

NEW 2023

**G R E A T E R T A M P A
R E L O C A T I O N &
H O M E B U Y I N G
G U I D E**

INSIDE

- Why You Need a Buyer's Agent
- Pre-qualified v. Pre-approved
- The Home Search
- The Offer
- The Contract
- Closing
- Need to Know Info: Insurance & HOAs (to name a few)
- Local contact information: schools, utilities, etc.



Amy L. T. Smith is a licensed real estate broker and Realtor® with Sun Realty One in Tampa, Florida, a prestigious boutique brokerage serving the Greater Tampa area since 2005. Amy Smith is a relocation and marketing specialist ready to put her substantial skills and experience to work for you.



QUICK TIPS

How to Buy a House in Tampa's Competitive Market

- HAVE A BUYER'S AGENT. Don't just call the name on the yard sign! Have someone with your best interests in mind.
- Know and accept your budget **before** you start seriously looking.
- Be **pre-approved or better yet pre-qualified** for a mortgage before you find a house you really want.
- Have a Realtor® who is accessible and flexible.
- Ask your Realtor® and your mortgage loan officer to call the listing agent when you've made an offer.
- Do your best to keep your emotions out of your decision making and be patient. New houses are listed daily.





AN AGENT OF YOUR VERY OWN

by Amy Smith

As someone who often comes in contact with people looking for a home, I am continually surprised by the number of people who say they don't want help from a buyer's agent. There are usually just a couple of reasons for this, one being that they're not sure they're ready to buy a house so they don't want to waste an agent's time, and the other reason that I encounter is that people think having a buyer's agent will somehow cost them more money.

I'm here to dispel these myths! First, I've spent time searching and searching for a home for a client who then ends up not buying a home. So what? That's part of the business, and I still keep in touch with those clients in the hope that when the time is right for them, they'll still want to work with me. I've never begrudged helping someone.

Next, a buyer should know that not only will having a buyer's agent not cost them more money, but very likely it will save them money in the short and long term. This is how a buyer's agent gets paid: a listing agent (or seller's agent) agrees to sell a home for a certain percentage of commission. Then that agent agrees to split the commission with an agent who brings a buyer. So if a buyer isn't represented, it doesn't mean that the buyer makes more money; it only means that the listing agent makes all of the commission.

Most importantly, a buyer's agent works with a buyer to ensure a smooth, valid, legal, safe, thorough home buying experience. Contracts and all the obligations of the process can seem overwhelming, but a Realtor® is trained to expertly handle and explain each step. You'll have a professional in your corner, making sure your best interests are being served and protected.



an iffy influence

Housing is almost always the heftiest expense in a person's budget, and it's no wonder. Housing prices have risen exponentially in the last decades, and since land is a limited commodity and location is everything, it's just plain expensive to buy a home.

Sometimes we can be negatively influenced by TV home shows that demonstrate how cheaply a home can be bought and flipped or fixed up by well-intentioned DIYers. I enjoy these programs too, but very often the reality of a bargain-priced house is very different from what we see on TV.

hire a pro

Real estate agents should be able to recommend reputable, professional Mortgage Loan Officers in their area.

If you're unsure about whether you will qualify for a loan, please see my article about financial requirements for a mortgage on my website: sunrealtyone.com.

STEP ONE: PRE QUALIFICATION, BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE

by Amy Smith

Money is most people's least favorite subject, but when buying a house, it is of supreme importance. So here we go.

In order to borrow money or obtain a mortgage for a house, you must first contact a licensed Mortgage Loan Officer. This could be someone from your bank or from a mortgage company.

When you start the qualification process, the Officer will obtain information about your financial situation. Usually at the beginning stage, there is very little validation of the facts you present, but if you meet certain criteria, you will be **pre-qualified** for a mortgage.

Pre-qualification is an important first step, but that's only the beginning. In some real estate markets, this is enough to start with, and many people start their home search at this point.

However, the more important next step of becoming **pre-approved** is vital in the Tampa market. Why? Currently, there is a housing shortage, and around 150 people move to the Tampa area every day. Houses sell very quickly and there are usually multiple offers on a house which means sellers choose buyers who can prove that they are financially ready, pre-approved, for a mortgage.

Pre-approval means that all the financial information you have given to the Mortgage Loan Officer has been validated and there are no financial obstacles to your obtaining a mortgage for a certain amount.



THE FUN PART

by Amy Smith

budget, budget, budget

The old adage in real estate about the importance of location is true, but most buyers face a tougher, more personal issue, and that, of course, is budget.

The key to a happy, friction-free home search is not only to know and be resolved to stick to a budget, but also to have a realistic idea of what that budget affords in the area.

fun fact

Over half of home buyers find their house by an online search, but around 25% of the time, a Realtor® finds it for them.

I love looking for houses. That's a good thing considering my line of work, and for many people, scrolling through a home search app is fun.

When you discover a house you like, you can let me know, and I'll check it out. I look for any information about the house that isn't obvious from the pictures or description. I'll advise you about anything potentially negative, and then if everything sounds good, I set up a tour, via video or in person.

During the tour, I answer any questions you might have and look for red flags like stains on the ceiling, mold, an aging roof, etc. I'll never try to talk you into buying a house. It's the opposite of a high pressure sales situation. You need to come to your own conclusions about whether a house is the One for you.

"...the opposite of a high pressure sales situation."





THE OFFER, PART 1

by Amy Smith

After you have found the perfect home--wait, first, what is the 'perfect' home? One that fits your lifestyle, your short and long term goals, and most importantly your budget--you're ready to make An Offer.

I once had a client who had found his perfect house ask me, "But how do we buy it though?" An offer is a contract. Most often it is called an "As is" purchase and sale agreement, which is a standardized form that real estate agents can draw up and present to the seller or seller's agent.

The contract identifies the purchase price, financing terms, inspection terms, the right to cancel period, other obligations, and all the dates for the duration of the contract. Time is of the essence in a contract, so you, your agent, and mortgage loan people have to move quickly through the process in order to meet all the deadlines and obligations that have to be taken care of before the inspection period is over. This is yet another reason to have accessible, professional people in your corner.

This should go without saying, but it's very important to read the contract. Read the contract with your agent, or note any questions you have to go over with your agent. Once you sign it, your agent forwards it to the sellers for their consideration.

THE OFFER, PART 2

How do you know how much to offer? How much a house is worth is, very simply put, the price someone is willing to pay for it. In residential areas, homes are generally priced according to the current market, especially if they're listed by a knowledgeable Realtor. Your real estate agent can do a CMA (comparative market analysis) on a home to help give you an idea of the value of the home. Since well-priced homes in hot markets sell quickly, buyers sometimes have to pay full asking price or even more. When homes are financed, the mortgage company orders an appraisal. The home must appraise high enough to warrant its asking price in order to obtain a mortgage.

An offer is usually accompanied by an earnest money deposit. There is no set price or percentage that this should be, but it should reflect your commitment to the final sale. One thing to note carefully in a contract is the terms under which you can get your earnest money deposit back.

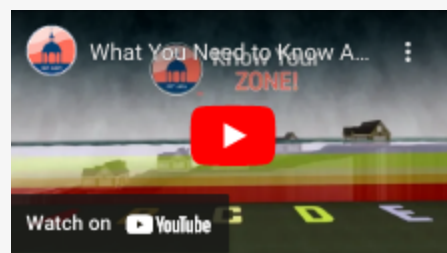
You will be notified if the offer is rejected, but the offer can also be countered. At this point, you can decide whether or not to accept the new terms. Ideally, your offer will be accepted which means you are operating under the terms of the contract, but there's more work to do before the home is yours.



HURRICANES, FLOODZONES, & SINKHOLES OH MY! ...and how they affect Homeowner's Insurance

Wonderful weather is one of the most amazing things about living in Tampa and all of Florida, but as with many things in life, you have to take the good with the bad. There are a couple of...let's say "quirky" things about weather here in Tampa, and unfortunately, these directly affect housing costs and sometimes day to day life.

The first thing that springs to mind is the possibility of a hurricane. They're a fact of life here and will likely only increase in frequency if the global warming predictions are accurate. What does this mean for residents? Well, first, the good thing about hurricanes (now that's a strange phrase) is that we know about them before they happen. Most Floridians are like me and always have an emergency supply of bottled water, batteries, nonperishable food items, propane or charcoal, and flashlights on hand. Next, many homeowners are safe in their very own homes, especially if it's not a mobile or manufactured home; this all depends on whether or not your home is in an evacuation zone. To see what areas of Tampa are in evacuation zones, click here:



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Even more dangerous than the strong hurricane winds are flood waters. Flooding is a serious problem and information about what areas are prone to flooding is also of primary importance when considering where to live. Buying a house in a flood zone requires special flood insurance which is a deterrent for many buyers, and it's something your real estate agent can advise you on.

It will come as no surprise that homeowner's insurance in Florida is not cheap. This is why it's important to carefully decide whether or not flood insurance--a requirement in some areas--is within your budget.

HURRICANES, FLOODZONES, & SINKHOLES OH MY!

...and how they affect Homeowner's Insurance (Continued)

For some complicated geological reasons, Florida is highly susceptible to sinkholes. OI. So what does that mean for buying a house in Tampa? Any known sinkhole activity on a property must be disclosed, even if it has been remediated. Buying a home with this kind of remediation will require special insurance.

Some areas of Florida are more likely to develop sinkholes than others, and sadly, this includes the Greater Tampa area. For more information on sinkhole areas:



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Florida deserves its nickname--The Sunshine State--because the sun here is fabulous, but the downside is that roofs need replacing more often than in some other areas. This also affects homeowner's insurance. Sometimes insurance companies won't write new policies unless the roof is less than 15 years old. For some companies, it's only 10 years. This means that if the seller hasn't replaced the roof, the buyer will be forced to pay for a new roof in order to obtain insurance and a mortgage.

NEED TO KNOW

ACRONYMS

CDD

Community Development District

- A developer initiates a CDD with the local government in order to fund the infrastructure of a community. Then the fees in the form of a municipal bond are passed along to homeowners in the community. The cost of the CDD typically ranges from \$1000-3000.
- The power to make decisions about how the money is spent stays with the homeowners, which is usually an advantage resulting in desirable amenities and increased property values.
- Problems can arise if the CDD is mismanaged, so the management and budget of the CDD board should be investigated carefully before buying a home with a CDD.
- All CDD information must be disclosed to prospective buyers.

HOA

Homeowner's Association

- A corporation that works to establish rules and covenants of a community.
- Mandatory membership is a requirement of homeownership. Membership requires an application with the governing board, and this typically involves an application fee.
- The corporation is governed by homeowners.
- HOA dues may be billable monthly, quarterly, or yearly, and dues can range from \$20-4000/year.
- Budget and management records should be carefully reviewed before purchasing a home with an HOA.
- All HOA information must be disclosed to prospective buyers.





THE CONTRACT

by Amy Smith

costs of owning a home

- mortgage (principal + interest)
- homeowners insurance
- maintenance
- HOAs and/or CDDs
- utilities

costs before you buy

- earnest money deposit
- down payment
- inspection
- homeowners insurance
- legal fees
- condo/HOA application fees

Once the offer has been accepted, it is time for due diligence. All the stipulations in the contract for inspections and finance obligations have to be fulfilled in a timely manner.

This is when you will work closely with your Mortgage Loan Officer to submit any needed paperwork. Your Realtor will help you schedule home inspections, and when you've reviewed the results of the inspections, you must make your final decision about whether to proceed with the sale.

Assuming there were no big surprises in the home inspections and you decide to move forward, after the inspection/right to cancel period ends, you are very close to homeownership.

At this point, you must secure homeowners insurance and continue working with the closing agent (either a title company or attorney agreed upon during the offer stage). You should also prepare to move by scheduling turning off/on of utilities, the final walkthrough date, and a moving van.



CLOSING & MOVING DAY

by Amy Smith

The inspection date has passed, your financing is all lined up, and closing day is on the books. There's still a lot to do! Now you have to move!

But first, closing, and a day or two before that, the final walkthrough. This is a chance for you to go to the property to make sure everything is still as it should be. It's not a time to point out any problems that should have been caught during the inspection. Then it's time to close.

Before you go to an office to sign papers for closing, you will be notified of the exact terms of the loan and how much you will pay monthly and over the course of the loan. You will also be notified about any out of pocket expenses.

On the day of closing, you sign a lot of papers. A lot. Then the keys will be handed over, and you can enjoy your new home. Congratulations.



MOVING CHECKLIST

by Amy Smith

4 weeks prior to move

- make an inventory of everything to be moved
- contact moving company or truck rental
- donate unwanted furniture and clothing
- purchase moving supplies:
 - boxes
 - tape
 - bubble wrap and paper
 - markers and labels
- book moving truck
- contact insurance company to transfer policies: life, homeowners
- review tax deductions for moving expenses so that you can keep track
- prepare change of address forms, online or in person
- prepare list of friends, businesses, and personal accounts that will need to be notified of your move
- arrange cut-off/activation dates for the following:
 - phone/home security
 - internet
 - gas, electricity, water
 - trash service
- make a plan to dispose of flammables that can't be transported
 - aerosol cans
 - cleaning fluids
 - ammunition
 - fireworks
 - paint/paint thinner
 - propane tanks



1 week prior to move

- confirm dates with moving company and utilities
- prepare a 'day of move' essentials box:
 - toilet paper
 - paper towels
 - scissors or pocket knife
 - garbage bags
 - cleaner
 - tool kit and flashlight
 - shower curtain
 - travel items: clothes, toiletries, etc.

1 day before and day of move

- all loose items packed in a box
- unplug large electronics (Plasma TVs should be unplugged the day before to allow them to cool)
- all pictures off walls
- contents removed from appliances and tops of furniture
- linens stripped from beds
- disassemble bedroom sets to save time

School Info

Florida Department of Education:

Here you can find information on all Florida public school districts and all area private schools.

fldoe.org

Hillsborough County Public Schools

hillsboroughschools.org

813 272 4000

Pasco County Public Schools

pasco.k12.fl.us

813 794 2000

Pinellas County Public Schools

pcsb.org

727 588 6000

Polk County Schools

polkschoolsfl.com

863-534-0500



Public Utilities

and other important county-wide information

On these county government websites, you'll find a wealth of information about the many county-government services, including water and waste management.

Hillsborough
County

hillsboroughcounty.org

Pinellas
County

pinellascounty.org

Pasco
County

pascocountyfl.net

Polk
County

polk-county.net/utilities

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