



# BUYERS GUIDE

for Home Buyers in OR + SW WA





★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“Kristen was immediately extremely knowledgeable and informative, and a fantastic advocate throughout the whole process. She was efficient, a great communicator, and very supportive. It's obvious that she really cares about her clients. Highly recommend.”

— Erin S.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“Kristen was knowledgeable, professional, and went above and beyond to help us sell our home and above asking! She guided us through the process, as we'd not yet sold a home, answered all our questions, and explained the process along the way.”

— Ashley M.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“Kristen is a wealth of information. Incredibly genuine, with facts from personal experience she tells you how to get the best deal and make it worth it. Cannot recommend her more, working with her has been really heartwarming!”

— Valeria U.



**We're glad you found us** — and we can't wait to learn more about your home-buying goals.

Whether you're purchasing your first home, your next home, or an investment, you deserve guidance that's honest, experienced, and fully aligned with what matters to you. We're passionate about helping buyers make confident decisions, and we bring a results-driven, straight-shooting approach to every step of the process.

Rooted in the communities we serve, our team is committed to protecting your interests and helping you move forward with clarity and confidence.

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MARKET LEADER IN COLUMBIA COUNTY

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OVER 50 YEARS OF COMBINED EXPERIENCE

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70-100 HOMES SOLD PER YEAR

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5-STAR ZILLOW BROKERS

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ESTABLISHING THE DIFFERENCE

# WHY OUR TEAM

Because experience, education, and a business-minded approach matter when you're trusting someone to sell one of your biggest assets. You deserve a team that understands the strategy behind every decision—and isn't afraid to guide you with clarity and confidence.

50+

Year of Combined  
Experience

90%

Referral or  
Repeat Client

\$90M

Sales Volume  
Per Year



Jessica Venable

Transaction Coordinator, Licensed in OR

Jessica brings over a decade of real estate and marketing experience to our team. A licensed Oregon Broker with a BFA in Graphic Design, she pairs sharp contract knowledge with an eye for detail that keeps every file running smoothly. Her organization, follow-through, and commitment to doing things the right way make her an essential part of the client experience — and someone you'll be grateful to have behind the scenes on your transaction.

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Brenda Blinsky

Broker, Licensed in OR

Brenda is a newly licensed real estate agent who primarily serves the Oregon Coast, including Astoria, Warrenton, and Seaside.

She is currently mentoring under and supporting Kristen Spellman in Columbia County, gaining hands-on experience while delivering reliable care to clients throughout the region.

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TEAM LEADER, LICENSED IN OR + SW WA

# KRISTEN SPELLMAN



Kristen Spellman is a seasoned Washington and Oregon realtor known for her straight-forward guidance, sharp contract knowledge, and unwavering commitment to her clients' goals.

With 6+ years of experience across residential, luxury, multi-family, manufactured/RV, and commercial properties, she brings a business-forward mindset to every transaction — and the patience, clarity, and determination her clients rely on.

As the owner of Pacific NW Broker, Kristen leads with honesty, professionalism, and a deep connection to the communities she serves. When she's not negotiating deals or advising clients, you'll find her exploring the Pacific Northwest with her family — the place that inspired her career and continues to ground her work today.

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100+ 5-STAR GOOGLE REVIEWS

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RESIDENTIAL + COMMERCIAL BROKER

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PACIFIC NW ENTHUSIAST

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THE COMPANY WE KEEP

# OUR BROKERAGE

The company you choose to represent you is equally as important as the agent you select. A strong brokerage provides the systems, compliance support, and expertise that protect you throughout the process. When you're selling a major asset, you deserve a team backed by structure and a reputation you can trust.

50+

US States and  
4 Canadian  
Provinces

74%

Increase in Closed  
Transactions  
in Q1 2024

\$7.5B

Closed  
Volume  
in Q1 2024

## Why Real Broker?

Real's core values shape everything we do. We believe kindness is a strength, collaboration moves us further, and innovation should make the real estate experience better for both agents and clients. The technology we build isn't just a tool — it's designed to streamline the process, elevate communication, and support a higher standard of service.

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TECH + HUMANITY

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COO NAMED AN INMAN FUTURE LEADER IN REAL ESTATE

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FASTEST-GROWING PUBLICLY TRADED BROKERAGE

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A MISSION TO REVOLUTIONIZE RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE

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FIRST STEPS TO BECOMING A

# HOMEOWNER

There's a lot that goes into buying a home, and it can feel overwhelming — we get it. The good news? We've done this more times than we can count, and we know how to simplify the process. Step one is choosing your agent and signing your Buyer Representation Agreement.

Step two is getting your financing squared away.  
Step three is finding the home that truly fits.

From start to finish, we're here to guide you through every part of the home-buying journey with clarity, patience, and experience.



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LET'S TALK ABOUT

# BUYER AGENT COMMISSION

In August 2024, the real estate industry saw a major shift in how commissions are structured. These changes came from a nationwide lawsuit involving the National Association of Realtors (NAR), multiple MLS organizations, and brokerages across the country.

## **Here's what matters for you as a buyer:**

The settlement decouples compensation — it does not eliminate it, and it does not eliminate buyer representation. Historically, the seller and listing agent negotiated the total commission, and a portion was offered to the buyer's agent. Moving forward, both listing agents and buyer's agents must have written contracts with their clients, and those contracts must clearly outline how each agent is compensated.

## Commissions Can Now Be Paid in Several Ways:

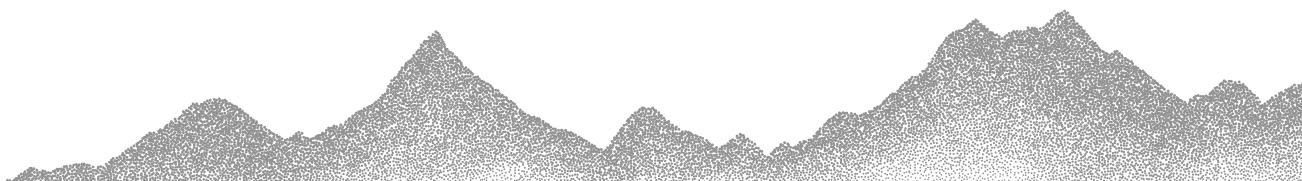
- The fee can be negotiated into the purchase and sale agreement through a seller concession.
- Buyers can pay their agent directly.
- A combination of both methods can be used.

## Three Key Agreements Will Now Govern Real Estate Transactions:

- Listing Agreement: Between the seller and the listing broker.
- Buyer Representation Agreement: Between the buyer and the buyer broker.
- Purchase Agreement: The offer and terms of sale agreed upon by the seller and buyer.

For our buyers, these changes mean that we are required to be under contract with you before showing properties, or we risk facing fines. As part of this contract, we will discuss and agree on our fees and services provided.

Our goal is always to negotiate the buyers' agent commission in the terms of the sale agreement. We fully understand the nuances of these changes and are dedicated to ensuring you receive the best possible representation and service.





# FINANCES IN ORDER

## Preliminary Financing

Start by getting a general idea of how much home you can comfortably afford based on your income and existing debt. Most lenders recommend that your total monthly debts — including your future mortgage — stay at or below 43% of your gross monthly income. An online mortgage calculator is a great place to get a quick estimate and set realistic expectations.

## Know Your Credit Score

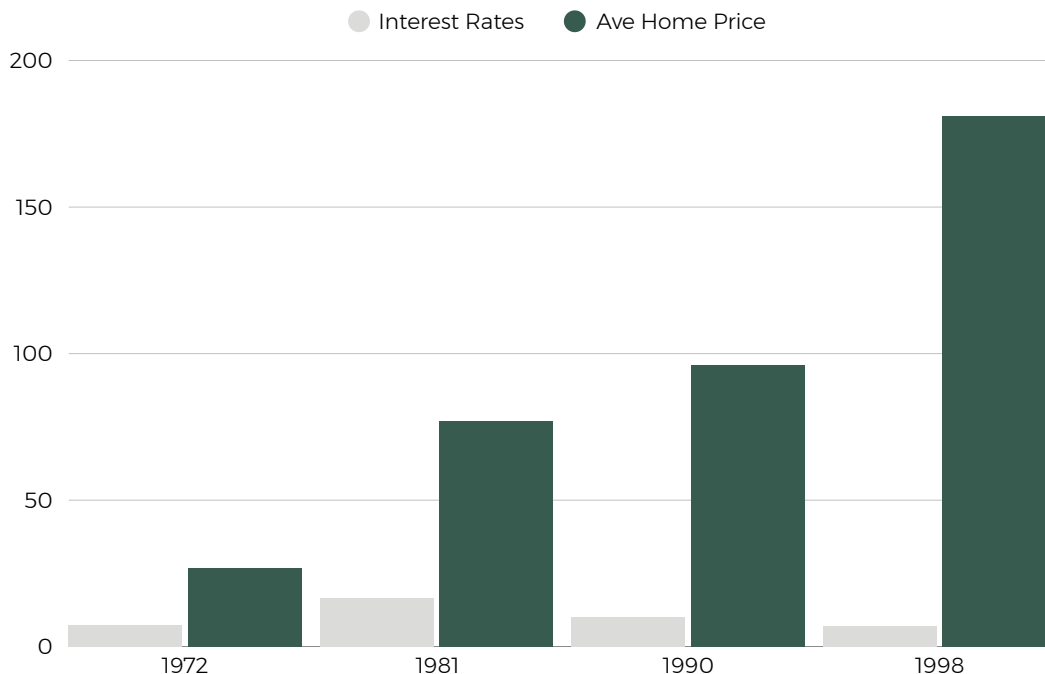
Your credit history plays a major role in the interest rate and loan terms a lender can offer. Strong credit typically means stronger terms. It's a good idea to review your credit reports from all three major reporting agencies so you know exactly where you stand. Improving your debt-to-income ratio can also boost your overall credit profile and help you qualify for better financing options.

## Gather Your Docs

- Social Security Number
- W2 Forms (Previous 2 Years)
- Pay Stubs (Last 3 Months)
- 2-Year Employment History Summary
- Federal Tax Returns (Previous 2 Years)
- Bank Statements (Last 3 Months)
- Creditor Information
  - Student Loans
  - Auto Loans
  - Credit Card Liabilities
  - Child Support Payments
  - Past Credit Challenges
- Complete Record of Assets
  - Stocks, Bonds, Investments
  - IRA, Retirement Savings
  - Life Insurance Policies
  - Automobiles Owned Free + Clear
  - Gift Funds
  - Documentation of any Secondary Income Sources

LET'S TALK ABOUT

# CURRENT INTEREST RATES



# PRE-QUALIFICATION + APPROVAL

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Now that you've done the initial homework, it's time to meet with a lender and get pre-approved. If you need recommendations for trusted lenders, we're happy to connect you.

So what's the difference between a pre-qualification and a pre-approval?

Pre-qualification is simply a loan officer's opinion that you may be able to obtain financing. Nothing is verified, and no formal approval is issued.

Pre-approval goes much deeper. The lender and underwriting team review your application, pull your credit, and verify key pieces of your income and assets.

This matters because pre-approved buyers have a clear advantage. A pre-approval letter shows sellers you're serious, qualified, and more likely to close smoothly — which can give you the edge in competitive or multiple-offer situations.

## UNDERSTANDING

# LOAN TYPES + OPTIONS

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Not all home loans are the same. Buyers have several mortgage options, and the best choice is the one that fits your specific financial situation. We'll help you understand the differences so you can choose the loan structure that supports your goals and keeps you confident throughout the process.

### Fixed Rate (Traditional) Loan

Usually structured with repayment terms of 15, 20 or 30 years with a fixed interest rate over the life of the loan. Monthly principal and interest payments will remain the same for the duration of the loan.

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### Adjustable-Rate Loan, ARM, Variable Rate

This loan generally has an introductory interest rate for a specified period; the interest rate will then fluctuate over the life of the loan based on market conditions or loan terms. Rate changes happen at specific periods, usually with a maximum and minimum cap on the rate of fluctuation.

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### Veterans Administration (VA) Guaranteed

Available to qualified veterans and their spouses, private lending institutions issue loans which are guaranteed by the VA. The VA does not require a down payment on VA Guaranteed Loans and allows the borrower to receive a competitive, fixed interest rate.

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### Federal Housing Administration (FHA)

Insured loans made by private lending institutions to eligible borrowers for the purchase of a home. A borrower must apply and qualify with a certified FHA Lender and must be able to pay a minimum of 3.5% of the purchase price as a down payment. FHA will insure a portion of the loan's value to the lender.



20 QUESTIONS TO ASK

# YOUR LENDER

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1. What are the differences between loan programs that would be a good fit for me?
2. What is the current interest rate? Is the rate quoted the lowest for the day/week?
3. How can we buy down the interest rate?
4. What is the Annual Percentage Rate (APR) for the loan offered?
5. Is the loan rate adjustable or fixed?
6. What are the discount points and origination fees?
7. What are all of the costs of the offered mortgages?
8. How will the rate and loan payments vary if the rate is adjustable?
9. What are the qualifying guidelines for this loan?
10. What is the lender's required down payment for this loan?
11. Which documents will I need to provide?
12. Can you explain all of the closing costs?
13. Can I lower the interest rate that you offered me?
14. Do you offer a loan rate lock, and is there a fee for that? How long is the rate lock?
15. Is there a prepayment penalty?
16. Could you let me know if you are equipped to approve loans in-house?
17. How much time do you need to fund the loan?
18. Will mortgage insurance be required?
19. Can the term of the loan be extended?
20. Is there a cap on payment adjustments?



# COST TO CLOSE

There are several costs involved in purchasing a home beyond your down payment. Some expenses are paid upfront, while others are collected at closing. Your lender is required to provide a Good Faith Estimate of closing costs at the time of your loan application, so you have a clear picture of what to expect with no surprises.

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## Upfront Costs

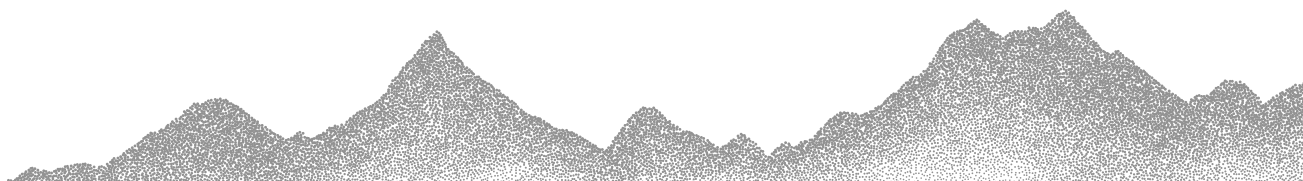
- Earnest Money - typically 1-3% of the purchase price, due within 3-5 business days of mutual acceptance
- Property Inspections - \$650-\$1,200 depending on the size of the home and which inspections were ordered
- Credit Report - \$75-\$100 collected by the lender
- Appraisal Fees - \$800-\$1,500 collected by the lender

## Additional Considerations

- Repairs - needed after closing
- Moving Expenses
- Utility Deposits
- Temporary Storage - if applicable
- Temporary Living - if applicable

## Expenses Collected At Closing

- Down Payment - anywhere from 0% and up depending upon the loan you select
- Lender Fees - points, origination, and underwriting fees
- Title Costs - examination and insurance
- Property Insurance - premium and reserves
- Recording and Filing Fees
- Legal and Closing Company Fees



WE FOUND THE PERFECT HOME

# WRITING AN OFFER

How exciting — it's time to write an offer. With your pre-approval in hand, we're in a strong position. From here, we just have a few clear steps to take to put your best offer forward.

**Finding the right home is the fun part** — and it all starts with location. Whether you're new to Columbia County or NW Washington, or simply moving within the area, choosing the right neighborhood comes first. Almost anything about a home can be changed except where it sits.

Here are a few key things to keep in mind as we start your search.

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ELIMINATION IS AS IMPORTANT AS SELECTION

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DON'T BE PUT OFF BY INTERIOR DECORATIONS

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MAP COMMUTE TIMES

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NO HOME IS PERFECT

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## SUBMITTING AN OFFER

We'll begin by reviewing comparable sold property data, along with inventory supply and general market conditions, to establish value and support your offer price. We will prepare the paperwork, review it all with you so that you fully understand the offer you are signing, and then we will submit it to the other agent on your behalf.

As a Buyer, you will be in a better negotiating position if:

- You have been pre-approved
- You don't have a house to sell before buying
- Your offer does not have out-of-the-ordinary contingencies

Once your offer is presented, the seller has the option to:

- Accept your offer
- Reject your offer
- Execute a counteroffer

Be prepared for negotiations before both parties agree to all terms. You may be competing with other Buyers. A typical counteroffer may include modifications to the purchase price, closing date, possession date, inclusions or exclusions of personal property, and/or closing costs. Don't be discouraged by the negotiation process. Once mutual acceptance has occurred and both Seller and Buyer have signed the final version of the contract, it becomes legally binding, and the timelines begin.



## UNDERSTANDING CONTINGENCIES

Every contract is a little different, but most include contingencies that allow a buyer to withdraw without penalty if certain conditions aren't met. Some of the most common contingencies include:

- Acceptance of the Seller's Property Disclosure
- Clear title which means the title of the property is free of defects, liens, or encumbrances
- Satisfaction of inspections to confirm the home's condition
- Review of HOA documents
- Appraisal contingency (some offers may waive this or have conditions for the Buyer to cover an appraisal shortage)
- Obtaining financing or verification of cash funds as outlined in the contract



NAVIGATING THE

# HOME INSPECTION PHASE

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Once your offer is accepted, one of the first steps is hiring a professional inspector to evaluate the home's condition. The goal of a home inspection is to give you an objective, independent, and thorough assessment of the property — including its structure, systems, and any potential safety concerns.

You'll receive a detailed written report, and we'll review it together. It's important to understand the difference between deficiencies, defects, and upgrades. A seller isn't required to make upgrades, but inspection findings may give you options depending on what's uncovered.

Based on the inspection results, you will have the opportunity to:

- Terminate the written offer, if major problems are discovered.
- Renegotiate the purchase price to account for necessary repairs.
- Negotiate that repairs are made by the Seller before the sale closes.
- Negotiate a credit amount instead of repairs.

Once we've fully reviewed your inspection results, we may recommend getting a second opinion or estimates from licensed contractors. Having real numbers makes it much easier to determine what's a major issue versus a minor one. In our experience, sellers are also far more receptive to repair or credit requests when those requests are supported by professional estimates.

Your sale agreement includes an inspection contingency, which protects you. If the inspection results don't meet your standards — or if we can't come to an agreement with the seller on repairs or credits — you have the right to withdraw from the contract without penalty.



REVIEWING

# SELLERS DISCLOSURE

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Delivery and acceptance of the Seller's Property Disclosure is a key contract contingency. This document outlines the "material facts" the seller is aware of, and you'll have the opportunity to review and accept it. While we don't rely on the disclosure alone to understand a home's condition, it's important to read it carefully and address any questions as soon as possible.

**The general rule of thumb is that a Seller must disclose anything that would:**

- Lower the perceived value of the property
- Affect a Buyer's decision to purchase
- Change the price and/or terms a Buyer offers



EXPLAINING

# TITLE INSURANCE

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Title insurance protects you from problems with a property's title. There are two types of policies, and both are required: one covers issues from the past, and the other protects you from defects that may arise during your ownership.

Before closing, a title specialist at the escrow company will conduct a full title examination. They'll review public records and prepare a title report that outlines the property's legal description and notes any liens, defects, or encumbrances. The goal is to identify anything that could prevent a clean transfer of ownership.

Most title issues can be resolved before settlement. In rare cases, more serious defects may delay closing or give a buyer reason to withdraw. We'll keep you informed throughout the title review process and update you immediately if anything requires attention.

# LOAN APPROVAL

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Most of the heavy lifting on your loan application happens upfront. However, during the transaction, the underwriting team may request additional information or documentation. Responding quickly helps keep everything moving and prevents delays.

There are also financing deadlines you'll need to stay on top of to avoid any issues with contract performance. Don't worry — we'll provide a clear transaction timeline and keep you informed every step of the way so nothing gets missed.

## **A few things to know:**

- In some cases, final loan approval may not be issued until the day of closing
- A notable milestone will be the review of the Closing Disclosure (CD) which details all of the terms and costs of your loan
- By law, the CD must be delivered three business days prior to signing any closing documents



## LENDER APPRAISAL

Another step in the process is verifying value with an appraisal. An appraisal is an estimate of the value of a property made by a qualified professional. The appraisal of a home is as important as a Buyer's credit history in obtaining a mortgage, as the property serves as the collateral for the loan. Although the primary goal of the appraisal is to justify the lender's investment, it also protects the Buyer from overpaying.

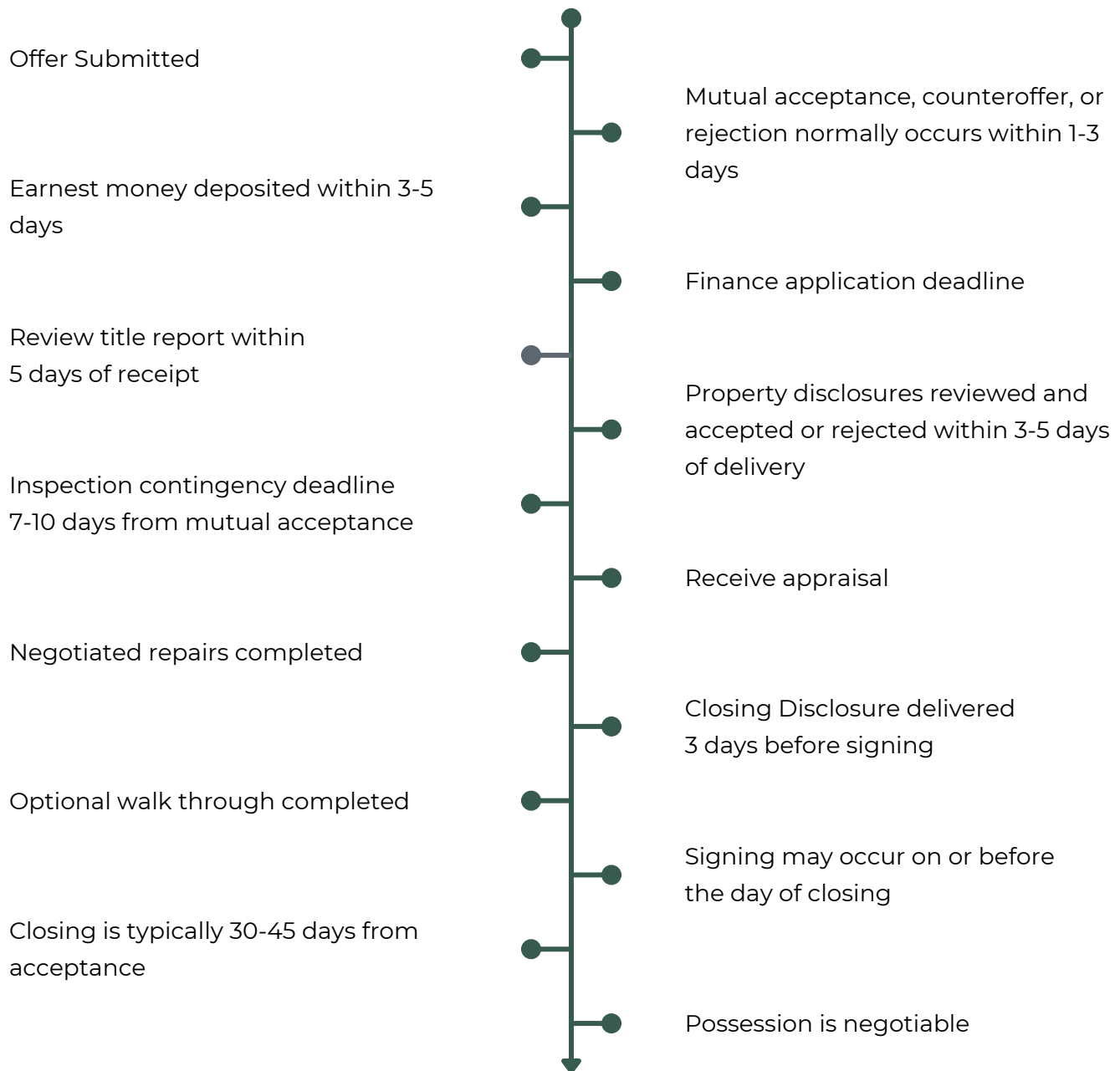
The lender will generally hire the appraiser and charge the Buyer a fee for the service. If the appraisal falls short of the contract price, the Buyer may be offered a lower loan amount on the mortgage and can either choose to put more money down or terminate at that time. Although a negotiable item, most financed purchases will be contingent on whether the appraisal comes in, at or above the mutually accepted purchase price.





# EXAMPLE OF A TRANSACTION TIMELINE

So much happens from when we enter into a binding contract until closing. Knowing that there is a lot to track, one of the first things we do is create a custom Transaction Portal where you'll have access to all documents, a timeline, and a contact sheet with relevant details of each party involved in your sale.



PREPARING FOR

# YOUR MOVE

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## Two Months Before

- Start downsizing and donating old and unwanted items
- Research moving companies, costs, and schedule movers/trucks
- Order packing supplies
- Collect school records

## One Months Before

- Plan expenses for moving
- Begin packing
- Find local healthcare providers and shopping necessities
- Buy any new appliances or make plans for what to buy

## Two Weeks Before

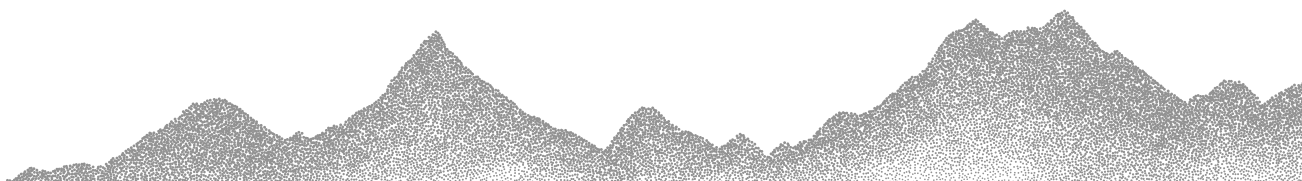
- Contact utilities
- Finalize moving arrangements
- Set up a change of address and send moving notifications to friends and family

## 2-3 Days Before

- Empty the refrigerator and defrost freezer
- Clean as you continue to pack
- Pack things you will need right away separately
- Update voter registration and DMV with new address

## Closing Day

- Conduct a walk-through of the property before closing to verify the condition of the home, completion of any repairs, and that all personal property meant to stay has been left
- Make sure all funds have reached escrow
- Be prepared to meet your broker to collect keys for your new home
- Unpack and have fun



CONTINGENCIES REMOVED

# WE'RE HEADED TO CLOSING



Once all steps in the transaction are completed and contingencies are cleared, it's time for closing. Closing is the legal transfer of ownership from the seller to you, the buyer. Most closings take place at the title company, where your closing officer will coordinate the signing of documents and the collection and disbursement of funds. To help ensure everything goes smoothly, you will need to:

- Obtain a homeowners insurance policy and provide the information to your lender and/or closing agent.
- Review the Closing Disclosure your lender provides at least three days before you sign closing documents. This will contain a detailed description of all costs associated with the transaction. The escrow agent will also provide a Settlement Statement which will include the exact amount you need to bring to closing.
- Confirm wiring instructions with your escrow agent, on the phone, and prepare the transfer of funds needed to close.
- Verify with your lender and/or closing agent any other items that you may need to bring with you to your signing appointment, such as a driver's license.
- Your Transaction Portal will be available indefinitely so you can access any documents you may need in the future!

