
Sell Smart!

Stress Less, When You Hire the Very Best!

Your Complete Seller's Guide to Real Estate

Welcome

Selling your home is one of the most important financial decisions you'll ever make. I provide expert advice, market insight, and a strategic plan to get your home noticed and sold.

This guide walks you through everything — from understanding today's market to closing day and beyond. Whether you are a first-time seller or a seasoned homeowner, you'll find clear answers, proven strategies, and the support you need to sell smart.

Use this as your roadmap from our first conversation through closing. Looking forward to a successful sale together!

PART 1: Understanding the Housing Market

Real Estate Market Cycles

The real estate market is constantly changing — and that's not a bad thing. What matters is having a trusted resource who can explain what market trends mean for you and your selling power.

There are three types of real estate markets:

- A Seller's Market: Fewer homes for sale, buyers competing for properties. You may see multiple offers and purchase prices above list price. This market favors sellers.
- A Buyer's Market: More homes for sale than buyers. Sellers compete for a smaller pool of buyers. Expect lower offers and terms that favor buyers.
- A Balanced Market: An even balance between inventory and buyers. The fairest of the three, but the least common.

Is Now a Good Time to Sell?

To determine if this is the right time for you, we'll look at current local market conditions — not just national headlines. Every market is different, and the DMV is no exception.

A question even bigger than market cycles is: "What is YOUR motivation to sell?" While market conditions matter, I coach clients to consider what making a move will look and feel like for their family, and what their return on investment will be. A great agent lays out all the information so you can make the best decision — emotionally and financially.

PART 2: Why Hire a Real Estate Professional? 🏆

According to the National Association of REALTORS®, 93% of homeowners say yes — they would hire a real estate professional again. Here's why it matters:

- We Protect Your Best Interests — just as you'd turn to a trusted attorney for legal matters, a REALTOR® navigates the complex process and negotiates on your behalf.
- We've Done the Homework — 60–180 hours of coursework before licensing, plus ongoing training in contracts, law, finance, pricing, marketing, and technology.
- Standards Matter — a REALTOR® is a licensed agent AND an active member of the National Association of REALTORS®, bound by a strict Code of Ethics.
- Legal Ease — contracts, addendums, contingencies, and closing paperwork require expert navigation. We handle every detail so nothing falls through the cracks.
- Pricing Expertise — we use Comparable Market Analysis (CMA) tools to price your home correctly from day one. Historically, 80% of marketing effectiveness is linked to price.
- Marketing Power — 93% of buyers start their search online. We use MLS syndication, social media advertising, email campaigns, 3-D virtual tours, professional photography, open houses, and more.
- Negotiation — buyers are savvy and have their own representation. You need an experienced professional in your corner who knows how to navigate multiple offers and protect your interests.
- Time — at last count, there are 184 actions, steps, and tasks involved from listing to close. We manage all of it so you can focus on your life.

PART 3: Who Is Involved in the Sale of Your Home? 🎬

Selling your home is a team effort. Here are all the parties involved who will influence the process:

- You, the Seller — interested in the best possible return on investment and favorable terms.
- Your Seller's Agent (me!) — working fiercely on your behalf to protect your interests and get you the most for your home in the shortest time.
- Seller's Attorney — protects your legal interests.
- The Buyers — looking to purchase for the least money possible with the most favorable terms.
- The Buyer's Agent — represents the buyer's interests.
- The Buyer's Attorney — protects the buyer's legal interests.

- The Home Inspector — hired by the buyer to assess the condition of your home. Their findings may open negotiations.
- The Appraiser — provides an objective third-party assessment of your home's value.
- The Lender/Bank Representative — oversees the buyer's financing and closing process.
- The Title Company — ensures clear title and proper transfer of the property.

In most cases, there is only one person communicating with every party on this list from contract to close: your Selling Agent. Think of your agent as the Director of the production — expertly directing every player to ensure a successful show.

PART 4: The Selling Process — Step by Step

Here is your complete roadmap from our first conversation to closing day:

Step 1 — Listing Consultation

- Discuss your goals, timeline, and expectations
- Review current market conditions and comparable sales
- Execute listing paperwork

Step 2 — Property Preparation

- Repairs, decluttering, and staging to make the home market-ready
- Professional photos, video, and virtual tours arranged

Step 3 — Setting the Price

- Use a Comparative Market Analysis (CMA) to determine the best price
- Ensure the price is competitive to attract buyers while maximizing value

Step 4 — Marketing the Home

- List on MLS and syndicated platforms (Zillow, Redfin, Bright MLS, etc.)
- Promote through targeted social media ads, email campaigns, and open houses

Step 5 — Showings & Open House

- Schedule and manage private showings and open house events
- Collect feedback from buyers and their agents

Step 6 — Receiving Offers

- Present all offers and walk you through the pros and cons of each
- Negotiate price, contingencies, and closing timeline

Step 7 — Accepting an Offer

- Once you accept, the buyer schedules inspections and finalizes financing
- Be prepared for potential negotiations based on inspection results

Step 8 — Appraisal & Contingencies

- The buyer's lender orders an appraisal to confirm value
- Work through contingencies — inspections, repairs, financing approval

Step 9 — Closing Preparation

- Coordinate with the title company, attorneys, and agents
- Review the closing disclosure to ensure all fees and terms are accurate

Step 10 — Closing & Celebration Day!

- Sign the necessary documents to transfer ownership
- Hand over the keys — congratulations on your successful sale!

PART 5: Pricing Your Home Right

Fair Market Value

Bottom line: pricing your home at or just below Fair Market Value is the best way to get the best sales price and terms in the least amount of time. Fair Market Value is the price that a reasonable buyer would pay and a reasonable seller would accept based on current market conditions — based on numbers, not emotion.

It is crucial to price correctly from day one. Historically, 80% of marketing effectiveness is linked to price. Your first offer is very often your best offer.

The Dangers of Overpricing

77% of sellers make the mistake of overpricing. Here is what happens when you do:

- You help your competition — a higher price sends buyers to competing listings to get more for less.
- Agents won't be on board — savvy buyer's agents will steer clear of an obviously overpriced listing.
- Appraisals dump the deal — if the appraisal falls short of the asking price, the deal can collapse.
- Your listing goes stale — homes get the most exposure in the first 30 days. An overpriced home sits, and buyers start asking, "What's wrong with it?"
- You lose valuable time — overpriced listings always take longer to sell, costing you time and money.
- Stress on your family — the longer your home sits, the longer you maintain "show condition."

The Zillow Zestimate Warning

Some homeowners rely on the Zillow Zestimate as a pricing guide. It's called an "estimate" for a reason — it is a flawed algorithm that no bank would use for lending purposes. Do not make major financial decisions based on it.

The Best Strategy

List at or just below fair market value. Then you are negotiating UP instead of down. Today's buyers are highly informed — if they sense they are getting a deal, they are likely to bid up a property that is slightly underpriced, especially in areas with low inventory.

PART 6: Preparing Your Home for Sale 🏠

See Your Home Through a Buyer's Eyes

While selling your home feels very personal, buyers are looking at it through their own lenses. A real estate professional can help you bridge that gap — looking at your home objectively, from a place of experience rather than emotion, to identify the staging and improvements that will get you the most return.

Home Staging: The Numbers Don't Lie

- 95% of agents suggest sellers declutter before putting a home on the market
- 83% of buyers' agents say staging makes it easier for buyers to visualize living in the home
- 53% of sellers' agents say staging decreases the time a home spends on the market
- 44% of buyers' agents say staging increases the dollar value offered on a purchase

Source: National Association of REALTORS® Profile of Home Staging

Common Home Improvements to Consider

You do not need to do a full renovation to make an impact. Here are high-value improvements that show well without a massive investment:

- Add a fresh coat of paint in neutral colors throughout the home
- Replace fogged windows (moisture build-up between panes)
- Repair any leaky faucets, showers, or jet tubs
- Replace or repair any rotting exterior wood; freshen up exterior paint
- Replace or repair any missing or damaged shingles — buyers worry about roofs
- Fix any wobbly handrails on decks and stairs
- Ensure HVAC units are working properly — this is a big buyer concern
- Clear out the clutter — ditch fridge magnets, pack up knick-knacks, remove bulk furniture
- Pack up everything you do not need to create a blank canvas and make rooms feel more spacious
- Update kitchen appliances where possible
- Put all valuables in safe keeping
- Make sure all light bulbs are working
- Deep clean — walls, baseboards, bathtubs, showers, floors, carpets, kitchens, driveways
- Consider hiring a professional home stager — they know how to accentuate your home's best features
- Landscape the yard — curb appeal matters and signals to buyers the home has been well maintained
- Wash all windows, inside and outside

- Clean out and organize the garage
- Take care of any odors before every showing

PART 7: 10 Quick Ways to Get Ready for a Showing (In 10 Minutes or Less!) ⚡

When a last-minute showing request comes in, here is your rapid-fire checklist:

1. Put dirty dishes from the sink in the dishwasher.
2. Make the beds.
3. Empty the trash.
4. Put dirty clothes in the washer.
5. Run the vacuum quick around the house.
6. Run a toilet brush around the toilet bowl.
7. Wipe down faucets and sinks.
8. Turn on all lights.
9. Take a deep breath — you're almost there!
10. Leave the house until the showing is over.

Smile — you did it!

PART 8: Setting Up Showings & Communication 📞

Setting Up Showings

To ensure a smooth showing process, we will make a few decisions together:

- **Access to the Property:** Provide key(s) for the lockbox or another access option you prefer. Share the alarm code or disarm before showings.
- **Showing Notice:** Let me know your preferred notice window (1–24 hrs), or if the property is vacant for immediate access. Flexibility = maximum exposure.
- **Yard Sign:** Optional, but boosts visibility.
- **Broker Opens:** Scheduled before the listing goes active to get agent feedback on pricing and condition — helps reduce days on market and fine-tune strategy.
- **Open Houses:** Optional, usually for the opening weekend or after a major strategy change like a price adjustment.

Protecting Your Home While It's Listed

All showings are handled by licensed agents — no strangers walk through your door unaccompanied. That said, while your home is active on the market, a little preparation goes a long way toward keeping your family, belongings, and personal information safe.

- Secure valuables before going active. Jewelry, cash, electronics, firearms, and prescription medications should be locked away or removed from the home entirely.
- Put away personal documents. Passports, financial statements, mail, and family calendars should be stored out of sight. Buyers and their agents are there to evaluate the home — not your personal details.
- Limit digital visibility. Smart home displays, sticky notes with passwords, and home office screens should be cleared or turned off during the listing period.
- Remove or cover personal photos. This is common staging advice, but it also protects your privacy — fewer identifying details visible to visitors.
- Let me handle all access coordination. Every showing is booked through a secure scheduling system. No one enters without a confirmed appointment tied to a licensed agent.
- Have a plan for pets. Animals should be secured or temporarily relocated during showings — both for their comfort and to create a welcoming environment for buyers.
- Deactivate indoor cameras if required. Some states have disclosure requirements around recording devices during showings — I'll advise you on DC/MD/VA rules before we go live.

Communication & Support

I have a full system in place to keep you informed at every stage and to handle the details behind the scenes. My goal is for you to feel prepared, supported, and clear on your options from our first conversation through closing.

Your transaction is fully managed — attention to detail is our top priority. My Transaction Coordinator, Jim Downing, is a licensed REALTOR® with over 20 years of experience in the industry. Jim isn't just someone keeping the paperwork in order — he brings deep real estate knowledge to every transaction. He handles scheduling, deadlines, documentation, and coordination behind the scenes, so I can stay focused on leading the sale and negotiating the best outcome for you. Between the two of us, you have seasoned professionals watching every detail from contract to close.

- Text or email are the fastest ways to reach us. Calls will be returned promptly during business hours.

Reach Me

- Monday – Friday: 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM
- Saturday: 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM
- Sunday: Reserved to recharge — available for urgent matters like contract review, negotiations, or time-sensitive issues.

Hours may vary slightly. Calls and messages will be returned the next business day.

Keeping You Updated

I will keep you informed as soon as I have any pertinent updates. Sometimes no news is good news — everything is moving along as planned. It is important to read and review your emails, as all key information will be provided in writing. All contract terms and changes must be signed or initialed by all parties.

Once listing paperwork is executed, I get to work on hundreds of tasks behind the scenes to get your home sold:

- High-impact marketing — a custom plan to maximize exposure. I pivot strategies as needed to get your home seen and sold.
- Top-notch negotiation — focused on your goals, fiercely advocating for the best price and terms.
- Clear communication — you stay informed every step of the way. If I don't know the answer, I find out fast.
- Full transaction management — deadlines, documents, and communications tracked for a smooth, transparent, stress-free sale.
- Pricing & Market Position — if we are not getting offers quickly, we discuss adjustments. I keep you updated on market trends so we make smart decisions together.

Everything is taken care of so you can focus on your life.

Offer Review Process

When offers come in, I will guide you through each one and provide my insights. We will clearly cover:

- Offer terms — price, financing, and other key details
- Conditions & contingencies — inspections, repairs, and special requests
- Closing timeline & next steps — key dates and actions to keep your sale moving

This ensures you are fully informed and can negotiate with confidence at every step.

PART 10: Pay-at-Closing Renovations

"What if my home needs updates, but I don't want to pay out of pocket before we list?"

Great news — there are companies that allow pre-sale improvements to be completed now and paid later at closing from your proceeds. This is called Pay-at-Closing.

What This Means for You

Instead of delaying important updates or coming out of pocket for repairs, paint, flooring, lighting, landscaping, or cosmetic improvements:

- The work can be completed before we go on the market
- Your home shows better and attracts stronger offers
- The contractor is paid from your proceeds at settlement

You get the benefit of a market-ready home without upfront financial stress.

How the Process Works

1. We identify the improvements that will make the biggest impact on price and buyer appeal.
2. The company provides a written estimate and scope of work.
3. You approve what you'd like done.
4. The work is completed before listing.
5. The home sells.

6. The invoice is paid from your proceeds at closing through the title company.

Companies I Have Already Contacted on Your Behalf

When we are ready, we will coordinate walkthroughs, estimates, and scheduling with the following Pay-at-Closing renovation partners:

- Ready to Sell Renovations — www.r2sr.com
- Max House Price — www.maxhouseprice.com
- Immaculate Home Builders — ihbremodelers.com
- Qwik Fix — theqwikfix.com

Homes that show better, photograph better, and feel updated sell faster and for more money. I will guide you through exactly what makes sense for your home and your goals. You won't have to figure this out alone.

PART 11: Closing the Sale

Accepting the Offer

When a buyer makes an offer, you will respond with an acceptance or a counteroffer, delivered through your agent to theirs. There is often back-and-forth negotiation — your agent will ensure that all parties come away with the best possible outcome for your goals.

In some cases, you will receive multiple offers. I have strategies to navigate multiple-offer situations to your advantage. Sometimes an offer can fall through — if this happens, I continue marketing your home until the right buyer comes.

Home Inspection & Appraisal

Typically, the buyer will schedule a thorough home inspection to check for any repairs or potential issues. This is an important part of the buyer's decision-making process and is traditionally paid for by the buyer.

An appraiser — an objective third party — will also assess the value of your home, especially if the buyers are financing. I will walk you through what to expect and how to respond to any findings.

Closing Costs

For the most part, closing costs are covered by the buyer, though the seller is responsible for paying the real estate commission. There are also occasions when commissions are split between parties. I will ensure full transparency on all fees before we list so there are no surprises.

The Final Transactions

In DC, Maryland, and Virginia, a real estate transaction is officially closed once documents are recorded and money changes hands. There is a lot of paperwork involved — and the great news is that more and more, much of this can be done digitally. I coordinate everything so your closing is smooth and stress-free.

PART 12: Moving — Your Complete Checklist

Moving can be an exciting yet overwhelming time for families. There is so much to do and so many details to manage. I have put together this Moving Checklist to help you get through the process — and tips to help children navigate what can feel like a scary time. I am also happy to provide moving company recommendations.

One Month Prior

- File "Change of Address" forms with the postal service.
- Make arrangements to move your personal belongings — contact a moving company or arrange for a rental truck.
- Gather boxes and other moving supplies.
- Plan your travel route to your new home. Be mindful of bridges or overpasses with clearance restrictions.
- Create a folder for moving expense receipts — some are tax deductible (lodging, meals, fuel).
- Develop a packing plan — pack last what you use most, and ensure items needed first upon arrival are accessible.
- Notify family, friends, and businesses of your move.
- Notify federal and state tax authorities and any other government agencies.

Two Weeks Prior

- Notify utility services: gas, electric, water, cable, phone, and internet.
- Arrange for services at your new address.
- Have your car serviced if your new home is some distance away.
- Recruit people to help you on moving day.
- Have a plan for keeping your pets safe — moving day can be stressful for them too.
- Arrange for babysitters for small children.
- Confirm your moving company or rental truck arrangements.
- Notify your bank if you are leaving the area.

One Day Prior

- Keep moving materials separate so they do not accidentally get packed.
- Put your phone chargers in a safe, accessible place.
- Pick up a rental truck if you are moving yourself.
- Fill up your car with gas and check your oil and tire pressure.
- Get a good sleep!

After the Move

- Any mail with a yellow forwarding sticker — contact the sender to update your address.

- Register to vote.
- Change the address on your driver's license, or apply for a new one if you moved to a different state. Update your auto insurance.
- Find out when garbage is picked up at your new home and what recycling programs are available.
- Select a new doctor and dentist and have your medical histories transferred.
- Locate new service providers: banks, pharmacies, plumbers, HVAC contractors.
- Make a list of emergency numbers to have handy in your new home.

PART 13: Tips for Helping Children With a Move

Kids require extra attention and care when the family is buying or selling a home. Making a little extra effort to include them in the process helps them adjust more quickly.

- Show the children the new home before moving day. If that is not possible, pictures or videos will help them visualize where they are going.
- Assure children that you won't forget their friends.
- Make a scrapbook of the old home and neighborhood.
- Throw a goodbye party. Have their friends sign a t-shirt as a keepsake.
- Have your children write goodbye letters to their friends and enclose their new address.
- When packing, give them their own box to decorate so they recognize it after the move.
- If you are moving far away, buy postcards at stops along the way so they can remember the trip.
- When unpacking, let them unpack their own treasures first. Have them play in the boxes while you unpack.
- Start a scrapbook for their new home, including a "My First..." diary.
- Visit their new school, park, and church. Take pictures for the scrapbook.
- Help your children invite new friends over to the house.
- Let them choose a new favorite restaurant — it gives them a sense of control in their new world.
- Encourage them to send letters about their new home to old friends.
- Involve them in groups, sports, and activities similar to what they enjoyed before.
- Remember: even if you only lived in your former home a few years, to a young child it is nearly their entire life!

A Note From Shawanda

Selling your home is one of the biggest financial decisions you will ever make — and doing it in a market as nuanced as the DC, Maryland, and Virginia area adds another layer of complexity. That is exactly why I created this guide: to take the mystery out of the process and make sure you never feel alone in it.

In over 10 years of serving buyers and sellers across the DMV, I have seen every kind of sale — straightforward listings, inherited properties, relocation transactions, estate sales, and everything in between. Every single client had a unique situation. Every single one needed something a little different. That is why I do not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach.

What I do believe in: clear communication, honest advice, fierce advocacy, and following through. From your first question to the day we hand over the keys — I am in your corner.

— Shawanda Robinson, REALTOR® | Probate & Relocation Specialist

Shawanda

About Your REALTOR®

Shawanda T. Robinson is a REALTOR® licensed in DC, Maryland, and Virginia with over 10 years of experience and a clear mission — to change lives, solve problems, and raise living standards through real estate.

A skilled negotiator with a background in interior design, she helps sellers maximize their return and ensures every home shows at its absolute best. As a Probate Specialist, she guides families through estate sales with care and expertise. As a Military Relocation Professional (MRP) with RLAH @properties, she proudly serves military families, veterans, and corporate transferees moving through the DMV.

Known for genuine connections and exceptional service, Shawanda doesn't stop until your real estate goals become reality.

Creating Opportunities. Offering Solutions. Building Your Future.

Shawanda Robinson | REALTOR® | Probate & Relocation Specialist

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