Home-Buying Timeline & Checklist

Eleven general stages from early research to your first months as an owner. Every transaction differs — use this as a map, not a fixed schedule.

1. Get your finances oriented

Weeks to months before shopping

- Pull your credit reports and review them for errors
- List recurring monthly debts and minimum payments
- Estimate a comfortable monthly housing payment range
- Start or grow a dedicated house-fund savings account

2. Learn the basics before talking to anyone

1-3 weeks

- Read the down payments, closing costs, and pre-approval guides
- Skim the glossary for unfamiliar terms
- Decide roughly how much cash you can allocate to a down payment and closing costs

3. Get pre-approved

A few days to about a week

- Gather pay stubs, tax returns, and bank statements
- Consider requesting estimates from more than one lender
- Review each Loan Estimate for fees and terms

4. Search for a home

Weeks to several months

- Write down your must-haves vs. nice-to-haves
- Track homes you view and your notes on each
- Revisit your comfortable monthly payment range as you see real listings

5. Make an offer

Typically a few days once you find a home

- Review contingencies with your agent or attorney before signing
- Confirm your earnest money amount and how it will be handled
- Clarify your offer's deadlines

6. Order a home inspection

Typically within a set number of days after acceptance

- Schedule the inspection promptly to stay within contract deadlines
- Attend if possible
- Review the report and note any items to discuss with your agent

7. Finalize your mortgage (underwriting)

Typically a few weeks

- Avoid new credit accounts or large purchases during this period
- Respond quickly to lender document requests
- Review the appraisal result with your agent if it differs from the offer price

8. Review the Closing Disclosure

At least a few days before closing, for many loans

- Compare final numbers to your Loan Estimate
- Ask about any changes you don't understand
- Confirm how much you'll need to bring to closing and in what form

9. Final walk-through

Typically 1-2 days before closing

- Bring your inspection report and repair agreements
- Test major systems and appliances again
- Note any issues immediately with your agent

10. Closing day

Typically a single appointment

- Bring valid photo ID and any required certified funds
- Review every document before signing; ask questions if unsure
- Confirm you receive copies of everything you sign

11. After closing

First weeks and months as an owner

- Set up utilities and update your mailing address
- Store closing documents somewhere safe and easy to find
- Start a maintenance reserve fund and a basic seasonal maintenance checklist

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