# FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER GUIDE



# MICETO MEETYOU!

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.





## 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



# 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/month \$5,000\*0.28 = \$1,400/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.





## **GETTING PRE-APPROVED:**

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

Before house hunting, get preapproved 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!







## 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.





# 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!



## 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





## **Under Contract**

## CONGRATS! THE SELLER ACCEPTED YOUR OFFER. NOW WE HAND! F:

### **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



# 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 walkthrough 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!







# 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.



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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