buyer a second chance to negotiate your price down or ask for a credit. Fixing them now costs less than fixing them during a deal.

- If carpet or flooring is worn, stained, or dated, replace it instead of offering a credit  
*A credit invites more negotiation. A finished floor removes the conversation before it starts.*
- Tighten or replace loose cabinet and door knobs
- Fix sticky doors and drawers  
*Sand a swollen edge or adjust the track. This takes minutes and buyers notice it every time.*
- Patch nail holes and touch up paint
- Fix leaky faucets and running toilets  
*Buyers read plumbing issues as a sign of deferred maintenance throughout the house.*
- Replace cracked outlet covers and switch plates
- Re-caulk tubs, showers, and sinks
- Fix squeaky doors and stair treads
- Repair visible cracks in drywall or ceilings, and test smoke detectors

### DON'T HAVE THE CASH FOR REPAIRS RIGHT NOW

You do not have to pay out of pocket to get your home ready. I have access to repair financing that lets you use your home's equity to cover repairs now and pay it back at closing. Cost does not have to be the reason anything on this list gets skipped. Ask me about it.

## 7 Curb Appeal: Yard

### WHY IT MATTERS

Curb appeal sets a buyer's expectation before they reach the front door. Dirt and neglect outside make a buyer assume the same neglect exists inside, before they have opened the door once.

- Power wash the siding, patio, porch, and driveway  
*Dirt reads as deferred maintenance, even when nothing is actually wrong.*
- Trim trees and bushes back from touching the house
- Mow, edge, and green up the lawn, and apply fertilizer if needed
- Edge sidewalks and driveways for a crisp, finished look
- Pull weeds from flower beds, rock beds, and concrete cracks
- Refresh mulch or rock beds  
*Fresh mulch creates high contrast in photos, one of the fastest ways a yard looks cared for.*
- Add potted plants or fresh flowers to the front walk and back patio for color
- Remove stains from the driveway and walkways
- Repair holes or cracks in outdoor surfaces
- Arrange outdoor furniture neatly, and store away anything you are not using

## 7 Curb Appeal: Exterior & Porch

### WHY IT MATTERS

The exterior and the front door are the first thing a buyer sees in your listing photos, and often the last thing they see before deciding whether to make an offer. Small details here carry more weight than their cost.

- Clean out gutters and downspouts
- Repair roof leaks or damaged shingles  
*Repair what needs it now. Save a full replacement for later if the roof still has usable life left.*
- Re-stain or seal wooden decks
- Repair broken fence slats or gates
- Inspect siding, windows, and shutters, and clean or repaint as needed
- Repair or replace broken windows, doors, and screens
- Touch up paint on house numbers, the mailbox, and fix or replace the doorbell
- Sweep and tidy the front porch, and place a new doormat
- Add potted or hanging plants near the front door
- Paint the front door and trim if they are faded or chipped
- Use warm, bright bulbs in porch and entry light fixtures

# Your Price Is Set By What A Buyer Believes

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Setting your price too high is one of the most expensive mistakes a seller can make, and it rarely costs just the amount you went over.

Buyers filter homes by price range before they ever click on a listing. Price your home 25,000 dollars above where it should be, and you do not just look slightly ambitious to buyers. You disappear completely from every buyer searching below that number.

The first two weeks a home is on the market bring the highest traffic and the most showings it will ever get. That window is where pricing right pays off, and where pricing wrong burns your best chance silently.

When a price cut becomes necessary, it does not just adjust the number. It signals hesitation, and buyers who show up after a price cut tend to negotiate harder, not softer. What a buyer believes your home is worth, not what you hope it is worth, is what sets your final sale price.

## THE TAKEAWAY

A price that feels right to you and a price that a buyer will actually pay can be two very different numbers. Knowing the difference before you list, not after, is what protects your equity.

# Appraised Value vs Market Value

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Most sellers assume these two numbers are the same. They are not, and the difference is exactly where many pricing mistakes start.

## Appraised Value

The value a licensed appraiser assigns to your home. Lenders use it to confirm the buyer's loan amount is justified. It is based on square footage, age, condition, and recent sales of comparable homes nearby.

## Market Value

What a buyer is actually willing to pay. It is shaped by your home's specific features, current buyer demand, and how a buyer feels while walking through it. The other homes competing for that same buyer at the same time are often the single biggest factor in what they are willing to offer. This number moves more than appraised value, and it responds directly to how your home is priced and presented against that competition.

### WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

A pricing strategy needs both numbers before you list. Pricing from only one of them is pricing by guess, and a guess that misses can mean months on the market and real money left on the table. This is the conversation we have before your home ever goes live.

# A Canceled Contract Costs More Than Time

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Getting a signed contract is not the finish line it feels like. Nationally, inspection and repair issues are the number one reason contracts fall apart after they are signed, cited by more than 70 percent of agents surveyed by Redfin in 2025. Locally, MIBOR's own market data shows pending contract fallouts in the Indianapolis market trending upward year over year, the same pattern playing out across the country.

When a contract falls apart, your home does not just go back on the market. It goes back with a history. Buyers can see it was pending and ask why. That question is the stigma, and it follows a relisted home even when the reason had nothing to do with the house itself.

This matters most because of timing. The first two weeks a home is listed bring its highest traffic and strongest offers. A canceled contract does not just cost you the buyer you lost. It costs you that entire window a second time, except now you are trying to recreate it with a relisted home and a harder story to tell.

## THE FIX

Get ahead of it with a pre-listing inspection. It shows you exactly what a buyer's inspector will find. Once you know, you have two options: repair it, or disclose it. Both put you in control. Neither leaves you exposed to losing your contract, your momentum, and your price, all at once.

# Know What Matters For Your Home

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This playbook covers what applies to almost every home. Which items matter most for your sale, and which ones you can skip entirely, depends on your home, your market, and your price point. That call is a strategy conversation, not a checklist.

If you want a walkthrough that tells you exactly what to prioritize and what to leave alone, or you want to talk through repair financing or your pricing strategy, reach out and we will build that plan together.

*Ready to build your plan*

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