

FIRST-TIME BUYER

♥
YOUR
JOURNEY
STARTS
HERE

*Your Guide
to Buying*
WITH CONFIDENCE

A step-by-step resource
to help you navigate the
home buying process
from start to finish.



Understand
THE PROCESS



Make Smart
FINANCIAL DECISIONS



Find the Right
HOME FOR YOU



Move Forward
WITH CONFIDENCE



TOM SHARP, REALTOR®

Helping people make thoughtful, lifelong
real estate decisions—with clarity and confidence.

Buying Your First Home Is a Journey, Not Just a Transaction

Buying your first home is exciting—but it's also filled with unfamiliar decisions. From financing and home shopping to inspections and closing, every step builds on the one before it.

This guide isn't here to tell you what to buy. It's here to help you understand the process so you can make informed decisions with confidence.

Whether you're just beginning to explore homeownership or already searching for a home, use this guide as a roadmap. Read it from beginning to end, or jump to the section that's most helpful to you today.



Your HOME-BUYING JOURNEY STARTS HERE



Buying your first home is one of life's biggest milestones—but you don't have to navigate it alone.

This guide walks you through the home-buying process one step at a time, helping you understand what happens, what decisions you'll make, and how to move forward with confidence.

YOUR JOURNEY

1

FINANCING & PRE-APPROVAL



Understand your financing options, review your credit, and get pre-approved so you know your budget and strengthen your buying position.

2

FINDING THE RIGHT HOME



Define your needs and priorities, explore locations, tour homes, and find the one that truly feels like the right fit.

3

MAKING AN OFFER



Write a strong offer, negotiate terms, and navigate contingencies to move your offer toward acceptance.

4

INSPECTIONS, APPRAISAL & CLOSING



Complete inspections, appraisal, and legal steps, then close with confidence and get the keys to your new home!

THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE YOU'LL FIND



Simple explanations—not confusing real estate jargon



Helpful checklists to keep you organized



Practical tips that can save you time and money



Common mistakes to avoid



QR codes linking to additional articles and resources

One step at a time.

By the end of this guide, you'll understand the entire home-buying process and be better prepared to make informed decisions.



Financing and Pre-Approval

One of the smartest first steps in buying a home is understanding what you can comfortably afford.

Why Get Pre-Approved?

- ✓ Know your budget
 - Focus on homes you can comfortably afford.
- ✓ Strengthen your offer
 - Sellers know you're financially prepared.
- ✓ Reduce surprises
 - Resolve financing questions before finding the right home.

Gather Documents You Will Likely Need

Most lenders request some combination of these documents during the pre-approval process

- ☐ Recent pay stubs
- ☐ W-2s or recent tax returns
- ☐ Bank statements
- ☐ Government-issued photo ID
- ☐ Employment information
- ☐ Monthly debt information
- ☐ Other documents required by lender



Tom's Tip:



Getting pre-approved before you fall in love with a home helps keep expectations realistic and makes the buying process much less stressful.

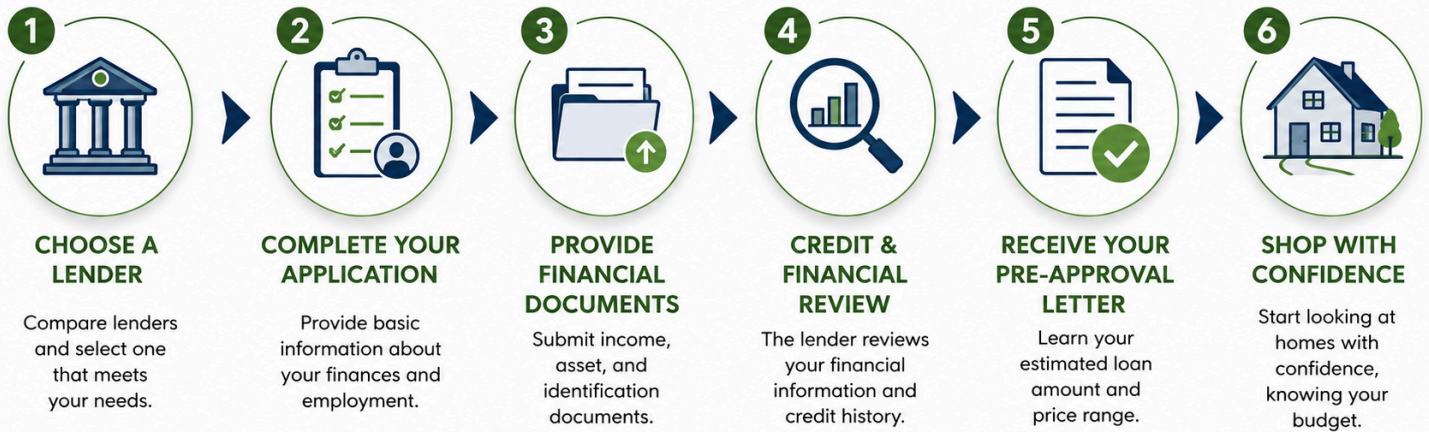


Did You Know? You can compare multiple lenders without multiple credit score hits.

Credit scoring models generally treat multiple mortgage applications made within a short shopping window as a single inquiry. That allows you to compare rates, fees, and loan options without being penalized for shopping around

THE PRE-APPROVAL PROCESS

A few simple steps today can make your home-buying journey smoother tomorrow.



Does Pre-Approval Guarantee Approval?

No.

Pre-approval is based on your financial situation at the time you apply.

Your loan could change if you:

- ✓ Lose your job
- ✓ Take on significant new debt
- ✓ Miss loan or credit card payments
- ✓ Experience a major drop in income or savings

First-Time Buyer Assistance

Many first-time buyers are surprised to learn they may qualify for programs that make homeownership more affordable.

- ✓ FHA loans
- ✓ VA loans (eligible buyers)
- ✓ USDA loans (eligible rural areas)
- ✓ Conventional low down payment loans
- ✓ Georgia Dream Homeownership Program
- ✓ Down payment assistance programs through various lenders

The best way to find out is to speak with a trusted lender.

Learn More About Financing

Scan to explore practical financing guidance, planning tools, and first-time buyer resources on my website.



Finance & Pre-Approval

Choosing the Right Home, Location, and Budget

Finding the right home is about more than bedrooms and bathrooms. By focusing on your priorities and evaluating each home carefully, you'll be more confident when it's time to make an offer.

Where Do I Begin?

- ✓ Know your budget.
 - Stay within the price range from your pre-approval.
- ✓ Separate needs from wants.
 - Decide what you must have versus features you'd simply like.
- ✓ Choose locations that fit your lifestyle.
 - Think about commute, schools, shopping, recreation, and future plans.
- ✓ Keep an open mind.
 - The "perfect" home rarely exists, but the right home often stands out quickly.

Be Flexible

Every home involves compromises. Focus on finding the home that best fits your priorities rather than waiting for a perfect home that may never come along.

Warning Signs to Watch For

- Strong odors hidden by air fresheners
- Fresh paint covering isolated areas
- Cracks in walls or ceilings
- Signs of water damage
- Doors or windows that don't close properly





Tom's Tip:

Trust your instincts—but verify them.

If a home feels right, make sure it also fits your budget, priorities, and long-term plans.

A second visit can often confirm your first impression.



Learn More About Your Home Search

Scan to explore home search tools and additional first-time buyer resources on my website.



Choosing the Right Home

LET THE SEARCH BEGIN

A few simple steps to help you find the right home.



Our Must-Haves List

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

✓ Home Tour Checklist

- ☐ **Bring a notebook or use a pre-printed checklist.**

Jot down impressions while they're fresh.

- ☐ **Notice the home's condition.**

Look past the decorating and pay attention to the roof, windows, flooring, walls, and major systems.

- ☐ **Review the Seller's Disclosure (if available).**

In Georgia, sellers are expected to disclose known material defects and other important information about the property. It often provides valuable insight into the home's condition, repairs, and known issues. Let your REALTOR® help guide you through the review and answer any questions.

- ☐ **Look beyond decorating.**

Fresh paint and furniture change easily—focus on the home's layout and condition.

- ☐ **Compare each home before touring the next one.**

Review your notes while the home is still fresh in your mind, then give it an overall score to help identify your favorites.

Overall Impression

★★★★★☆☆☆☆ (5/10)

- ☐ **Ask questions.**

Find out about the home's age, updates, HOA fees, utilities, and anything that concerns you.

- ☐ **Picture your daily routine.**

Can you imagine living comfortably in this home and neighborhood?

- ☐ **Pay attention to the neighborhood.**

Notice traffic, nearby amenities, noise levels, and how the surrounding homes are maintained.



Home Tour Notes

Property Address:

Asking Price: \$ _____

Bedrooms: _____ **Bathrooms:** _____

How many of your must-haves does this home meet?

_____ of _____

Location ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Overall Condition ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Layout / Functionality ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Neighborhood ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

What I Liked Most

Concerns / Questions

Things to Check or Ask About

Could I Picture Myself Living Here?

☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ No

Would I Like to See It Again?

☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ No

Overall Impression

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

_____ / 10

Making An Offer

Once you've found the right home, it's time to prepare an offer. Your REALTOR® will help you understand current market conditions, explain your options, and guide you through each step.

What's Included in an Offer?

Offer Price

- Based on comparable sales
- Current market conditions
- Your budget and priorities

Terms & Conditions

- Closing date
- Earnest money
- Financing terms
- Contingencies

Negotiation

- Seller may accept
- Seller may counter
- Seller may reject

Acceptance

Once both parties agree and sign the contract, you're officially under contract and move toward closing.

Good to Know

- **Every transaction is unique.**
- **Deadlines are important.**
- **Ask questions if something isn't clear.**
- **Your REALTOR® will help guide you through each step.**
- **An accepted offer doesn't guarantee the sale will close.**



Tom Tip

Don't feel pressured to rush.

Your offer should reflect your goals, your budget, and your comfort level—not someone else's timeline.

If something isn't clear, ask questions until you're **comfortable moving forward.**



Learn More About Your Offers and Closing

Scan to explore home search tools and additional first-time buyer resources on my website.



Choosing the Right Home

After Your Offer Is Accepted

- **Earnest Money**

Shows your commitment to purchasing the home.

- **Home Inspection**

Provides an opportunity to better understand the home's condition.

- **Due Diligence Period**

Your opportunity to complete inspections, review the property, and decide whether to move forward.

- **Appraisal**

Required by most lenders to confirm the home's market value.

- **Final Loan Approval**

Your lender completes the final review before closing.

-

- **Final Walk-Through**

Confirm the home's condition and agreed-upon repairs before closing.

- **Closing Day**

You'll sign documents, receive the keys, and officially become the homeowner.



Understanding Due Diligence

The Due Diligence Period gives you time to fully evaluate the home before making your final commitment to buy.

During this time, buyers often:

- Schedule a home inspection
- Review the property's condition
- Obtain repair estimates if needed
- Ask questions and negotiate repairs
- Decide whether to move forward
-

Important: Due diligence deadlines are established in the purchase agreement. If you decide not to move forward, you generally must act before the deadline to preserve your contractual rights.

Inspections and Appraisals

After your offer is accepted, several important steps help confirm the home's condition, value, and financing before closing. While your REALTOR® will help coordinate the process, understanding these steps can make everything feel much less overwhelming.

Home Inspection

A professional home inspection evaluates the home's major systems and identifies issues that may need attention. While no home is perfect, the inspection helps you better understand the property's condition before moving forward.

Repair Requests

After reviewing the inspection report, buyers may request repairs, ask for a credit toward repairs, or choose to proceed without requesting changes. Every situation is different, and negotiations depend on the contract and the condition of the home.

Appraisal

If you're financing your purchase, your lender will typically require an appraisal. The appraiser estimates the home's market value to help ensure the purchase price is supported by comparable sales. There's usually no active involvement on your part required.

Learn More About Inspections & Appraisals

Scan to learn more inspections & appraisals, as well as other first-time buyer resources on my website.



Inspections & Appraisals



Good to Know

Negotiation is about finding common ground.

Buyers may request repairs, credits, or price adjustments, while sellers may agree, negotiate different terms, or decline the request.

.....
The goal is to reach an agreement that works for both parties.



Tom's Tip:

Understand the Inspection Report.

A home inspector's job is to find **EVERY** possible flaw—from major concerns to minor imperfections.

Focus on the issues that matter most. Not every item on the report needs to be repaired. Your REALTOR® can help you distinguish between routine maintenance and concerns that deserve further attention.



Closing

Closing is the final step in the home-buying process. Once all documents are signed and funds are transferred, ownership officially transfers to you.

Preparing for Closing

Complete These Before Closing



Homeowner's Insurance

Purchase a homeowner's insurance policy early in the process. Your lender will need proof of coverage before closing



Review Your Closing Disclosure

Compare the final numbers with your expectations and ask questions if anything looks different.



Arrange Closing Funds

If you'll be wiring funds or bringing certified funds, confirm the amount and payment instructions with your closing attorney.



Transfer Utilities & Update Your Address

Schedule utilities to begin on closing day and submit a change of address with the U.S. Postal Service.



Final Walk-Through

Shortly before closing, verify the home's condition and confirm any agreed-upon repairs have been completed.

The day of closing:



Bring a government-issued photo ID.



Confirm your wire transfer has been completed (if applicable).



Ask questions before signing if anything isn't clear.



Receive your keys and celebrate your new home!

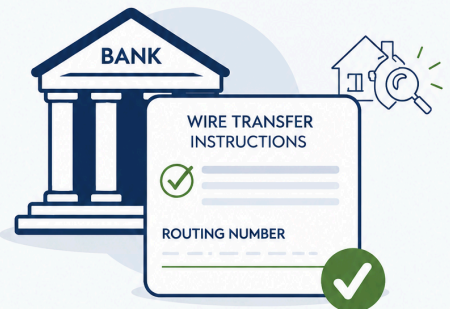


Tom's Tip:

Good to Know

If you'll be wiring funds for closing, ask your bank for its official wire transfer instructions several days in advance.

The routing number for wire transfers may be different from the one on your checks or online banking.



Learn More About Closing

Scan to learn more closing steps, as well as other first-time buyer resources on my website.



Closing

YOU DON'T HAVE TO FIGURE IT OUT ALONE.

I'm here to help.

Buying your first home is an exciting milestone—and it's normal to have questions along the way. This guide is here to help you feel informed, prepared, and confident every step of the way.



LOCAL EXPERTISE

I know this area and can help you find the right home in the right community.



PERSONAL SERVICE

You'll get the time, attention, and guidance you deserve—never just a transaction.



YOUR GOALS

My focus is simple: helping you find a home that fits your life and your future.



MORE RESOURCES. ONE EASY PLACE.

Scan the QR code to explore helpful tools, checklists, and more first-time buyer resources on my website.

Scan me!



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Serving Athens-Clark and surrounding counties


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