

THE BUILDER'S LANGUAGE DECODER

30 New Construction Terms Every Gainesville, GA Buyer Should Know

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Why This Guide Exists

I'm Shannon Sanborn, The Flying Realtor — with more than 20 years of hands-on experience across all phases of new construction, I put this guide together because builders and sales reps use terminology every day that most buyers have never encountered. Not knowing what a term means at the design center or in your contract can cost you real money.

This isn't legal jargon translated into slightly-less-confusing legal jargon. It's the 30 terms that actually come up — explained the way I'd explain them if we were sitting across from each other before your first visit to a sales office.

The Bottom Line

You don't need to become a construction expert. You just need to know enough to ask the right questions — and recognize the answers that should make you pause.

The 30 Terms

1. Spec Home

A home built by the builder without a specific buyer, using the builder's own selected finishes.

2. Design Center

The showroom where you select finishes and upgrades after signing your contract.

3. Change Order

Any modification to your contract after signing, typically priced at the builder's rate and can affect your timeline.

4. Quick Move-In Home (QMI)

A home already under construction or completed, with limited or no ability to customize finishes.

5. Kickout Clause

Contract language that can allow the builder to cancel your contract under certain conditions, even after you're under contract.

6. Pre-Drywall Inspection

An inspection before interior walls are closed up, giving a rare look at framing, wiring, and plumbing.

7. Punch List

The list of remaining items to fix or complete before or shortly after closing.

8. Slab Foundation

A home built directly on a concrete foundation at ground level, with no space underneath.

9. Basement Lot (Walkout/Daylight)

A lot where the home includes a lower level below the main floor, sometimes with direct outdoor access.

10. HOA (Homeowners Association)

The organization managing shared community amenities and rules, funded by regular dues.

11. Builder Warranty

Coverage provided by the builder, typically shorter on workmanship and longer on major systems and structural elements.

12. Structural Warranty

The longest-term portion of a builder warranty, covering major structural components of the home.

13. Earnest Money

A deposit showing good faith when you sign a purchase contract, typically credited toward your purchase at closing.

14. Escrow

A neutral third party holding funds (like earnest money or property taxes) until the transaction terms are satisfied.

15. Rough-In

The stage where electrical, plumbing, and HVAC systems are installed before walls are closed up.

16. Framing

The structural skeleton of the home, built before drywall, siding, or finishes are added.

17. Grading

How the ground slopes around your home's foundation, critical for directing water away rather than toward your house.

18. ENERGY STAR Certified

A third-party-verified standard covering insulation, windows, and HVAC efficiency.

19. Party Wall

The shared wall between two attached homes, such as townhomes, requiring specific fire separation and sound insulation standards.

20. Buyer Representation Agreement

A signed agreement, required since 2024, between you and your agent before touring homes together, outlining how your agent is compensated.

21. Builder's Allowance

A set dollar amount included for a specific feature (like flooring or lighting); costs above that allowance come out of your pocket.

22. Model Home / Sales Center

The builder's showcase home, often featuring upgrades not included in the base price.

23. Elevation

The exterior style option for a given floor plan (for example, Elevation A vs. Elevation B).

24. Standard vs. Upgrade Features

What's included in the base price versus what costs extra at the design center.

25. Certificate of Occupancy (CO)

The official document confirming a home is legally safe to move into.

26. Closing Disclosure

The final document outlining your actual loan terms and closing costs, provided before closing.

27. Builder's Punch List Walk

The scheduled walkthrough where you and the builder's representative identify remaining items before closing.

28. Preferred Lender Incentive

A discount or credit offered by a builder if you finance through their preferred lending partner, worth comparing against your own lender's rates.

29. Flex Cash / Builder Credit

Promotional funds a builder applies toward closing costs, rate buydowns, or upgrades, usually time-limited.

30. HOA-Managed Landscaping

A common HOA-covered service in townhome communities; confirm exactly what's included versus your own responsibility.

Ready to Put This Into Practice?

A glossary can only take you so far. If you're ready to talk through a specific community, builder, or contract you're looking at, I'm here to walk through it with you — no pressure, no obligation.

Text me directly at **(678) 997-0206**, or visit **ExploreGainesvilleGA.com** to explore active new construction communities across Gainesville and Hall County.

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