BUY WITH YOUR EYES OPEN

Homebuyer's Guide

MINNESOTA / Logan Haburn



A payment that fits your life

I give a damn about what happens after you get the keys. I want you to enjoy your home without a payment that eats up the rest of your life. Before you fall for a kitchen or a backyard, get clear on what you can comfortably carry each month.

Write down the whole housing cost: mortgage principal and interest, property taxes, homeowners insurance, any mortgage insurance, and association dues. Ask your lender which costs are included in the payment and which you will pay separately. A headline payment can leave out expenses you still have to cover. [S1]

Then add utilities, maintenance, moving costs, and the commitments you already have. Leave yourself a repair cushion. Think about the life you want outside the house, too: time with family, a trip, a business idea, or simply breathing room.

My starting question: after the bills are paid, does this still feel comfortable? Write down your monthly limit and the savings you want left after closing. If the plan only works when everything goes perfectly, slow down. There is nothing wrong with choosing less house or waiting.

> **Your comfort check**
>
> Monthly housing limit: _____
>
> Cash I want left after closing: _____
>
> Costs I still need to confirm: _____
>
> A tradeoff I will not make just to buy sooner: _____

Keep your own limit in front of you. The goal is a home you can live in comfortably, not a payment you have to survive.

Get clear on financing before you get attached

Talk with lenders before you get attached to a house. Ask what documents they need, what preapproval covers, and what still needs to be reviewed. If something sounds confusing, keep asking. You are the one who has to live with the payment.

Compare Loan Estimates, not just the advertised rate. Look at the loan terms, fees, estimated payment, and cash needed at closing. Ask the lender to walk you through differences you cannot explain. Bring your own comfortable budget into that conversation. [S1]

Ask a participating lender whether Minnesota Housing programs fit your situation. Eligibility and education requirements apply. Its downpayment and closing cost assistance programs are loans, not grants. Understand the repayment terms before building them into your plan. [S2]

> **Ask the lender, in plain English**
>
> Which parts of this payment could change?
>
> What cash will I need at closing, separate from my repair cushion?
>
> Which costs differ between these offers, and why?
>
> What is still conditional, and when will I know?

If you cannot explain the loan back in your own words, ask for another walkthrough.

Find the fit. Know the terms.

Tour with a plan. Ask before you sign.



Tour with a short list and a consistent routine

Separate must-haves from nice-to-haves. Think about layout, stairs, storage, parking, commute, and how long the home might fit your plans. Decide which tradeoffs you would accept before a beautiful kitchen changes the conversation.

During each tour, take notes on the same things. Ask about the roof, heating system, drainage, basement moisture, and past repairs. In Minnesota, also picture snow storage and winter access. For a condo or townhome, request the association information and understand what dues cover. Photos will help you remember the finishes; notes will help you compare the homes.

A good-looking house can make it easy to brush past a concern. Write it down anyway. Before moving forward, decide which questions need an answer and which repairs need a qualified opinion. You do not have to talk yourself into a house just because you liked the photos.

> **A better tour note**
>
> Hypothetical example: You love the kitchen, but notice a stain in the basement. Record the concern instead of guessing its cause.
>
> Ask: What is known about it? What documentation is available? Who can investigate it properly?
>
> For each home, record: must-haves met / concerns / unanswered questions / next action.

A beautiful finish is easy to remember. Write down the expensive questions before they get lost.

Understand the offer before you sign

Before you sign, make sure you can explain the offer in your own words. Price is one part. Review earnest money, financing terms, the closing date, included items, and contingencies. The actual wording and deadlines control your options. Do not assume you can cancel or get earnest money back when something unexpected happens. Ask your agent to explain the agreement and get legal advice when needed. [S3]

Discuss inspection plans before making the offer. A seller's disclosures do not replace your own investigation. Ask the inspector what is covered, what is excluded, and whether the property calls for additional testing or a specialist. [S3]

> **Before you put pen to paper**
>
> What am I committing to, and what money is at risk?
>
> What must happen next, and by what deadline?
>
> Who is responsible for each next step?
>
> Which unresolved concern could change my decision?

Do not let the excitement of getting an offer accepted rush the part where you understand it.

Lake Minnewaska: Trick on / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 3.0. Cropped; same license.

Keep the final stretch clear.

Good decisions need a little organization.

Keep the final stretch organized

Once an offer is accepted, put the deadlines in one place. Track inspection decisions, lender requests, insurance, and the closing appointment. Ask your lender before making major financial changes. If something feels off, speak up early. You are not being difficult by asking what you are signing.

Review your Closing Disclosure against your latest Loan Estimate and ask about changes before signing. Request closing documents in advance. Be cautious with last-minute payment instructions: scammers can impersonate people involved in the transaction. Verify instructions directly using a trusted phone number, rather than relying on a new email or text. [S4]

Your practical starting checklist

- ☐ Set a comfortable monthly housing budget and a post-closing savings cushion.
- ☐ Gather the documents your lender requests and compare loan options.
- ☐ Ask about assistance eligibility and repayment obligations.
- ☐ Write your must-haves, tradeoffs, and questions for tours.
- ☐ Understand the offer, contingencies, and deadlines before signing.
- ☐ Review closing documents and independently verify payment instructions.

Make one closing tracker

Task or question | Person responsible | Due date | Confirmed complete

Inspection decision | _____ | _____ | _____

Lender request | _____ | _____ | _____

Insurance / closing details | _____ | _____ | _____

Payment instructions verified by trusted phone number | _____

A deadline living in somebody’s inbox is easy to miss. Put the next action where you can see it.

A clear next step.

Good questions. A real conversation.

Keep your bigger plans in mind

Think about whether this home fits the life you want now and the options you may want later. If a future rental or house-hacking idea interests you, weigh the positives, the costs, and the responsibilities with qualified lending, legal, tax, and insurance professionals before relying on it.

House hacking deserves its own guide. For this first purchase, keep the focus on a home you can comfortably carry and a decision you understand.

Let’s talk about your first home

Have questions? Give me a call, send me a text, or send me an email. Bring your rough timeline and what matters most to you. We can start there.

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Sources and notes

October 29, 2026 edition. General education, not individualized legal, tax, or lending advice. Recheck program terms and property-specific rules before acting.

S1 - CFPB, Loan Estimate Explainer: payment components, comparison, fees, and cash to close. https://www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/loan-estimate/

S2 - Minnesota Housing, Homeownership Programs: eligibility, education, and assistance loans. https://www.mnhousing.gov/home/homeownership/buy-home-refinance

S3 - Minnesota Attorney General, The Perfect Place: inspections, disclosures, purchase agreements, and contingencies. https://ag.state.mn.us/Consumer/Handbooks/HmBuyers/CH5.asp

S4 - CFPB, Review documents before closing: comparing documents and recognizing payment-instruction scams. https://www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/close/review-documents-before-closing/