

THE CALGARY BUYER'S GUIDE

Buying a Home in Calgary

Everything you need to know — from your first showing to the day you get the keys. Built for buyers in Calgary and the surrounding area.

YOUR CALGARY REALTOR®

Nadine Rife

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A QUICK HELLO

Hi, I'm Nadine.

Helping you find home in YYC and beyond.



Nadine Rife · KIC Realty


I'm a Calgary REALTOR® with KIC Realty who believes buying a home should feel exciting, not overwhelming. My job is to translate the jargon, look out for the details that matter, and make sure you walk into your new place feeling confident about the decision you made.

Whether you're chasing a first place in the inner city, a forever home in the suburbs, or your first new build in a brand-new community, I'll be the steady hand at every step — from your first showing to the day you get the keys. I work with first-time buyers, growing families, downsizers, and investors all over the Calgary area.

MY PROMISE TO YOU

Clear answers, honest advice, and zero pressure. We move at your pace — not the market's.

How to reach me

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 KIC Realty

Why this guide?

Buying a home is one of the biggest decisions you'll ever make — and the process has a lot of moving parts. This guide is the friendly, plain-English version of everything I walk my clients through.

What's different about Calgary & Alberta?

A few things make our market unique compared to BC or Ontario:

ALBERTA ADVANTAGE

No Land Transfer Tax. You'll pay only a small Land Titles registration fee at closing — usually a few hundred dollars vs. thousands in other provinces.

HEADS UP

Calgary has its own quirks — chinook weather, basement development trends, condo bylaws, special assessments, and a strong new-build market. I'll point them out as we go.

How to use this guide

Read it cover to cover, or skip to the step you're on. You'll find diagrams, real numbers for Calgary, and a checklist at every stage. Questions? Call or text any time — that's literally what I'm here for.

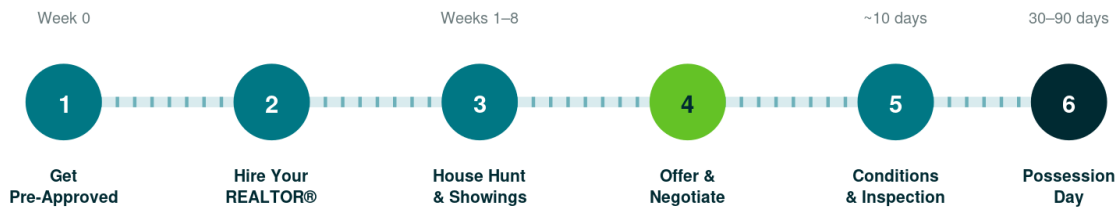
THE BIG PICTURE

Six steps from maybe to moving in.

Most home purchases follow the same general arc. Here's the bird's-eye view before we zoom in.

The buying journey.

From your first online search to the keys in your hand, the process usually takes 8–14 weeks once you start touring homes seriously.



Every buyer's journey is different — some take months to find the right place, others find it in their second showing. The timeline above is for the active phase once you've made a serious decision to buy.

A NOTE FROM NADINE

Don't skip Step 1. A pre-approval before you start shopping saves heartache later when you fall for a place outside your real budget.

Get pre-approved.

This is where every smart buying journey starts — knowing exactly what you can afford, and what monthly payment fits your real life.

What pre-approval actually means

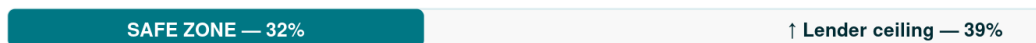
A lender (bank or broker) reviews your income, debts, credit, and down payment, and tells you the maximum mortgage they'd be willing to lend you. They'll also lock in an interest rate for 90–120 days while you shop.

What you'll need

1. Photo ID + Social Insurance Number
2. Two most recent pay stubs (or T4s + Notice of Assessment if self-employed)
3. Proof of down payment (90 days of statements showing the source)
4. List of debts (car loans, credit cards, student loans, support payments)
5. Property tax + condo fee info if you own already

Gross Debt Service (GDS) — Max 32% (most lenders 39%)

Housing costs ÷ gross monthly income



Total Debt Service (TDS) — Max 40% (most lenders 44%)

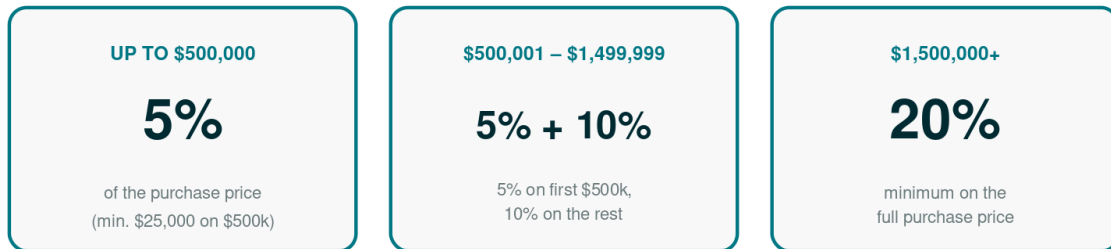
Housing + all other debts (car, credit cards, student loans) ÷ gross monthly income



Even if you qualify at the higher ratios, the lower targets leave room for life — daycare, RRSPs, vacations, surprises.

How much down do I need?

The minimum down payment in Canada depends on the purchase price:



Less than 20% down = insured mortgage (CMHC, Sagen, or Canada Guaranty) with an insurance premium added.

INSURED VS. UNINSURED

If you put down less than 20%, your mortgage must be insured. The premium is rolled into your mortgage — typical range is 2.8% to 4% of the loan amount, depending on your down payment.

Bank vs. broker — which is better?

Banks deal with their own products. Mortgage brokers shop dozens of lenders, often finding sharper rates and more flexible terms. I work with both and can connect you with trusted Calgary contacts either way.

Hire your Realtor®.

Buyers in Alberta now sign a written Buyer Representation Agreement — and there's good news in that: it spells out exactly what you'll get and what (if anything) you'll pay.

What I do as your Realtor®

- Set up MLS searches tuned to your real wishlist — not what an algorithm guesses.
- Book and run showings on your schedule (evenings and weekends, no problem).
- Pull comparable sales so we know what a home is actually worth.
- Spot red flags — Poly-B plumbing, aluminum wiring, condo special assessments, post-tension cables, knob-and-tube — before you fall in love.
- Write your offer using the AREA-approved Alberta contract and negotiate firmly on your behalf.
- Coordinate the inspection, condo doc review, lawyer, and lender so nothing slips.

Who pays the commission?

IN MOST CASES

The seller's listing agreement specifies a commission that covers both sides. Your Buyer Representation Agreement makes any difference transparent up front so there are no surprises later.

RECA — YOUR PROTECTION

Every licensed Alberta Realtor® answers to the Real Estate Council of Alberta (RECA). Ask any agent for their license — I'm happy to share mine.

Home hunting.

This is the fun part — and the part that takes the most patience. Most of my Calgary buyers see 8–20 homes before they find the one.

Building your wishlist

I'll have you think through three buckets:

Must-have	Want	Nice-to-have
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of bedrooms• Max commute to work / school• Garage / no garage• Hard 'no' deal-breakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yard size, exposure• Style (modern, character)• Specific quadrant• Walk to coffee shop, river	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finished basement• Heated garage• Quartz vs. laminate• Specific school

Calgary neighborhood vibes

A quick non-exhaustive cheat sheet — every quadrant has gems and we'll narrow in based on your priorities:

- NW — University, U of C, mountain views, family-friendly: Hidden Valley, Brentwood, Tuscany.
- NE — Diverse, great food, affordability: Saddle Ridge, Skyview Ranch, Cornerstone.
- SE — New communities & lakes: Mahogany, Auburn Bay, Seton, Cranston.
- SW — Established, river access, mountain proximity: Altadore, Lakeview, Bridlewood.
- Inner-city — Walkable lifestyle: Bridgeland, Inglewood, Kensington, Mission, Beltline.

At the showing.

A showing isn't just about whether the place "feels right." I'll have you look at specific things that affect long-term cost and livability.

What to actually look for

Structure & systems

- Age of furnace, hot water tank, roof, windows
- Visible cracks in foundation or drywall
- Sloping floors or sticky doors (settlement)
- Type of plumbing (Poly-B = future replacement)
- Electrical panel age & amperage (60A = upgrade)

Calgary-specific

- Sump pump & backwater valve (flood risk areas)
- Attic insulation (cold winters!)
- Roof age — Calgary hail country
- South-facing windows (vs. wind-side)
- Snow drift patterns / driveway grade

BRING A TAPE MEASURE

Listings can be misleading — measure key spaces (couch wall, kitchen, your king-size mattress against that bedroom wall). I always bring one.

Condo? Don't skip this.

For condos and townhomes in Calgary, the "condo documents" tell the real story — reserve fund study, recent meeting minutes, special assessments, bylaws, and budgets. I'll order them and we'll review together before you firm up.

Writing the offer.

Once you've found the one, we move fast. A well-written offer can win you the home even against a higher bid — because terms matter as much as price.



DEPOSIT TIMING

Typically due within 24–48 hours of conditions being removed (firm sale).
Paid by certified cheque / bank draft to the listing brokerage trust account.
Held in trust until closing — then applied to the purchase price.

What goes into a Calgary offer

- Price — based on comparable recent sales, not the asking price.
- Deposit — typically 1–5% of price, due 24–48 hours after offer is firm.
- Possession date — when you actually get the keys (usually 30–90 days out).
- Conditions — see next page — what protects you while we verify everything.
- Included items — appliances, window coverings, shed, hot tub.

Strategy for winning.

Multiple offer situations

When the Calgary market gets hot, you may end up in a bidding war. Here's how we approach it:

6. Decide your true ceiling before we know the competing bids.
7. Sharpen the terms — shorter condition period, flexible possession, larger deposit.
8. Write a personal letter to the seller where appropriate.
9. Skip "fluff" conditions, but never skip the important ones (more on the next page).
10. Walk away if it crosses your number. There's always another house.

STAY SANE

Losing an offer hurts. I've seen clients lose three before winning the perfect one — sometimes for less than the previous bids. Patience pays.

A note on "love letters"

A short, warm note to the seller about why you love their home can occasionally tip the scales. Keep it generic — no photos, no family details that could open the door to Fair Housing concerns.

Conditions & inspection.

Your offer is accepted — but it's 'conditional.' For the next 7–14 days, we verify everything. This is when you can still walk away cleanly if something serious turns up.

The four usual conditions

1

Financing

Your lender does a final review of the actual property and approves the mortgage. Pre-approval is not a guarantee — this step makes it real.

2

Home Inspection

A licensed Alberta home inspector (~\$450–\$700) spends 2–4 hours going through the home from roof to crawlspace. You should attend — it's your best home-systems education.

3

Condo Document Review

(Condos only) Your lawyer or a condo doc specialist reviews 200+ pages of bylaws, financials, and meeting minutes.

4

Property Insurance

You confirm you can actually get insurance at a reasonable rate. (Past flood claims or knob-and-tube can be a deal-breaker.)

When the inspection finds something.

It almost always does — no home is perfect. What matters is whether it's a "deal-breaker," a "negotiate it" item, or "just life with a house."

Just life

- Loose toilet seat
- Minor caulking
- Burned-out bulb
- Cosmetic paint

Negotiate

- Old furnace nearing end of life
- Poly-B plumbing
- Roof with <5 yrs life left
- Failed seals on windows

Deal-breaker?

- Foundation cracks & movement
- Mould or moisture in basement
- Asbestos or vermiculite
- Major structural settling

Your three options after inspection

11. Remove conditions — proceed as-is and the deal becomes firm.
12. Negotiate — ask for a price reduction, repairs, or a holdback to handle items.
13. Walk away — within the condition period, you can cancel and your deposit is returned.

Closing & possession.

Conditions are removed, your deposit is in trust, and now the lawyers take over. Here's what happens between 'firm' and 'keys in hand.'

Roughly 2 weeks before possession

- Sign your formal mortgage documents with your lender.
- Visit your real estate lawyer to sign closing documents (1–2 hours).
- Bring a certified cheque or bank draft for your down payment + closing costs.
- Arrange property insurance, with proof to your lender BEFORE possession day.
- Set up utilities (ENMAX, ATCO Gas, City of Calgary water) for the possession date.
- Book movers — Calgary movers fill up fast around month-end.

Possession day

14. Your lawyer wires funds to the seller's lawyer.
15. Title transfers to you at Alberta Land Titles.
16. Keys are released — usually around noon — typically via lockbox or seller drop-off.
17. You and I do a final walk-through together to confirm everything is as agreed.
18. You celebrate. 🎉

The first 30 days.

Don't skip these

19. Re-key the locks (or replace them) — you don't know who has copies.
20. Find the main water shut-off, breaker panel, and furnace filter — write it down for next time.
21. Test smoke and CO detectors; replace batteries.
22. Locate the sump pump and backwater valve (Calgary basements!).
23. Update your address: driver's license, ID, banking, insurance, government.
24. Set up automatic property tax payments through TIPP (City of Calgary).

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Calgary property tax bills mail out in May, due end of June. Set up the TIPP monthly plan now so you're never hit with a lump sum.

My ongoing service to you

The relationship doesn't end at possession. I send my clients an annual market update on their home's value, can connect you with trusted trades, and I'm always a phone call away when "is this normal?" questions come up.

What it actually costs.

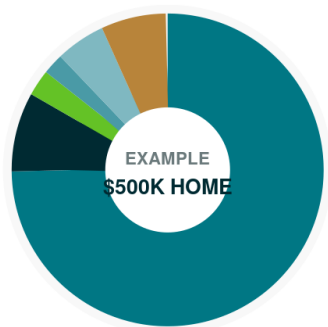
Beyond the down payment, plan for 1–3% of the purchase price in closing costs. Here's the realistic breakdown for a Calgary purchase:

Item	Description	Estimate
Deposit (counts toward purchase)	Shows the seller you're serious	\$5,000 – \$20,000+
Home Inspection	Independent check of the home	\$450 – \$700
Property Appraisal	Lender's confirmation of value	\$300 – \$500
Real Estate Lawyer	Closing, title transfer, mortgage registration	\$1,500 – \$2,500
Land Titles Registration	Provincial fees (transfer + mortgage)	\$200 – \$700
Title Insurance	One-time policy protecting ownership	\$250 – \$400
Tax / Condo Fee Adjustments	Reimbursing seller for prepaid amounts	varies
Property Insurance	Required by lender, starts on possession	\$80 – \$200/mo
Movers + Setup	Movers, utilities, internet, locks rekeyed	\$500 – \$3,000

Alberta has no provincial Land Transfer Tax — buyers pay only the modest Land Titles registration fees above. That's thousands of dollars less than buying in BC or Ontario.

Closing cash visualized.

Here's how your closing-day cash typically splits up. Down payment is the giant — but watch the others; they add up fast.



Down Payment (5–20%)	\$25,000 – \$100,000
Legal Fees + Disbursements	\$1,500 – \$2,500
Home Inspection	\$450 – \$700
Title Insurance	\$250 – \$400
Adjustments (taxes, condo)	varies
Movers / Setup / Insurance	\$1,000 – \$3,000

Note: Alberta has no Land Transfer Tax — buyers here pay a small Land Titles registration fee instead. (See cost table for details.)

ALBERTA ADVANTAGE, REPEATED

Notice what's missing? Land Transfer Tax. Alberta buyers pay only modest Land Titles registration fees — typically \$200–\$700. That's a \$5,000–\$15,000 savings vs. Ontario or BC on a \$500K home.

Quick answers.

How long does the whole process take?

From the day you start touring seriously, plan on 8–14 weeks. Some clients find their home in two showings; others take six months. Both are normal.

Should I buy now or wait?

Honest answer — it depends on your life, not the headlines. Calgary fundamentals are solid, but timing the market perfectly is impossible. The best time to buy is when your finances are stable and you'll be in the home 3+ years.

How much should I have saved before I start?

Minimum: your down payment + 1.5% for closing + 3-month emergency fund. For a \$500K home that's roughly \$32K–\$50K depending on down payment percentage.

What if I want a new build?

I represent you with the builder — at no cost to you in most cases. I'll review the contract, decode the upgrade pricing, and protect you during the walkthrough. See my New Home Buyer's Guide for the full story.

Do I need a real estate lawyer?

Yes — in Alberta a lawyer is legally required for the title transfer and mortgage registration. I'll happily recommend ones I trust.

Useful links.

Government & financial

- CMHC mortgage calculator — cmhc-schl.gc.ca
- City of Calgary property tax (TIPP) — calgary.ca/property-tax
- Calgary property assessment lookup — assessmentsearch.calgary.ca
- Alberta Land Titles fees — alberta.ca/land-titles
- RECA (consumer info) — reca.ca

My recommended team

I work regularly with trusted mortgage brokers, lawyers, inspectors, insurance reps, and trades — I'm happy to share my full list with introductions when we're ready to move.

Calgary stats & trends

- Calgary Real Estate Board monthly stats — creb.com/news
- Calgary Economic Region labour market reports — calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com

WANT MY CALGARY DEEP-DIVE?

I send a monthly newsletter with hyperlocal market stats, new listings, and what's selling. Text "subscribe" to 587-777-6119 and I'll add you.

Let's find your **home.**

When you're ready to start — whether that's tomorrow or six months from now — I'd love to help. No pressure, no hard sell. Just a friendly chat to figure out what's right for you.

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