

FORT WORTH, DALLAS, METROPLEX AREA

Buying Your First Home

Every question answered.

TRUSTED · EQUIPPED
CREATIVE · CONNECTED

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Your home buying road map

Buying your first home can feel overwhelming, but it does not have to be. I will walk you through every step, from pre-approval to keys, so you always know what happens next. No surprises, no guessing, and no confusing jargon.

1 Get your credit ready

We will look at your credit together and find simple ways to improve it. Small changes can save you thousands over the life of your loan.

2 Talk to a lender

This is where we find out what monthly payment fits your budget. Do not worry — you are not committing to anything yet.

3 Get pre-approved

This sets your price range and shows sellers you are a serious buyer.

4 Start house hunting

Now for the fun part. We tour homes, compare options, and find the one that fits.

5 Write an offer

There is a lot more to an offer than price. I will negotiate the terms that give you the best shot at the home while protecting your money.

6 Option period & inspection

Your chance to inspect the home and catch any major issues before you are fully committed.

7 Closing day

You sign, your loan funds, and you officially become a homeowner. I will also make sure you do not miss the tax exemptions that save you money every year.

8 Building wealth

Every payment builds equity. Over time, your home becomes one of your biggest assets.

A QUICK NOTE ABOUT THE NUMBERS

Interest rates, loan limits, and payment examples change constantly. Rather than give you numbers that could be outdated next month, this guide focuses on how everything works. When it is time to buy, I will work with your lender to get current numbers for your situation.

Why buy — and when renting is smarter

THE CASE FOR BUYING

Equity. The share of the house you actually own — market value minus what you still owe. Every payment moves a little from the second number to the first. Rent builds none of it.

A fixed housing cost. A fixed-rate principal and interest payment does not renew. Taxes and insurance still move, but the largest piece of your payment is locked for thirty years.

Control. Paint it, renovate it, get a dog, stay as long as you want. Nobody sells the building out from under you.

RENT FOR NOW IF

- You may move within three years. Selling costs eat the equity you build early.
- Your down payment would empty your savings. A house with no emergency fund is a hazard, not an asset.
- Your income just changed, or is about to. Lenders want two years of stability.
- You are carrying high-interest debt. Paying that down first raises your score and your buying power at the same time.

WHAT EQUITY ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE



YOURS — equity

THE BANK'S — remaining balance

Illustration only. Your share grows two ways at once: the balance falls as you pay, and the value moves with the market. Early on, most of a payment is interest — which is exactly why a three-year hold rarely pencils out.

PHASE 1

Credit

Five things build a FICO® Score, and they are not weighted evenly. If you have limited time before you buy, spend it on the two widest bars.



WHERE TO SPEND YOUR EFFORT

Pay on time, every time. Payment history is the single largest factor. One 30-day late can undo months of work.

Get balances under 30%. Amounts owed is really about utilization — what you owe against your limit. Keeping revolving balances well below 30% of the limit helps, and it moves faster than anything else on this list.

Do not close old cards. Length of history and mix are slow to build and easy to damage. An old card with a zero balance is an asset. Leave it open.

Do not shop off a credit app

FICO publishes many versions of your score, and mortgage lenders pull a different one than your free app shows. The number on your phone is directional, not the number you will be underwritten on. It is routinely off by enough to change your loan program.

FREE AND WORTH DOING

Pull your actual reports at **annualcreditreport.com** — the federally authorized site, no card required. Dispute errors before a lender ever pulls you. Errors are common and they take weeks to clear.

FICO® is a registered trademark of Fair Isaac Corporation. Factor weightings are FICO's published general model and vary somewhat by individual profile and score version.

PHASE 1

The number that actually decides your budget

Everyone obsesses over their credit score. Your score decides *whether* you qualify and at what rate. Your **debt-to-income ratio** decides *how much house*. It is the number that surprises people.

HOW TO WORK IT OUT IN ONE MINUTE

ADD UP MONTHLY DEBT PAYMENTS

Car notes, student loans, credit card minimums, personal loans, child support. **Not** utilities, phone, groceries, or insurance.



DIVIDE BY GROSS MONTHLY INCOME

Before tax, not take-home. Include reliable overtime and bonus only if you have a two-year history of it.

ROUGHLY WHERE YOU STAND

Under 36%	Comfortable. You will have options across every loan program.
36–43%	Normal territory. Most approvals live here.
43–50%	Workable with compensating factors — reserves, a strong score, a larger down payment.
Over 50%	Pay something off first. FHA can stretch higher with strong compensating factors, but you are borrowing against your own breathing room.

TWO WAYS TO RAISE YOUR BUDGET

Kill a payment, not a balance. A \$12,000 car loan at \$480 a month hurts your DTI far more than \$12,000 on a card at a \$250 minimum. Paying off the car outright can move your approval more than the same money applied anywhere else.

Do not confuse approved with affordable. A lender will approve you to the edge of a formula that has never seen your daycare bill or your travel habit. Decide your own comfortable payment first, then tell me that number — not the approval number.

Ask your lender for both figures: the maximum you qualify for, and the payment at the price you actually want. They are different conversations.

PHASE 2

The lender or the agent — which comes first?

Lenders and agents work as a team, and a good one of either will hand you a short list of the other. An experienced agent knows which lender fits your situation. A lender knows which agents negotiate well and who handles complicated files.

THE ANSWER

Call the lender first.

Not because they matter more. Because nothing else can start without them. I cannot write you an offer, and no seller in Tarrant County will look at one, without a pre-approval letter attached.

WHAT THAT FIRST CALL COSTS YOU

Twenty minutes and a credit pull. That is it. You are not committing to a loan, a lender, or a house.

SHOP MORE THAN ONE

Multiple mortgage pulls inside a short shopping window generally count as one inquiry for scoring purposes. Ask each lender to date their pull close together, and compare Loan Estimates side by side — not verbal quotes.

I HAVE REFERRALS, AND I DO NOT GET PAID FOR THEM

I keep a short list of lenders who answer their phone on a Sunday and who have closed hard files for my clients. You are free to use anyone. But if a lender will not return your call during pre-approval, imagine them three days before funding.

PHASE 3

Pre-approval — and protecting it

Pre-qualification is a conversation. Pre-approval is a file. One is an estimate based on what you told them. The other means a lender pulled your credit, reviewed your income and assets, and put your buying power in writing. Only the second one is worth anything with a seller.

HAVE THESE READY

Income	Two years of W-2s or tax returns, 30 days of pay stubs. Self-employed: two years of returns plus a year-to-date P&L.
Assets	Two months of statements for every account you will draw from. All pages, even the blank ones.
Identity	Photo ID and Social Security number.
If applicable	DD-214 or Certificate of Eligibility for VA, divorce decree, child support order, gift letter.

The new truck can wait

From the day you are pre-approved until the day you fund, the only thing you should do with credit is pay it down. Your lender re-verifies everything right before closing. People lose houses at this stage, and it is always avoidable.

WHAT KILLS A LOAN AFTER PRE-APPROVAL

Financing anything	A car, furniture, a mower on store credit. It adds a payment and changes your DTI.
New credit lines	Including the 10% off you were offered at the register.
Changing jobs	Especially salaried to commission, or W-2 to contract. Tell your lender <i>before</i> , not after.
Large deposits	Anything unusual has to be sourced and papered. Cash you cannot document cannot be used.
Closing old cards	Shortens your history and raises your utilization at the same time.
Co-signing	Someone else's loan becomes your debt.

ONE MORE THING YOUR PRE-APPROVAL BUYS YOU

It ends the guessing. Most first-time buyers are either shopping well below what they qualify for, or falling in love with houses they cannot finance. Knowing the real number saves you months.

PHASE 3

The money, and when each piece is due

Five separate things get called "the money." They are due at different times, and only some of them come back to you.

WHAT	WHEN YOU PAY	TYPICAL	WHAT IT DOES
Option fee	Within 3 days of a signed contract	A few hundred dollars	Buys you a set number of days to terminate for any reason at all. Paid to the seller. Not refundable — but usually credited to you at closing.
Earnest money	Within 3 days of a signed contract	1–3% of price	Good-faith deposit showing you are serious. Held by the title company, not the seller. Refundable if you terminate during the option period. Applied to your costs at closing.
Inspections	During the option period	Varies by scope	Paid out of pocket to the inspector, at the time of service. Never refundable. Also the best money you will spend.
Appraisal	Ordered after contract	Set by the lender	Usually collected up front by the lender. Not refundable, and it does not transfer if you switch houses.
Down payment	At closing	0–20%+	Your stake in the property. It is not a cost — it converts straight into equity.
Closing costs	At closing	2–5% of price	Loan origination, title insurance, survey, recording, prepaid taxes and insurance, and the first escrow deposit. Frequently negotiable — see phase 5.

The two you need in cash, fast

Option fee and earnest money are both due within three days of a signed contract. Have them liquid and ready before we ever write an offer — not in an account with a transfer hold.

Where people get caught out

Prepays. Your first-year insurance premium and several months of property taxes get collected at closing to fund your escrow account. On a Texas house, that is a real number and it is not part of your down payment.

PHASE 3

Which loan, and what it really costs

The down payment is the headline. The mortgage insurance is what decides your payment for years.

	FHA	VA	CONVENTIONAL
Minimum down	3.5% at 580+ 10% at 500–579	0%	As low as 3%
Credit floor	580 typical	No VA minimum; lenders set their own	620 typical
Mortgage insurance	1.75% upfront, financed into the loan, plus an annual premium paid monthly. With less than 10% down it lasts the life of the loan .	None. Ever. A one-time funding fee instead.	PMI only if you put under 20% down — and it drops off as you build equity.
One-time fee	1.75% upfront MIP	2.15% funding fee (first use, nothing down)	None
Best when	Your score or DTI needs the flexibility, and you expect to refinance out later.	You are eligible. It is the strongest program in the country.	Your credit is solid and you want the insurance to end.

THE FHA TRAP WORTH UNDERSTANDING

FHA gets you in the door with a low score and a small down payment — genuinely useful. But on most FHA loans with less than 10% down, that monthly mortgage insurance never falls off, no matter how much equity you build. The only way out is refinancing into a conventional loan. Go in knowing that is the plan, not discovering it in year six.

2026 LIMITS, TARRANT COUNTY

\$563,500

FHA single-family limit for Tarrant County. Higher-cost DFW tier — same figure across eleven DFW counties.

\$832,750

Conforming loan limit — the same in every Texas county. Above this you are in jumbo territory.

No limit

VA, with full entitlement. Eligibility, not a ceiling, is what governs.

Limits reset annually. Verify current figures with your lender before relying on them.

Your VA benefit is worth more than you think

Roughly a third of my business is VA buyers. It is the strongest loan program in the country, and the two things that cost veterans the most money are both avoidable.

WHAT IT GETS YOU

Zero down	No down payment required with full entitlement, at any price your income supports.
No monthly MI	No mortgage insurance, ever. On a \$350,000 loan this alone can be worth well over a hundred dollars a month against FHA.
Capped costs	The VA limits certain fees a lender may charge you, and bars some outright.
Reusable	It is not once in a lifetime. Entitlement restores when the loan is paid off, and can sometimes be used twice at once.
Assumable	A qualified buyer can take over your loan and your rate later. In a high-rate market that is a real selling advantage.

MISTAKE ONE: PAYING A FEE YOU ARE EXEMPT FROM

First-time use with nothing down carries a **2.15% funding fee** — \$7,525 on a \$350,000 loan. But veterans receiving VA disability compensation are **exempt entirely**. So are certain Purple Heart recipients and surviving spouses receiving DIC. If you have a rating at any level, say so on day one. And if your rating came through *after* you closed, ask about a refund — it is often recoverable.

MISTAKE TWO: NOT USING IT AT ALL

Eligible buyers talk themselves out of VA because they heard it is slow, or that sellers dislike it, or that the property has to be perfect. In this market, with a lender who knows the program and an agent who can present the offer properly, none of that holds up. Do not leave the best loan in America on the table.

Funding fee tiers: 2.15% first use with less than 5% down, 1.5% with 5–9.99% down, 1.25% with 10% or more. Subsequent use with nothing down is 3.3%. Rates current as of July 2026. Eligibility and exemption status are determined by the VA and your lender, not by me.

PHASE 3

Buying the rate down

Two completely different things get called a buydown. Knowing which one you are being offered — and who pays — is worth thousands.

OPTION A

Permanent — discount points

You pay cash at closing to lower the rate for the entire life of the loan. One point costs **1% of the loan amount** and typically drops the rate about **0.25%**.

WORTH IT WHEN

You are staying five to seven years or more, you have cash beyond your emergency fund, and you would not refinance if rates fell.

SKIP IT WHEN

You might move inside five years, or you would refinance the moment rates dropped. Paying for a rate you will replace in eighteen months is money gone.

OPTION B

Temporary — 2-1, 3-2-1, 1-0

Money is placed in escrow to subsidize your interest for the first year or two. A **2-1** means your payment is calculated 2% below the note rate in year one, 1% below in year two, then full rate from year three.

THE PART NOBODY EXPLAINS

Your note rate never changes, and **you must still qualify at the full unsubsidized payment**. A temporary buydown does not get you into more house. It softens the first two years.

WHO PAYS

Almost always the seller or the builder, as a concession. Rarely worth funding yourself — that is just prepaying your own interest.

WHY I WILL ASK FOR THIS BEFORE I ASK FOR A PRICE CUT

A seller will often agree to a buydown when they will not agree to an equivalent price reduction — it costs them less and it does not reset their comparable sales. Rate buydowns have been among the most common seller concessions since 2025, and builders offer them by default. In a market with more sellers than buyers, this is the lever nobody thinks to pull. Always ask.

COMPARE THE NOTE RATE, NOT THE YEAR-ONE PAYMENT

A 2-1 buydown on a high note rate can cost you more from year three onward than a lower note rate with no buydown at all. Ask your lender to show you both side by side over five years. And confirm one thing in writing: if you refinance before the buydown is used up, does the unused balance credit back to you?

PHASE 4

The search

SEPARATE THESE TWO LISTS BEFORE WE START

Non-negotiable. Bedroom count, school district, maximum commute, single story, a yard for the dog. Things you cannot change about a house.

Changeable. Paint, flooring, countertops, fixtures, landscaping, the awful light in the entry. Do not reject a structurally right house over a \$4,000 problem — and do not pay a \$40,000 premium for finishes you would have chosen differently anyway.

ASK THESE AT EVERY SHOWING

Age of systems	Roof, HVAC, water heater. These are the expensive ones and they all have a clock.
Taxes	The current bill, and whether the seller has an exemption you will not inherit at the same value.
HOA	Dues, what they cover, special assessments, and the restrictions. Get the documents.
Days on market	And whether the price has been reduced. Both tell me how to write your offer.
Why are they selling	Sometimes you get a real answer, and it changes the negotiation entirely.

Drive it twice

Once on a weekday at rush hour, once on a Saturday night. Traffic, noise, parking and the feel of a street are completely different at 8am and 10pm. This has changed more of my clients' minds than any inspection.

Photograph everything

After the fourth house they blur together. Shoot the electrical panel, the water heater label, any staining on ceilings, and the fence line. You will want them later.

New construction: bring me to the first visit

The person in the model home works for the builder. Most builders pay buyer agent commission and most require me to be registered on your *first* visit. Walking in alone costs you representation and costs you nothing less on the house.

RESALE VALUE IS NOT A MOOD

Backing to a busy road, a power easement, a functionally odd floor plan — these discount a house when you buy and again when you sell. If you love it anyway, buy it knowingly and negotiate for it.

PHASE 5

Nine things on the table besides the price

Everyone negotiates price — the one thing a seller is most attached to and least likely to move on. Here is the rest of the board.

- 1 **Purchase price**
Contested, and often the least efficient thing to fight over.
- 2 **Seller-paid closing costs**
Cash back into the deal without touching the sale price. Often the biggest single win available to a first-time buyer.
- 3 **A rate buydown**
Cheaper for the seller than a price cut, and worth more to your monthly payment.
- 4 **Who pays for title**
The owner's policy is a real line item, and customary is not the same as required.
- 5 **Who pays for the survey**
Or whether the seller's existing survey can be reused with an affidavit, saving the whole cost.
- 6 **Appliances and fixtures**
Refrigerator, washer, dryer, mounted televisions. If it is not written down it is not yours.
- 7 **A home warranty**
A year of coverage on systems and appliances, paid by the seller. Cheap for them.
- 8 **Closing and possession dates**
Matching your lease end, or a few days of overlap, is worth real money in double rent.
- 9 **Repairs, or credit in lieu**
After inspection. A credit often serves you better than the seller's cheapest contractor.

HOW MUCH YOU ARE ALLOWED TO ASK FOR

Seller-paid costs are capped by your loan program, not by the seller's generosity. Asking above the cap wastes the ask.

FHA	Up to 6%	of the sale price
VA	Up to 4%	in seller concessions, plus customary closing costs
Conventional	3% – 9%	tiered by your down payment — the more you put down, the more you may receive

Concessions can never exceed your actual closing costs and prepaids — you cannot take the difference in cash. A good agent does not just ask: every request comes with a reason the seller can accept and a trade they gain. That is the difference between a strong offer and a rude one. Confirm your exact cap with your lender before we write.

You are on the clock

The option period is the single most valuable thing you buy in this transaction. For a few hundred dollars you purchase the unrestricted right to terminate the contract for any reason at all — or for no reason — and get your earnest money back.

It begins the moment the contract is executed. It ends at **5:00 p.m.** on the final day.

**Not 5:01.
5:00.**

There is no grace period and no sympathy. At 5:00:01 your right to walk away is gone and your earnest money is at risk. Every inspection, every quote, every hard conversation happens inside this window. Do not spend the first three days deciding who to call.



DAY 1

Deliver the option fee and earnest money. Book the inspector the same day — good ones are booked out.

MIDDLE

Inspection, then any specialist follow-ups, then contractor quotes on anything significant.

FINAL DAY

Amendment negotiated and signed, or terminate. Decide by noon, not at 4:45.

PHASE 6

Inspections

You pay for it, you own the report, and you should be standing there when it happens. A general inspector will spend two to three hours on the house and the walkthrough at the end is worth more than the PDF.

SPECIALISTS WORTH ADDING

Foundation	North Texas clay soil moves. If the general inspector flags anything, get a structural engineer — not a foundation company offering a free estimate.
Sewer scope	A camera down the line. On any house over about thirty years old this is cheap insurance against a five-figure surprise.
WDI / termite	Required on some loan programs, sensible on all of them.
HVAC	If the system is aging or the general inspector cannot fully evaluate it in the current weather.
Pool	Separate discipline entirely. Equipment is expensive.

Sort the report into three piles

Safety and structure. Electrical hazards, gas leaks, active water intrusion, foundation movement. Always address.

Expensive and imminent. A roof at end of life, a failing HVAC. Negotiate hard.

Cosmetic and maintenance. Every house has thirty of these. Chasing them costs you credibility on the items that matter.

THE REPORT WILL LOOK TERRIFYING

Every inspection report on every house reads like a disaster. Inspectors document everything, including a loose doorstop. A thirty-page report is normal. Read it with me before you react to it.

Repairs or a credit?

A credit puts money in your pocket and control in your hands. A seller-completed repair is done to the standard of the cheapest available contractor, on their timeline. For most items I will push for the credit.

PHASE 6

The appraisal — and what to do if it comes in low

Once you are under contract your lender orders the appraisal. The appraiser is an independent third party, usually assigned through an appraisal management company, so neither you, the lender, nor I can choose them or lean on them. Expect contact within about 48 hours of the order to schedule access. The buyer typically pays.

What they are actually deciding: not whether the house is nice, but whether it is worth what you agreed to pay, based on recent comparable sales. The lender will not finance more than the appraised value. That is the whole point.

The moment everyone panics

You are under contract at \$370,000. The appraisal comes back at \$355,000. The lender will lend against \$355,000. There is now a \$15,000 gap, and someone has to solve it.

YOUR FIVE OPTIONS, IN THE ORDER I WOULD TRY THEM

- 1 **Seller drops to value**
The strongest ask, and more reasonable than it sounds — the next buyer's appraisal will likely land in the same place.
- 2 **Meet in the middle**
They come down some, you bring some cash. The most common outcome.
- 3 **You cover the gap**
In cash, on top of your down payment. Only if the house is genuinely worth it to you and your reserves survive it.
- 4 **Dispute it**
A reconsideration of value with better comparables. Slow, and it succeeds less often than people hope — but worth trying if the comps were clearly wrong.
- 5 **Walk**
If your contract has a financing contingency intact, this is available. This is why we do not waive things casually.

BEFORE YOU OFFER OVER ASKING

Ask yourself where the gap money would come from if the appraisal does not support the price. Decide that before we write, not after the report lands.

PHASE 7

Closing day

Final papers are signed, money moves, and keys change hands. It takes about an hour and it is mostly signing. Here is the week around it.

THE DAYS BEFORE

3 days out	Your Closing Disclosure arrives by law. Read it against your Loan Estimate. Question anything that moved.
Wire early	Confirm wire instructions by phone, with a number you looked up yourself . Wire fraud in real estate is real, it is sophisticated, and the money does not come back.
Day of	Final walkthrough. Confirm repairs were done, the agreed appliances are still there, and nothing broke since you last saw it.
Utilities	Transfer into your name effective the closing date. Do this a week ahead.
Insurance	Policy must be bound and paid before funding. Your lender will not close without it.

BRING

Government photo ID for every person on the loan. That is genuinely it — the money should already have been wired.

Funded, not signed

In Texas you do not own the house when you finish signing. You own it when the transaction **funds** and records. That is often the same afternoon, sometimes the next morning. Do not schedule the movers for the hour after signing.

Keep these forever

Closing Disclosure, deed, title policy, survey, and the inspection report. Scan them the same week. You will need the Closing Disclosure at tax time and the survey the first time you want a fence.

Congratulations.

You just bought your first home.

PHASE 7

The first year

Four things in the first twelve months, and the first one is free money that first-time buyers miss constantly.

DO THIS FIRST

File your homestead exemption

WHAT

Form 50-114, filed with your county appraisal district. Tarrant, Johnson, Parker, Denton — whichever county the house sits in.

WHEN

By April 30 of the tax year. There is a late-filing window, but do not rely on it. File it the month you close.

WHY

It removes a large chunk of value from your school district taxes *and* caps how fast your taxable value can rise each year. It is free and it renews automatically.

Only your primary residence qualifies. The exemption amount has changed twice recently by constitutional amendment — check your appraisal district for the current figure. Additional exemptions exist for homeowners 65 and older, disabled homeowners, and disabled veterans.

Watch your escrow

Your first tax bill may be based on the seller's assessed value, not yours. When it resets, your escrow can shortfall and your payment jumps. Ask your lender to review it after the first assessment.

Protest your value

You may protest your appraised value annually — the deadline is typically in mid-May. It is free to file. Plenty of homeowners do it themselves and win.

Build the reserve back

Aim for one to three percent of the home's value each year for maintenance. The water heater does not care that you just bought.

TEXAS INSURANCE IS ITS OWN CONVERSATION

Hail and wind drive North Texas premiums, and deductibles are often a percentage of the insured value rather than a flat dollar amount. Read your deductible before you need it, and re-shop the policy at every renewal — loyalty is not rewarded here.

PHASE 8

Putting equity to work

Once you have built equity, there are two common ways to borrow against it. Both put your house up as collateral, which is exactly why the rates are lower than a credit card – and exactly why you should be careful.

	HOME EQUITY LOAN	HELOC
Shape	One lump sum, paid out at closing.	A revolving line you draw against as needed, like a credit card secured by the house.
Rate	Fixed for the life of the loan.	Usually variable. Your payment can move.
Repayment	Set payment over a set term, starting immediately.	A draw period, then a repayment period – and the payment often jumps sharply when that transition happens.
Suits	A known, one-time cost. A roof, a single renovation, consolidating a specific debt.	Staged or uncertain costs. A long remodel, or a standby safety net.
Watch for	You pay interest on the whole sum from day one, whether you need it all or not.	Variable rates, and the ease of treating your house like an ATM.

Texas has its own rules

Home equity lending in Texas is governed by the state constitution and is more restrictive than most states – there are limits on how much of your value can be borrowed against, required waiting periods, and specific disclosure requirements. Talk to a Texas lender specifically. Do not rely on general advice you read online.

THE HONEST WARNING

These tools are genuinely useful for a roof, a renovation that adds value, or escaping high-interest debt. They are a bad idea for a vacation, a wedding, or a depreciating vehicle.

The difference matters more than usual here: unsecured debt damages your credit if it goes wrong. This kind is secured by the roof over your head.

I am a REALTOR®, not a lender, attorney, or tax advisor. Nothing in this kit is financial, legal, or tax advice. Confirm every figure and every program rule with the appropriate licensed professional before you act on it.

The checklist

Print this, put it on the refrigerator, and work down it. Nothing here is optional busywork — every line is something that costs money or time when it gets missed.

PHASE 1 · CREDIT & CAPACITY

- ☐ Pull all three reports free at annualcreditreport.com
- ☐ Dispute any errors — allow several weeks to clear
- ☐ Get revolving balances under 30% of each limit
- ☐ Set every account to autopay minimum, no exceptions
- ☐ Stop opening new accounts entirely
- ☐ Calculate your DTI: monthly debt payments ÷ gross monthly income
- ☐ Identify which single debt payoff moves your DTI the most
- ☐ Build an emergency fund separate from the down payment

PHASE 2 · LENDER

- ☐ Interview at least two lenders
- ☐ Ask each for a written Loan Estimate, not a verbal quote
- ☐ Keep all credit pulls inside a short shopping window
- ☐ Compare FHA, VA and conventional side by side
- ☐ Ask specifically about first-time buyer and down payment assistance programs
- ☐ VA buyers: confirm your funding fee exemption status
- ☐ Ask about temporary and permanent buydown structures

PHASE 3 · PRE-APPROVAL

- ☐ Gather two years of W-2s or tax returns

- ☐ Gather 30 days of pay stubs
- ☐ Gather two months of statements for every account — all pages
- ☐ VA: obtain DD-214 and Certificate of Eligibility
- ☐ Get the pre-approval letter in hand, not pre-qualification
- ☐ Agree your own comfortable monthly payment, separate from the maximum
- ☐ Confirm your seller concession cap for your loan program
- ☐ Freeze all credit activity until you fund

PHASE 4 · SEARCH

- ☐ List non-negotiables and changeables separately
- ☐ Set your search area and confirm commute times at rush hour
- ☐ Check school ratings if relevant
- ☐ Set up MLS alerts with me
- ☐ Photograph systems, panels and defects at every showing
- ☐ Ask age of roof, HVAC and water heater every time
- ☐ Request HOA documents, dues and any special assessments
- ☐ Look up the current tax bill for each address
- ☐ Drive the street on a weekday morning and a weekend night
- ☐ New construction: register me on your first visit

The checklist, continued

PHASE 5 · OFFER

- ☐ Review comparable sales with me before naming a price
- ☐ Set your true walk-away number
- ☐ Decide the ask on closing costs, buydown, title, survey and warranty
- ☐ Confirm which appliances are included, in writing
- ☐ Agree earnest money and option fee amounts
- ☐ Have both amounts liquid and immediately available
- ☐ Set closing and possession dates against your lease end
- ☐ Decide in advance how you would cover an appraisal gap

PHASE 6 · OPTION PERIOD

- ☐ Deliver option fee and earnest money within 3 days
- ☐ Book the general inspector on day one
- ☐ Attend the inspection and the closing walkthrough with the inspector
- ☐ Add specialist inspections: sewer scope, foundation, WDI, HVAC, pool
- ☐ Sort findings into safety, expensive, and cosmetic
- ☐ Get contractor quotes on anything significant
- ☐ Negotiate repairs or a credit — and sign the amendment before 5:00 p.m.
- ☐ Confirm the appraisal has been ordered
- ☐ Lock your interest rate and note the expiry date

- ☐ Begin shopping homeowners insurance

PHASE 7 · CLOSING

- ☐ Return every lender document the same day it is requested
- ☐ Bind and pay the insurance policy
- ☐ Review the Closing Disclosure against your Loan Estimate
- ☐ Verify wire instructions by phone using a number you looked up
- ☐ Transfer utilities effective the closing date
- ☐ Complete the final walkthrough
- ☐ Bring government photo ID for every borrower
- ☐ Confirm the file has funded and recorded before moving
- ☐ Book the movers — ask about the 25% Quicke discount

PHASE 7 · FIRST YEAR

- ☐ File Form 50-114 for your homestead exemption
- ☐ Scan and store the Closing Disclosure, deed, title policy and survey
- ☐ Change the locks and the garage code
- ☐ Locate the main water shutoff and the electrical panel
- ☐ Note your escrow analysis date and watch for a shortfall
- ☐ Diarise the protest deadline for next spring
- ☐ Start a maintenance reserve

IF YOU ONLY DO THREE THINGS

Call a lender before you look at a single house. Do not touch your credit between pre-approval and funding. File your homestead exemption the month you close.

Let's keep it moving

Quickee Moving Co., LLC is a flat-rate DFW mover — you get a fixed price before the truck arrives, not an hourly meter that runs while someone wraps a lamp slowly. I recommend them because my clients keep telling me they showed up on time and nothing got broken.

As a thank you for being my client, Quickee will take **25% off** your move with **no deposit required**.

25% off

No deposit required. Address A to address B, within the Quickee service area. Does not include junk removal or storage drop-off.

Disclosure: I have a business relationship with Quickee Moving Co., LLC. You are under no obligation to use them, and you are welcome to get competing quotes — I will not be offended and I will still hand you the keys.

Quickee MOVING CO.

AS FAST AS POSSIBLE

quickeemove.com

Booking tip

Book the truck the day your option period ends, not the week of closing. Good movers fill up, and the end of the month is the worst time to find one.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Let's find out what you can actually do.

A consultation costs nothing and commits you to nothing. Bring your questions, and bring the one about whether you can afford this at all — that is the one most people are too embarrassed to ask, and it is the easiest one to answer.

Rebecca Kennedy

REALTOR® · TOP 1% IN TEXAS

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OR TEXT

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