

AYANNA THOMAS | DAVID LLOYD REALTY

FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER GUIDE

ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR FIRST TIME HOMEBUYERS



AYANNAARIE.COM



DAVID LLOYD
REALTY

hey there. NICE TO MEET YOU!

SO YOU'RE THINKING OF BUYING YOUR
FIRST HOME?

I'm Ayanna Thomas, your favorite Gen Z
Realtor® serving Columbia, SC and beyond!

My mission? To make homeownership real,
reachable, and SIMPLE.

Buying your first home can feel
overwhelming, but I'm here to guide you
every step of the way.

This guide is your step-by-step roadmap—
broken down in easy language to help you
feel confident, prepared, and empowered
through the whole process.





Step 01.

Hire Your Real Estate Professional

Your Guide From Start To Close

The first (and most important) step in your home buying journey is choosing the right agent to guide you. Hiring a licensed real estate professional is the very first step in the home buying process. Your agent will guide you through everything—from getting pre-approved and finding homes to making offers and closing the deal.

They'll help you avoid common mistakes, break down complicated steps, and make sure your best interests are protected throughout the entire journey.

What Your Agent Helps With:

- Explains the full buying process step-by-step
- Recommends trusted lenders for pre-approval
- Finds homes that match your needs
- Schedules showings
- Submits offers + negotiates on your behalf
- Coordinates inspections, paperwork, and deadlines
- Supports you all the way through closing day

Step 02.
Determining Your
Budget

How Much Home Can You Afford?

GENERAL RULE OF THUMB:

Your total monthly home payment (including mortgage, homeowner's insurance, etc.) should not be more than **28% of your gross monthly income.**

For example: if your annual salary is \$60,000 before taxes, your monthly gross income is \$5,000. Using the 28% rule, you should spend no more than \$1,400 per month on your home payment

$$\$60,000/12 = \$5,000/\text{month}$$

$$\$5,000 * 0.28 = \$1,400/\text{month}$$

However, budget is just one factor. Lenders also review your debt-to-income ratio, the percentage of your monthly income that goes toward debts like credit cards and loans. Ideally, **this should be 36% or less**, including your future mortgage payment.



A bright, modern kitchen interior featuring white cabinetry with gold-toned hardware, gold-toned pendant lights, and wooden stools. The scene is well-lit, suggesting a sunny day. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular background in the center of the image.

Step 03.

Getting Pre-
Approved

GETTING PRE-APPROVED:

The home-buying process is exciting but requires careful financial preparation.

Before house hunting, get pre-approved by a lender. It shows sellers you're serious and gives you a clear budget.

You'll need:

- Pay stubs
- W2s/tax returns
- Bank statements
- Credit check

AYANNA'S TIP:

I can connect you with trusted lenders I work with personally!



The background image shows a bright, modern kitchen. It features white shaker-style cabinets with gold-toned hardware. Three gold-toned, lantern-style pendant lights hang from the ceiling. In the foreground, several light-colored wooden bar stools are tucked under a white countertop. The floor is made of light-colored wood. The overall aesthetic is clean and contemporary.

Step 04.

Narrow Down Locations/Must Haves



WHAT REALLY MATTERS TO YOU

Buying a home isn't just about the number of bedrooms — it's about how it fits your life. This part of the process is to help you figure out what really matters so we can focus on homes that truly feel like the right fit.

Preferred Areas

Think about the places that feel like you. This could be based on your commute, family, school districts, lifestyle, or just the vibe. Which areas are you most interested in living?

Do you want to be close to:

- ☐ Work
- ☐ Family
- ☐ School
- ☐ Airport
- ☐ Shopping/Restaurants
- ☐ Quiet suburbs
- ☐ Downtown or city life

Must-Have Features

These are your non-negotiables — the things your new home absolutely HAS to have.

of bedrooms: _____

of bathrooms: _____

Style (one-story, two-story, modern, etc.): _____

Yard / Outdoor space: Yes / No

Garage: Yes / No

Open floor plan? _____

Other must-haves:

AYANNA'S TIP:

The clearer you are about what works and what doesn't, the easier it'll be for us to find your dream home without overwhelm.

Step 05.

House Hunting!





The House Shopping Begins!

NOW THE FUN BEGINS!

Now that we know what you want and where you want to be, it's time to start house hunting. But don't worry—you're not doing this alone. I'm here to guide you through every showing, every option, and every decision until we find "the one."

I'll send you carefully selected options that match your:

- ✓ Preferred locations
- ✓ Budget
- ✓ Must-haves
- ✓ Dealbreakers
- ✓ Timeline + availability

During Showings, We'll:

- Walk through the layout + flow of the home
- Take notes on what you liked or didn't like

Every showing brings us one step closer to the one!

Step 06.
Making
The Offer

Making The Offer

Once you've found a home you love, it's time to make a strong, strategic offer. This is where I step in to guide you every step of the way.

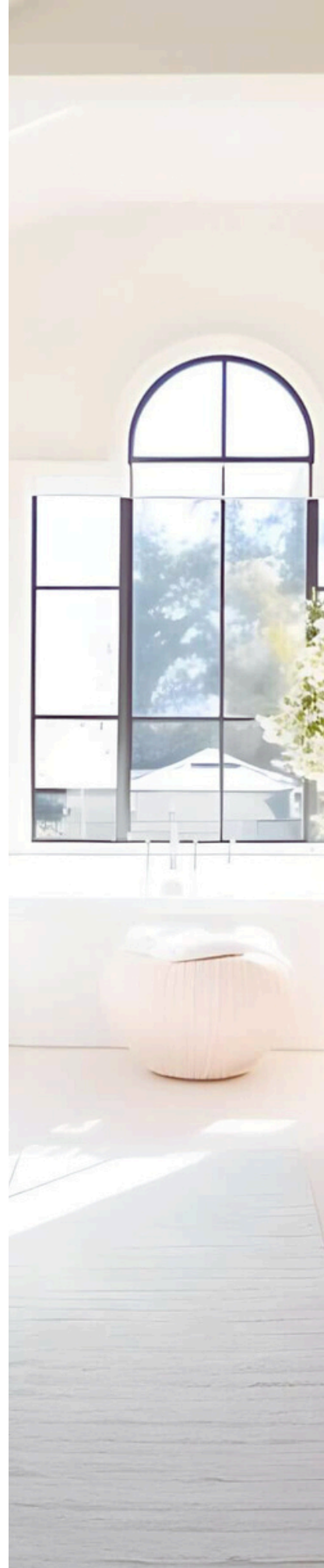
Your offer will include important pieces like the purchase price, your earnest money deposit (a good faith amount that shows the seller you're serious), and any contingencies—such as the home inspection, appraisal, or financing. We'll also decide on your ideal closing date and how quickly you'd like to move in.

I'LL HELP YOU:

- Review market comps
- Choose the right offer price
- Draft & submit the offer

Offer Terms:

- Price
- Earnest money deposit
- Contingencies (inspection, financing, appraisal)
- Closing timeline



A modern living room interior. In the foreground, a low, wide wooden coffee table sits on a light-colored, textured rug. To the right, a white sofa is partially visible. In the background, a white built-in bookshelf holds various decorative items, including vases, books, and a woven basket. A framed painting of a landscape with a white building hangs on the wall to the left. A white wall sconce with two light bulbs is mounted on the wall between the painting and the bookshelf.

Step 07.
Go Under
Contract To
Purchase

Under Contract

CONGRATS! THE SELLER ACCEPTED YOUR OFFER. NOW WE
HANDLE:

HOME INSPECTION

A licensed inspector checks the home for any issues—like the roof, plumbing, or foundation.

APPRAISAL

Your lender hires a professional to confirm the home is worth what you're paying before finalizing your loan.

FINAL LOAN APPROVAL

The lender gives a final “yes” after reviewing your updated documents and the appraisal to officially approve your mortgage.

NEGOTIATIONS (IF NEEDED)

If anything comes up—like repairs—we will work out a solution that works for you.

If there are major issues, we can:

Ask for repairs

Re-negotiate the deal

A modern bathroom with white cabinetry, a large mirror, a walk-in shower, and a bathtub. The text "Step 08. Clear To Close!!!" is overlaid on a white rectangular background in the center of the image.

Step 08.
Clear
To
Close!!!

Final Steps Before Closing Day

A simple breakdown of what you'll pay and why

You're almost at the finish line—just a few final details to wrap up before closing day. One of the most important parts to understand is closing costs.

CLOSING COSTS

These are the fees needed to officially buy your home. Usually 3–6% of your loan amount and are due on closing day along with your down payment.

Common closing costs include:

Lender Fees

These are the costs from your mortgage company.

Prepaid Items

You'll pay some home-related bills up front.

- Homeowner's insurance (for the first year)
- Property taxes

Title & Legal Fees

These ensure the home title is clean.

- Title search
- Title insurance (protects you + the lender)
- Recording and transfer fees (to legally put the home in your name)





Closing Day Logistics

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- Your closing date is confirmed
- You'll receive your Closing Disclosure – this outlines your final loan terms, monthly payment, and exact amount you'll need to bring to closing
- The title company or closing attorney will prepare the documents for you to sign
- You'll complete your final walk-through of the property
- On closing day, you'll sign your documents and receive the keys to your new home!

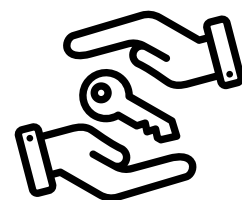
IMPORTANT REMINDER:

- Avoid any big changes: Don't open new credit cards, make large purchases, or change jobs until after closing.

You'll need to bring:

- Cashier's check or proof of wire transfer
- Photo ID
- Homeowners insurance
- Final walk-through checklist

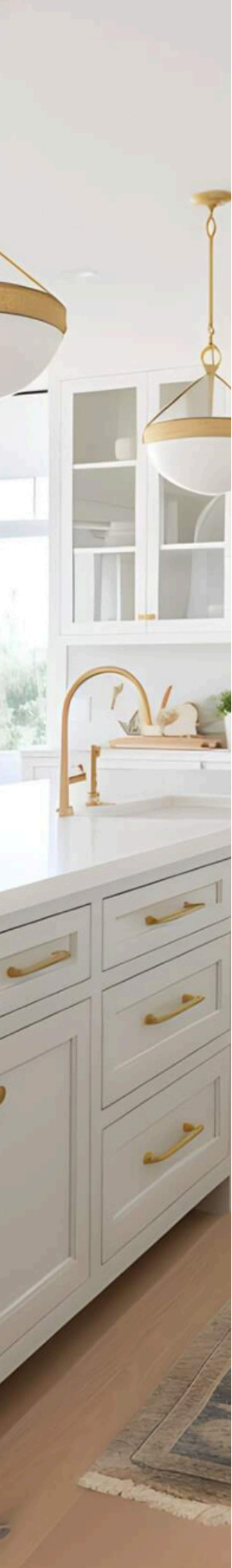
Once everything is signed and keys are handed over... **YOU'RE OFFICIALLY HOMEOWNER!**



A modern bathroom with white cabinetry, a large mirror, a walk-in shower, and a bathtub. The floor is covered in light-colored wood-look tiles. A white bathtub is visible on the right side of the image. A white vanity with a large mirror and a walk-in shower are visible on the left side of the image. A white towel is hanging on the side of the bathtub.

Money Moves That Matter

DOWN PAYMENT TIPS + RESOURCES TO
HELP YOU BUY SMART



Tips for Saving Your Down Payment

WAYS TO BUILD YOUR HOME BUYING FUND

- ☐ Set up automatic transfers to dedicated savings accounts
- ☐ Cut back on expenses like dining out, entertainment, etc..
- ☐ Get a side gig or temporary second job
- ☐ Consider using tax refunds, and cash gifts
- ☐ Use financial apps to track spending and set saving goals
- ☐ Consider tapping retirement accounts for a down payment (with cautions)
- ☐ Look into down payment assistance programs in your area! List provided on next page for SC Buyers!

Down Payment Assistance Programs

LOW OR NO DOWN PAYMENT OPTIONS



SC HOUSING HOMEBUYER PROGRAM

Offers up to \$10,000 in forgivable down payment assistance for eligible first-time homebuyers through approved lenders.



PALMETTO HEROES PROGRAM (WHEN AVAILABLE)

Provides \$10,000 in down payment assistance to frontline workers like teachers, nurses, firefighters, law enforcement, and military. Limited funding and released annually.



USDA LOANS

In specified rural areas, income-eligible buyers can get a USDA home loan with no money down



LENDERS, GRANTS, NON PROFITS

Many lenders, counties and non-profits offer down payment grants or second low-interest mortgages for first-time and low-income buyers

Even with low/no down options, having some reserves for buying a home is always recommended.





Part 1

Costs During the Transaction

FROM CONTRACT TO CLOSING

(what you'll owe, when, and why)

Buying a home is exciting, but it comes with costs many buyers don't know about until they're due. Let's break it down step by step so you know exactly what to expect.

EARNEST MONEY DEPOSIT

- Due: Within 24–48 hours of your offer being accepted.
- Amount: Usually 1% of the purchase price (varies).
- Purpose: Shows good faith; credited back (applied to cost) at closing.

INSPECTION FEES

- Due: Right after going under contract (within 7 days)
- Amount: \$300–\$600 depending on home size.
- Purpose: Protects you: inspector checks roof, foundation, plumbing, HVAC, etc.

APPRAISAL FEE

- Due: Once lender orders appraisal (before closing).
- Amount: \$400–\$700.
- Purpose: Confirms the home is worth what you're paying.



FROM CONTRACT TO CLOSING

(what you'll owe, when, and why)

SURVEY (SOMETIMES OPTIONAL IN SC, RARE)

- Due: If required by lender or you request.
- Amount: \$300–\$500.
- Purpose: Confirms boundaries/lot lines (where property is located)

CLOSING COSTS

- Due: On closing day.
- Amount: 3–6% of the loan amount.
- Includes:
 - Lender fees (loan origination, underwriting)
 - Title search & title insurance
 - Prepaid property taxes & homeowners insurance (first year)
 - Recording & attorney fees
 - ETC
- Example: On a \$250,000 home, expect \$7,500–\$12,500.

AYANNA'S WEALTH TIP:

- *Don't forget deposits for utilities (power, water, internet).*
- *Budget for any moving expenses (hiring movers, boxes, etc)*
- *Always budget at least 1–2% of the purchase price in cash on top of your down payment for these extra expenses!*



The background image shows a bright, modern kitchen. It features white shaker-style cabinets with gold-toned hardware. Three gold-toned, lantern-style pendant lights hang from the ceiling. In the foreground, several light-colored wooden stools are visible. The overall aesthetic is clean and contemporary.

Part Two

Costs of Owning a Home

*(The ongoing expenses and responsibilities once
you've got the keys)*

AFTER CLOSING

Closing is just the beginning. Homeownership comes with monthly, yearly, and long-term expenses. Knowing them upfront helps you stay prepared and stress-free.

HOMEOWNERS INSURANCE

- Covers damage, theft, or disasters.
- Average in SC: \$1,200–\$1,800/year.
- Flood insurance is separate.

Ayanna's Tip: Review your policy yearly, shop around for better rates.

PROPERTY TAXES

- SC Perk: Apply for the 4% Legal Residence Assessment (instead of 6%) right after closing, this saves you hundreds yearly.
- Due: Annually (can be escrowed with mortgage).

Ayanna's Tip: File as soon as possible to lock in savings.

HOA FEES (IF APPLICABLE)

- Range: \$10–\$400/month.
- Covers: Neighborhood upkeep, amenities, security, etc

UTILITIES & BILLS

- Includes electricity, water, sewer, gas, internet.
- Budget: \$200–\$500/month depending on home size.
- Ayanna's Tip: Call providers for average bills before moving in.



AFTER CLOSING

MAINTENANCE & REPAIRS

- Budget: 1–2% of home value yearly.
- Examples:
 - HVAC tune-ups
 - Roof/gutters
 - Plumbing/electrical fixes
 - Pest control

Ayanna's Tip: Preventive care is cheaper than emergencies! (Check out my local guide for preventive homeowner care tips!)

HOME WARRANTY (OPTIONAL)

- Cost: Varies per company!
- Covers: Appliances/systems when they break.

Ayanna's Tip: Worth it if your home is older.

FINAL WORD

Homeownership is one of the biggest investments you'll ever make. Yes, it comes with costs, but it also builds equity, wealth, and stability.

Take care of your home, and it will take care of you.





Ways to Lower Your Monthly Payment

Owning a home doesn't mean your payment is locked forever. There are strategies you can use to keep costs down, or even reduce them as time goes on.

REFINANCE YOUR MORTGAGE

What it is: Replacing your current loan with a new one (usually at a lower interest rate).

Why it matters: A lower rate = a smaller monthly payment.

Bonus: You can also refinance to shorten your loan term (pay off faster) or to pull out equity with a cash-out refinance.

Ayanna's Tip: Watch interest rates, when they drop 1% or more below your current rate, it's worth asking a lender about refinancing. (you need equity to refinance).

SHOP AROUND FOR INSURANCE

Homeowners insurance rates change year to year.

Switching carriers could save you hundreds annually.

Ayanna's Tip: Review your policy every year.

ENERGY-EFFICIENT UPGRADES

Smart thermostats, new windows, and better insulation lower your utility bills.

Some upgrades also qualify for tax credits.

Ayanna's Tip: Start small, swapping lightbulbs or sealing leaks adds up over time.

Thank you!

I'm so glad you took the time to go through this guide. My goal is to make sure you feel informed, confident, and supported as you take this next big step.

Whether you're just getting started or ready to begin your home search, I'm here to walk with you—one key at a time.

Let's turn your homeownership goals into real results.

Ready to move forward? Scan the QR code to connect with me!

Ayanna Thomas

YOUR LOCAL REALTOR®

Serving Columbia SC &
Surrounding Area's!



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