FREE GUIDE · ATLANTIC COUNTY, NJ

First-Time Buyer Offer Playbook

How to write a strong offer in Atlantic County, NJ — without giving up the protections that matter.

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This is general guidance for first-time buyers in New Jersey, especially Atlantic County and the towns I work in — Galloway, Egg Harbor Township, and nearby Shore communities. It is not legal, tax, or mortgage advice. Your lender and a New Jersey real estate attorney should review your specific deal.

How offers work in New Jersey

Here's what most people don't know: in New Jersey, buying a home is not just “highest price wins.”

An offer is a package. Price matters, but so do your deposit, inspection terms, appraisal terms, closing date, and a few other details that decide whether a seller says yes — and what you actually walk away with.

Once you and the seller both sign, most New Jersey residential contracts go into attorney review. That period is usually three business days. During that time, either side's attorney can propose changes or cancel the contract. After attorney review is resolved, you move into inspections, appraisal, mortgage work, and closing.

Let me break down the steps I'd walk my own family through.

Five steps to a strong offer

1. Get pre-approved before you fall in love with a house

A pre-qualification is a rough estimate. A pre-approval is a lender reviewing your income, assets, and credit and saying what you can reasonably borrow. Sellers in Galloway, Egg Harbor Township, and the rest of Atlantic County take a pre-approved buyer more seriously.

Do this before you tour homes in a serious way. It also keeps you from writing an offer you can't support.

If you're a first-time buyer, look at the NJ Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency programs early at njhousing.gov. Those programs can change what you can afford, and they sometimes come with their own timelines.

2. Put down a deposit that shows you're serious

Your escrow deposit — also called earnest money — is money you put up with the offer to show the seller you're committed. It's typically held in escrow and applied to your costs at closing. If the deal falls apart for a reason allowed in the contract, you may get it back. If you walk away for a reason the contract doesn't allow, you may not.

How much, and when it's due, is negotiable. A thin deposit can make a good offer look weak. A deposit larger than you're comfortable putting at risk isn't worth it either. We'll size it to the house and to what the seller needs — not to a round number you heard from a friend.

3. Keep your inspection — and compete with other terms

Here's what I'd tell my own family: don't waive the inspection just to win the house.

A home inspection is how you find out what you're buying, especially with older homes and with properties near the bay or marshes, where flood history and condition both matter. In Atlantic County, look up the address on FEMA's Flood Map Service Center (msc.fema.gov/portal/search) before you get attached to a house.

You can still write a competitive offer without giving that up. Closing date, deposit, inspection length, and how you handle small repairs are all levers. Price isn't always the one that matters most.

Before I write an offer, I call the listing agent to learn what the seller actually needs. Then I build your offer around that.

4. Plan for the appraisal

If you're financing the purchase, your lender will usually order an appraisal. If the home appraises for less than the contract price, you may need to bring more cash, renegotiate, or, if your contract allows it, walk away.

You can offer some appraisal coverage — a willingness to cover a gap — but you shouldn't promise money you don't have. We'll talk through what you can truly afford before that language goes in the offer.

5. Use New Jersey attorney review the right way

New Jersey is an attorney-review state for most residential deals. You want a New Jersey real estate attorney in place before you write the offer, not after it gets accepted.

Attorney review is usually three business days after the contract is signed. It's there so each side's attorney can review the terms, request changes, or cancel. It is not a formality, and it is not a substitute for a home inspection.

I'll coordinate with your attorney so the offer we write is one they're comfortable defending in those three days.

Common mistakes I see

- Leading with a higher price and giving up the inspection to do it.
- Writing an offer before you're pre-approved.
- Using a deposit that's too light for the situation — or larger than you can afford to have tied up.
- Skipping a flood-map check in parts of Atlantic County, including some areas of Egg Harbor Township near the bay and marshes.
- Treating all of Galloway or all of Egg Harbor Township as one market. Comps from the other side of town can throw your number off.
- Waiting until after the offer is accepted to find an attorney.
- Never asking what the seller actually needs. A flexible closing date sometimes beats a slightly higher price.

Your next step

If you're thinking about buying in Galloway, Egg Harbor Township, or anywhere else I work in Atlantic County, I'll walk you through this on your house — not in the abstract.

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This guide is general information, not a legal opinion or a promise about any specific property, offer, or outcome. Rules, forms, and lender requirements can change. Talk with your attorney and lender before you make an offer.