YOUR FIRST HOME STARTS WITH UNDERSTANDING YOUR OPTIONS.

First-Time Buyer Roadmap

A practical guide from The American Dream Project
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Before you count yourself out

Maybe you've heard that homes cost too much. Maybe you're waiting until your savings are bigger, your credit is stronger, or someone tells you the timing is perfect.

Before you decide homeownership isn't possible, give yourself the opportunity to understand what it could look like for you. You don't need to have every answer today. You just need a clear place to start.

My passion for helping people get the keys to their first home is what pushed me to pursue the education and licensing to serve buyers on both the real estate and mortgage sides. My faith shapes how I approach that work: with honesty, patience, and a responsibility to serve my community well.

This guide is here to help you learn without pressure. Whether you buy soon or spend the next year preparing, the goal is a decision you understand and feel comfortable making.

Start with your life, not a listing

Before browsing homes, write down what you want homeownership to make possible. Think about your routine, your priorities, and what you want to preserve financially.

Ask yourself:

- What monthly housing budget would leave me comfortable?
- How much savings do I want to keep after moving?
- Which locations fit my work and daily life?
- What do I truly need in a home?
- Am I ready for the responsibilities of maintaining a property?

Your goal is not to buy the most expensive home you can qualify for. It is to find a home that fits your life.

Get clear on the money

Start by reviewing your income, spending, savings, debts, and credit before setting your homebuying budget. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau recommends this preparation before shopping for a mortgage.[1]

Build your planning worksheet around:

- **Monthly ownership budget:** Mortgage principal and interest, property taxes, homeowners insurance, any mortgage insurance or HOA dues, utilities, and maintenance.
- **Purchase expenses:** Down payment, closing costs, inspections, and moving.
- **Money you keep:** Emergency savings and a cushion for repairs or other surprises.

Ask for a written breakdown rather than relying on a single advertised payment. Make sure you understand what is included and what you would pay separately.

Explore your options before assuming you need more savings

A large down payment is not the only possible path, and assistance programs may help eligible buyers with down payment or closing costs.[2] Some assistance is a grant, while other assistance comes with repayment or forgiveness conditions, so the details matter.[2]

Questions worth asking:

- Which loan options fit my situation?
- Is assistance available to me?
- What would I need to bring to closing?
- Does the assistance affect my rate or other costs?
- Would I have to repay it if I sell, refinance, or move?
- What would the same purchase look like without assistance?

The goal is not just to find help. It is to understand whether that help makes sense for you.

1. https://www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/prepare/
2. https://www.tsahc.org/homebuyers-renters/loans-down-payment-assistance

Get pre-approved and understand what it means

A pre-approval can help clarify your buying range, but it is not a guaranteed loan approval; the lender still needs to confirm information and satisfy remaining requirements.[1]

Use the accompanying Pre-Approval Document Checklist to get organized. Ask your lender what has already been reviewed, what still needs verification, and what could change your qualification.

If you aren't ready yet, ask for a specific preparation plan. "Not today" should lead to a clearer next step, not the end of the conversation.

Shop with a plan and ask questions before you offer

Use your comfortable budget and must-have list to guide your search. Ask your real estate professional to walk you through the purchase contract before you sign.

Your offer conversation should cover:

- Price and proposed terms.
- Deposits and any applicable fees.
- Inspection opportunities and deadlines.
- Financing requirements and deadlines.
- Requested repairs or seller contributions.
- Closing date and when you would receive possession.

Don't feel embarrassed about asking someone to explain a term twice. Understanding the agreement matters more than looking experienced.

1. https://www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/explore/get-a-preapproval-letter/

Compare the financing and prepare for closing

After finding a home, obtain and compare official loan offers rather than choosing on the interest rate alone.[1] Review the Loan Estimate and Closing Disclosure carefully, including the loan terms, closing costs, and money needed to complete the purchase.[2]

Keep a written list of questions and outstanding items. Before making major financial changes, ask your lender how they could affect your application.

For your closing conversation, ask:

- What still needs to be completed?
- Does the final payment match what we discussed?
- How much money do I need, and how do I deliver it securely?
- How will I independently verify payment instructions?
- When is the final walkthrough?
- When will I receive possession and the keys?

Take the next step that fits you

You don't have to buy today to make progress today. Organizing your paperwork, understanding your budget, or asking one honest question is a worthwhile beginning.

My mission is to help people in my community move from uncertainty toward informed decisions. If homeownership is right for you, I want you to approach it with a plan, not pressure.

Have questions or need help with your next step? Call or email me. I'm happy to explain your options and help you feel prepared, without pressure or any obligation to move forward.

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Buyer Masterclass: https://satx.localhomeclass.com
Schedule a conversation: https://satx.localhomeclass.com/book

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1. https://www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/
2. https://www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/what-documents-should-i-receive-before-closing-on-a-mortgage-loan-en-181/