

Home buyer checklist

CREDIT: Ilyce Glink, thinkglink.com



1. UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU WANT IN A HOUSE AND WHAT YOU NEED. Just cause you want five bedrooms doesn't mean you need them.

2. IDENTIFY YOUR NEIGHBORHOODS OF CHOICE. Write down what your neighborhood of choice should have and compare that list with actual neighborhoods you can afford and may want to live in. Then, spend time in it.

3. FIGURE OUT HOW MUCH YOU CAN COMFORTABLY SPEND.

- Calculate how much you can afford to spend on your mortgage, property taxes and insurance each month
- Add in all of the other expenses you pay for each month
- Add in money for upkeep and maintenance expenses
- How much is left in your paycheck?

Ask yourself: Can I afford to spend a little more of it on my housing expenses each month?

4. PULL A COPY OF YOUR CREDIT HISTORY AND CREDIT SCORE. Do this at www.annualcreditreport.com to get a free copy of your credit history from each of the three credit reporting bureaus.

5. GATHER YOUR PAPERWORK BEFORE SHOPPING FOR A LOAN. You'll need copies of your W2, bank account and retirement account statements, and tax information.

6. SHOP AROUND FOR A MORTGAGE. Talk to different types of lenders to see what's out there.

7. FIND AN AMAZING REAL ESTATE AGENT. A great agent with years of experience negotiating for buyers and sellers in your neighborhood of choice is invaluable.

8. UNDERSTAND WHAT "TRUE VALUE" MEANS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD OF CHOICE. Start collecting information about the local housing stock. Ask your agent to walk you through each home that has recently sold, so you begin to understand the relationship between price, condition and value.

9. APPLY FOR YOUR LOAN. Try not to chew your nails off while waiting to be approved

10. WORK WITH YOUR AGENT. Identify the homes for sale in your neighborhood(s) of choice that meet your wants and needs.

11. PUT TOGETHER OTHER PIECES OF YOUR TEAM. Choose your home inspector and your lender (and decide what kind of loan you want). Think about hiring a good real estate attorney (especially if you're buying a foreclosure or short sale).

12. UNDERSTAND THE TRUE COSTS OF HOMEOWNERSHIP. You don't want to be stressed out over the monthly expenses of owning a home as well as other unexpected surprises that come with buying a home.

13. DON'T LET ANYONE PUSH YOU AROUND. You should work hard to set your own home buying agenda.

14. MAKE A SMART OFFER. Look at how much other homes in the area have sold for, and then build an offer that gives the seller something he or she wants in exchange for whatever you really want.

15. STAY FOCUSED UNTIL CLOSING. Schedule the movers. Pack your boxes. Set up utility accounts at the new property.