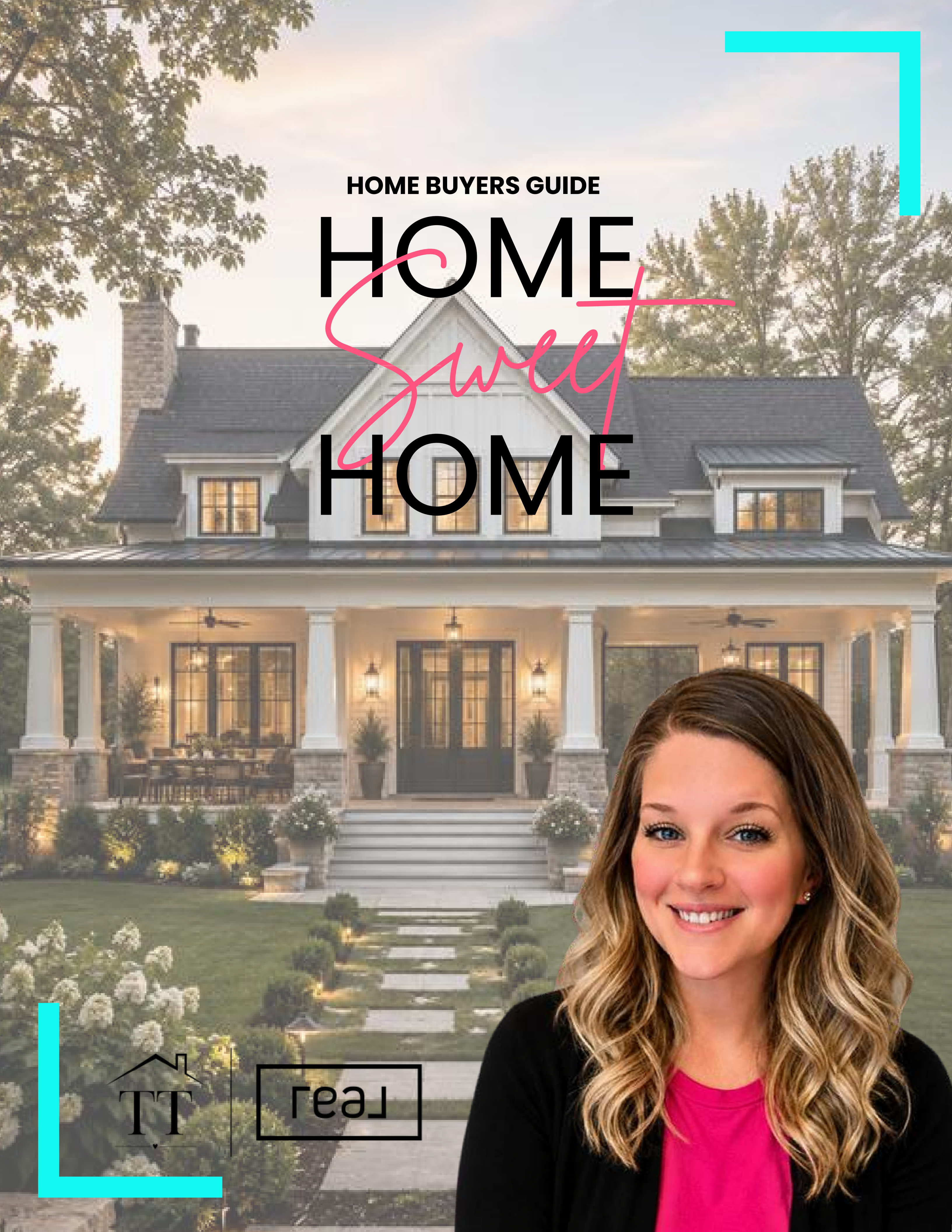
HOME BUYERS GUIDE

HOME *Sweet* HOME



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Nice to meet you!

I'm Tiffany–

your guide to finding home

Buying a home is a BIG DEAL. There are a LOT of moving parts, and that's exactly why I'm passionate about helping my clients know what to do, who to trust, and where to start.

Finding the right Realtor is one of the most important parts of the process. You deserve someone who listens, communicates clearly, negotiates on your behalf, and is committed to making the experience as smooth and stress-free as possible. Whether you're buying your first home, upsizing, downsizing, or relocating, I'll be there to guide you every step of the way.

As a local Realtor and mom, I know that a home is so much more than four walls—it's where birthdays are celebrated, holidays are hosted, and everyday moments become lifelong memories. My goal is to help you find not just a house, but a place that truly feels like home.

Real estate doesn't have to feel overwhelming. With the right guide by your side, it can actually be exciting—and I'd love to be that guide.

Tiffany Tolbert

REALTOR®

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

LET'S FIND YOU A HOME!

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TT | real

You're not just buying a house. You're buying the place all of your future memories will be made.

I am honored to help you find the perfect place to call home.

the BUYING PROCESS

We always start with the lender

STEP ONE
FINANCES

- [ ] GATHER YOUR DOCUMENTS
- [ ] OBTAIN PRE-APPROVAL OR PROOF OF FUNDS FROM THE LENDER
- [ ] SOURCE YOUR DOWN PAYMENT FUNDS, PREPARE FOR ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS SUCH AS THE HOME INSPECTION (~$500)

STEP TWO
HOME SEARCH

- [ ] SIGN BUYERS BROKER AGREEMENT WITH YOUR AGENT.
- [ ] PREVIEW POTENTIAL PROPERTIES ONLINE, SCHEDULE SHOWINGS, AND VIEW THE PROPERTIES YOU ARE MOST INTERESTED IN.
- [ ] WRITE AN OFFER TO PURCHASE FOR YOUR FAVORITE PROPERTY! :)

STEP THREE
UNDER CONTRACT

- [ ] NEGOTIATE THE TERMS OF THE OFFER AND ACCEPT THE CONTRACT.
- [ ] SCHEDULE THE HOME INSPECTION ACCORDING TO THE TIMELINE DETERMINED IN THE CONTRACT.
- [ ] DEPOSIT EARNEST MONEY AND COMPLETE LOAN APPLICATION WITHIN DESIGNATED TIME FRAME (WE WILL DISCUSS DATES FOR THESE)

STEP FOUR
DUE DILIGENCE

- [ ] CONDUCT INSPECTIONS
- [ ] RESOLVE/NEGOTIATE ANY ISSUES FROM INSPECTION
- [ ] YOUR LENDER WILL ORDER THE APPRAISAL
- [ ] OBTAIN HOMEOWNERS INSURANCE

STEP FIVE
CLOSING TIME

- [ ] TITLE COMPANY WILL CONDUCT TITLE SEARCH AND ORDER SURVEY RECEIVE
- [ ] CALL AND SET UP UTILITIES, MAKE SURE TO HAVE SERVICE START DAY OF CLOSING
- [ ] CLOSING STATEMENT/CLEAR TO CLOSE WIRE FUNDS TO CLOSING COMPANY
- [ ] CONDUCT A FINAL WALK-THROUGH OF PROPERTY MEET ESCROW CLOSER AND SIGN FOR THE HOME
- [ ] CLOSING DAY: GET YOUR KEYS, IT'S ALL YOURS!
- [ ] LEAVE YOUR FAV REALTOR A 5 STAR REVIEW! :)

**Your time is valuable. I respect that.
Consults are tailored to fit your schedule.**

Hey Tiffany

I found a few homes that I would to see this weekend. Can you show us them before 2pm--we have soccer later in the day.

ABSOLUTELY! So glad you reached out. I can get them all lined up for the AM. Remember-- we will need to sign the Buyers Broker Agreement before we tour. Then we can get this party rockin and rollin!

read 5 minutes ago

Can't wait! Thank you again for helpin us- you are the best Realtor around!

630.303.3440

PRE APPROVAL

A pre-approval is an official letter from a lender showing how much money you are approved to borrow.

When you apply for pre-approval, your lender reviews your:

- Credit score and credit history
- Income and employment
- Debt and monthly expenses
- Bank statements or savings

Based on this information, they tell you the maximum loan amount and the price range you can confidently shop within.

QUESTIONS TO ASK POTENTIAL LENDERS

WHAT TYPE OF LOAN DO YOU RECOMMEND FOR ME? WHY?

WILL MY DOWN PAYMENT VARY BASED ON THE LOAN I CHOOSE?

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT MY INTEREST RATE IS?

WHAT IS AN ARM?

WHAT WILL MY CLOSING COSTS BE? ARE THEY A PART OF MY LOAN, OR WILL I PAY THEM IN CASH AT CLOSING?

ARE ALL LOANS THE SAME? WHAT IF I DON'T QUALIFY?

WHAT IS PMI?

WHERE WILL I MAKE MY MORTGAGE PAYMENTS?

DOES MY PAYMENT INCLUDE HOA FEES?

IF YOU ARE PURCHASING WITH CASH, WE WILL NEED A PROOF OF FUNDS. YOU CAN SCREENSHOT YOUR BANK ACCOUNT SHOWING AT LEAST THE AMOUNT YOU ARE OFFERING OR MORE

Please black out any account numbers, Social Security numbers, or other sensitive information. We only need to verify your name and available funds..

Why am I signing this?

Buyers Broker Agreement

A Buyer's Broker Agreement (also called a Buyer Representation Agreement) is a written contract between you (the buyer) and your real estate agent.
It outlines how your agent will represent you, what services they'll provide, and how they'll be compensated. It also clarifies the working relationship so everyone is on the same page from the start.

BUT DO I HAAAAVE TO SIGN IT?

YES. If an agent is willing to show homes without signing this, they can get in BIG TROUBLE. Realtors have to adhere to State & Brokerage Legal Requirements.
Real estate laws and brokerage policies now require written consent before agents can show homes, write offers, or represent a buyer in negotiations.
This protects everyone involved and keeps your transaction compliant.

It clearly states how your agent is paid — whether by the seller, the listing brokerage, or you — so there are no surprises at closing.
This became especially important after recent national commission lawsuits that changed how commissions are disclosed and paid.

SO WHO PAYS COMMISSION?

Glad you asked--Once you sign the agreement, your agent is legally and ethically bound to represent your best interests — not the seller's. It is the Buyer Responsibility, but it is often negotiated into the offer. Commissions are ALWAYS negotiable. Your Agent will discuss this in further detail. Always ask if you have ANY questions before singing ANYTHING.

NEEDS vs. WANTS

WRITE DOWN YOUR NEEDS & WANTS IN YOUR FUTURE HOME

NEEDS	WANTS

PRO TIP: IF YOU FIND SOMETHING THAT CATCHES YOUR EYE, CHECK OUT THE GOOGLE STREET VIEW. ONLINE PICTURES CAN BE DECEIVING SO A VIRTUAL 'WALK DOWN THE STREET' WILL GIVE YOU A BETTER SENSE OF THE HOUSE AND SURROUNDING AREA. KEEP IN MIND, LOCATION IS THE ONE THING YOU CAN'T CHANGE WHEN PURCHASING A HOME.

The *home* SEARCH BEGINS

ONCE WE KNOW WHAT YOU ARE APPROVED FOR, NOW WE CAN START THE SEARCH. KEEP IN MIND, THIS WILL MORE THAN LIKELY NOT BE YOUR “FOREVER HOME.” YOU WILL HAVE TO GIVE AND TAKE ON NEEDS VS WANTS.

NEEDS ARE THE NON-NEGOTIABLE FEATURES; THE FEATURES YOU SIMPLY MUST HAVE IN YOUR NEXT HOME. WANTS ARE THE ONES YOU’D LIKE TO HAVE, BUT YOU CAN ADD OR CHANGE DOWN THE ROAD.

Keep in mind...you have a set amount you are approved for. We all want a $5 million dollar home with new appliances and a pool. But we have to stick to the budget! AND if you are a first time homebuyer, keep in mind this home paves the way for the forever home.

NEEDS MIGHT BE THINGS LIKE:

- Enough square footage for you & your family
- Sufficient bedrooms & bathrooms
- LOCATION
- Close proximity to work & school
- Attached two-car garage
- Backyard for children's or pet's play area

WANTS WILL LOOK MORE LIKE:

- Specific paint or exterior color
- Pool, hot tub, or other exterior water feature
- Fenced-in backyard
- Specific carpet, hardwood floors, or tile
- Kitchen amenities like countertops and appliances
- Walk-in shower or double bathroom vanity in primary

Real Estate Lingo

WHAT IS ESCROW?

1. Hold your earnest money deposit (the "good faith" deposit you make when your offer is accepted).
2. Coordinate all paperwork between the buyer, seller, lender, and title company.
3. Make sure all terms of the purchase contract are met before anyone gets paid.
4. Disburse funds—like paying the seller, agent commissions, and closing costs—only after closing.

Think of escrow as the referee of the transaction: neutral, organized, and ensuring everyone follows the rules.
In short:
Escrow = Safely managing the money and documents until the home officially becomes yours.

WHAT IS EARNEST MONEY?

Your earnest money is a "good faith" deposit to show you're seriously interested in the home you're offering on and are willing to put money on the line to show it. Typically earnest money is 1% of the purchase price. These funds are due shortly after getting your offer accepted and will be held by the escrow closer in a neutral account until closing. Your earnest money is applied to the purchase, it is not "extra" money.

PLEASE KEEP IN MIND: DO NOT make any major job changes, major purchases, or open new credit cards or lines of credit, as any of these activities could alter your qualifications for a loan. Please do not CLOSE any lines of credit, credit cards etc. before you consult with your lender as this can have just as much of a negative effect on your credit as opening new accounts could.

CONGRATS! **YOU FOUND THE ONE AND PUT AN OFFER IN! IT GETS ACCEPTED...**

WHAT'S NEXT?

YAAAAAAY!

WE NOW NEED TO GET YOUR EARNEST MONEY SUBMITTED TO THE TITLE COMPANY. PLEASE KEEP IN MIND THAT WIRE FRAUD IS VERY REAL- SO MAKE SURE TO DOUBLE AND TRIPLE CHECK WITH THE TITLE OFFICER YOU HAVE ALL THE RIGHT INFO BEFORE SENDING ANNNNNY MONEY.

NEXT, WE WILL BE GETTING THE HOME INSPECTION SCHEDULED. I'LL ALSO LOOP IN YOUR LENDER AND THE OTHER PERTINENT PARTIES TO THE TRANSACTION. HERE'S A QUICK RUNDOWN ON WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU MAKE AN OFFER AND YOUR NEW HOME IS "UNDER CONTRACT."

STEP ONE

Once your offer is accepted, I'll send you an email outlining all the important details, deadlines, and next steps. I'll carefully review the contract and timeline and make sure you know exactly what to expect as we move toward closing. I'll stay on top of each deadline and keep you updated along the way so nothing falls through the cracks.

STEP TWO

I will contact your lender to loop them in on the process. I recommend following up with them as well to firm up financing details and lock in your interest rate.

STEP THREE

You will be responsible for submitting your earnest money to the title company/escrow closer. We will get you in touch with them in order to get you the address and contact info to designate where to wire your funds. Depending on the escrow holder, payment may be made by check, wire transfer, or electronic payment. Always verify wire instructions directly with the title company before sending funds.

STEP FOUR

We'll schedule your home inspection within the timeframe outlined in our contract. I highly encourage you to attend! This is a great opportunity to learn more about the home, ask questions, and have the inspector walk you through their findings firsthand. Once the inspection is complete, we'll review the results together and discuss any concerns and our next steps.

HOME INSPECTION

WHAT IS A HOME INSPECTION?

The inspection will uncover any issues in the home that would have otherwise been unknown. You will receive a written report of the inspection. I always recommend that you are present for the inspection, so that you may ask the inspector any questions. I will be there as well! The cost for the inspection is around $500.

WHAT DOES THE “INSPECTION PERIOD” MEAN?

The length of the inspection period is determined at the time of offering on the home and stipulated in the Purchase and Sale Agreement. The buyer has the right to hire a professional to inspect the condition of the home. You as the buyer and myself as the agent will each get a copy of this report. We do NOT share this with the seller/list agent unless given permission. If the results on the inspection report comes back with any issues that need to be addressed, the buyer may ask the seller to cover the costs of these repairs, reduce the sales price, or fix the repairs before closing. If an agreement can not be made, the buyer has the right to back out of the contract and get the earnest money back with no consequences. But it MUST be within this time period.

DO I REALLY NEED A HOME INSPECTION?!

1000000% YES. You may think the home is in great shape, but some of the costliest problems are often invisible to the untrained eye: leaks, foundation issues, poor ventilation, faulty wiring, etc. A home inspection gives you the chance to have a professional inspector see if there are any problems that need to be addressed, replaced, or fixed prior to you purchasing the home

DOES THE SELLER REAPAIR THE ITEMS WE FIND?

GREAT QUESTION! This is where we draft a document called the Notice of Required Repairs (NORR). We can ask the seller to fix and all items, they have the right to say no, but if it causes the deal to fall apart, they are usually on board to cooperate and negotiate. If they stated in the offer/counter offer “THE SELLER WILL MAKE NO REPAIRS” then it is unlikely they will fix anything.

APPRAISAL FAQ'S:

An appraisal is a professional assessment of the value of the property by a licensed, unbiased professional appraiser. This is a major piece of the transaction. It will be ordered by your lender and paid for by you the buyer (unless otherwise negotiated in the offer). The goal of the appraisal is to verify the value of the property for the lender and to protect you from overpaying. The contract is contingent upon whether the appraisal comes in at or above the purchase price.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE HOME DOESN'T APPRAISE ?

A house "appraises low" if the value assessed by the home appraiser is lower than the purchase price agreed to between the buyer and seller. The home appraisal provides a snapshot of the appraiser's opinion of the current market value based on similar closed sales in the area. When the appraised value comes in below the contract price, it limits the amount a lender will finance because they base the loan on the appraisal and the lender will not lend more than the appraised value.

A low appraisal is where the Buyer and Seller negotiate new terms or the deal does not proceed. In some cases the seller agrees to sell at the appraised value, other cases the buyer pays the difference. The outcome is dependent on the parties involved and the power of negotiating skills and willingness of the seller.

TITLE CO.

WHAT IS A TITLE COMPANY AND WHAT EXACTLY DO THEY DO?

The title company will conduct a title search to ensure the property is legitimate and find if there are any outstanding mortgage liens, judgments, restrictions, easements, leases, unpaid taxes, or any other restrictions that would impact your ownership associated with the property. Once the title is found to be valid, the title company will issue a title insurance policy which protects lenders or owners against claims or legal fees that may arise over ownership of the property. This will also be a part of your closing costs. Having a good Title company is vital. You want one with a great reputation.

WHAT DOES CLEAR-TO-CLOSE MEAN?

This is the final parts of the mortgage process. This term means the mortgage underwriter has officially approved all documentation required to fund the loan. Again, making sure to have the best team in place (lender, realtor, and title company) is KEY to closing the deal.

YAY!

Let's get this baby closed!

We're almost there! As closing approaches, your attorney, lender, title company and I will work together to make sure everything is ready for closing day. I'll keep you updated along the way so you know exactly what to expect.

Q: When do we do the final walk-through?

A: We'll typically do the final walk-through shortly before closing. This is our chance to make sure the home is in the expected condition and any agreed-upon repairs have been completed. If anything comes up, we'll work with your attorney to address it before closing.

Q: How long does this take?

A: Plan for about 1–2 hours, although every closing is different. You'll review and sign your closing and loan documents, and your attorney and the title company will guide you through the paperwork. Once everything is signed and funded, it's time for the keys!

Q: What should I bring?

A: Bring a valid government-issued photo ID and follow the instructions from your attorney, lender or title company regarding any funds needed for closing. Always verify wire instructions directly with the title company before sending funds.

SIGNED. FUNDED. KEYS IN HAND.
Congratulations—you're officially a homeowner!
And BOOM. Done!

Tips for moving

4-6 WEEKS BEFORE

- [ ] DECLUTTER, DISCARD & DONATE.
- [ ] COLLECT QUOTES FROM MOVING COMPANIES (I RECOMMEND GETTING A FEW QUOTES). CHOOSE A MOVER & SIGN CONTRACT.
- [ ] LOCATE SCHOOLS, HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS IN YOUR NEW AREA.
- [ ] SECURE OFF-SITE STORAGE IF NEEDED.
- [ ] CREATE A FILE OF MOVING-RELATED PAPERS AND RECEIPTS.
- [ ] CONTACT HOMEOWNER'S INSURANCE AGENT ABOUT COVERAGE FOR MOVING.
- [ ] CONTACT INSURANCE COMPANIES TO ARRANGE FOR COVERAGE IN NEW HOME.

3-4 WEEKS BEFORE

- [ ] NOTIFY EVERYONE ABOUT YOUR CHANGE OF ADDRESS.
- [ ] NOTIFY UTILITY COMPANIES OF DATE TO DISCONTINUE/ TRANSFER SERVICE.

2-3 WEEKS BEFORE

- [ ] NOTIFY DMV OF NEW ADDRESS.
- [ ] DISCONTINUE ADDITIONAL HOME SERVICES (HOUSEKEEPER, GARDENER/LAWN SERVICE).
- [ ] ARRANGE FOR CHILD AND PET CARE ON MOVING DAY.
- [ ] NOTIFY HOA ABOUT UPCOMING MOVE (IF APPLICABLE).
- [ ] START USING UP THINGS YOU CAN'T MOVE, SUCH AS PERISHABLES.

1 WEEK BEFORE

- [ ] CONFIRM FINAL MOVING ARRANGEMENTS.
- [ ] ARRANGE TRANSPORTATION FOR PETS AND PLANTS.
- [ ] PACK AN ESSENTIALS BOX FOR QUICK ACCESS AT NEW HOME.
- [ ] SCHEDULE UTILITIES AT YOUR NEW PLACE.

MORE FANCY REAL ESTATE TERMS

CONTINGENT:
In real estate, when a house is listed as contingent, it means that an offer has been made and accepted, but before the deal is complete, some additional criteria must be met.

DEED:
This is a legal document that transfers the property ownership from one person to another. The deed to a home is also known as a title and is the written proof of who owns it.

ESCROW/TITLE OFFICER:
The individual at the title company who is responsible for the completion of real estate escrow transactions by determining requirements, clearing title, assembling, preparing and reviewing closing documents and disbursing funds

EARNEST MONEY:
Deposit for the home purchase held by a 3rd party (NOT the seller or buyer), typically the closing company or an attorney. This deposit goes towards your down payment at closing.

HOA FEE:
Monthly maintenance fee paid by homeowners to an association in their community to go towards costs such as, but not limited to, water/ sewer, property maintenance, electricity, community ammenities.

HOME WARRANTY:
A contract covering repairs and replacements on systems and appliances in your home.

ON RECORD:
The magic words when you finally own your new home! It means all of the documents have recorded and all of the county records will reflect YOU as the new owner.

NOTES

THANK YOU!

IF YOU ARE READING THIS AS A FIRST TIME BUYER READY TO BOOK A CALL WITH ME, AS AN INVESTOR ON YOUR 15TH PROPERTY, OR IF WE ARE CURRENTLY IN ESCROW AND ON THE WAY TO CLOSING - JUST KNOW THAT I AM YOUR REALTOR FOR LIFE! WHATEVER YOU NEED, I GOT.

I truly love what what I do and am so honored to have helped hundreds of people just like you, successfully navigate the wild world or Real Estate.

Most of my clients become more like friends and am proud to have built my business on referrals from amazing people like YOU, so if you know someone that would benefit from this guide, please feel free to send this to them. And if you have a friend or family member looking to buy or sell --connect us via phone call or text. I will take GREAT care of them.

Thank you for trusting me with such a big part of your life. And remember,I am here for you ANYTIME you need something Real estate related.

Tiffany Tolbert

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My *promise* To You

Buying a home is exciting, but I know it can also feel like a LOT. My job is to make sure you never feel like you're navigating it alone.

When we work together, you can count on me to...

♡ COMMUNICATE.

You'll always know what's happening, what's coming next, and what I need from you.

♡ KEEP YOU INFORMED.

I'll explain the process, answer your questions, and make sure you feel confident making decisions.

♡ BE HONEST.

I'll give you my genuine opinion—even when it's not necessarily what you hoped to hear.

♡ MANAGE THE DETAILS.

Deadlines, inspections, paperwork, follow-ups—I'll help keep everything moving.

♡ ADVOCATE FOR YOU.

From writing the offer to getting you to the closing table, your best interests will always come first.

♡ BE THERE.

You're hiring me, and I'll be there throughout the process from our first conversation to the day you get your keys.

My goal isn't just to help you buy a house.
It's to help you find a place that feels like home.

I can't wait to find you the **perfect** home.

You are in good hands

real

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And if you're moving to IL from out of state...

I know all the spots!

I Have all the hookups for almost antying you may need.

From movers, to plumbers, painters, electricians, handymen, landscapers, concrete guys, dog walkers...you name it and I will get you a reliable contact!

I love my community, and with almost 20 years here, I have been blessed to have made wonderful relationships with all kinds of business owners.

I also have reccomendations for yummy places to eat, fun events to attend, parks to take the kids to (or doggie kids), and anything else you could possible think of. I am your go to for ALL THINGS IL!

TT | real


YOUR next chapter
STARTS HERE
I can't wait to help you find it
real