

FREE BUYER'S GUIDE / OTTAWA

Buying a home *in* *Ottawa.*

There is a version of the home buying process where nobody tells you the hard parts until after you have already committed. This is not that guide.

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Are you actually ready?

Most buyers start in the wrong place. They browse listings, fall in love with something they cannot afford, and then work backwards trying to make the numbers fit. Start here instead.

Buying a home makes sense when you have stable income and employment, you plan to stay in the property for at least three to five years, you have enough saved for a down payment plus closing costs, and you have an honest picture of what monthly ownership actually costs, not just the mortgage payment.

If one of those things is not yet true, that is not a reason to stop. It is a reason to have a different conversation first. We have had clients who were not ready when we first spoke and bought two years later. That is a good outcome.

Stable income

Consistent employment and reliable earnings before you commit.

A 3 to 5 year horizon

Plan to stay long enough for the purchase to make sense.

The full savings picture

Down payment plus closing costs, not just the down payment.

The true monthly cost

Ownership costs beyond the mortgage: taxes, insurance, utilities, upkeep and any condo fees.

We are not going to tell you buying is always the right move. We are not going to pressure you into a timeline that works for us.

The worst version of this process is buying before you are ready and spending the next five years house-poor.

What to know before you talk to a lender.

In Canada, the mortgage process has a few rules that catch first-time buyers off guard.

MINIMUM DOWN PAYMENT IN CANADA

PURCHASE PRICE	MINIMUM DOWN PAYMENT
Up to \$500,000	5%
\$500,000 to \$1,499,999	5% of the first \$500,000, plus 10% of the rest
\$1,500,000 and above	20% (default insurance not available)

The stress test Every mortgage applicant must qualify at the higher of their contract rate plus two percent, or 5.25 percent. In practice you will qualify for less than the headline rate suggests. Know this number before you fall in love with a price range.

Pre-approval A pre-approval is not a promise of financing. It is a lender's assessment of what you likely qualify for based on your income, debt and credit. It is still the right first step: it shows your realistic price range, usually holds a rate for 90 to 120 days depending on the lender, and tells sellers you are serious. Get pre-approved before you look at a single home.

Mortgage default insurance With less than 20 percent down, mortgage default insurance (from CMHC or a private insurer) is required. The premium runs from 2.8 to 4 percent of the mortgage depending on your down payment, and it is added to your mortgage. In Ontario, the 8 percent provincial sales tax on that premium is not added to the mortgage: you pay it on closing.

Home Buyers' Plan (HBP)

First-time buyers can withdraw up to \$60,000 from their RRSP, tax-free, toward a home, and repay it over 15 years.

First Home Savings Account (FHSA)

Contribute up to \$8,000 a year, to a lifetime maximum of \$40,000, and withdraw it tax-free for a qualifying first home.

You can use the HBP and the FHSA together, which is a real advantage for first-time buyers in Ottawa. Your lender or accountant can confirm what applies to you.

The number nobody mentions until it's too late.

Your down payment is not the only money you need on closing day. Budget an additional 1.5 to 3 percent of the purchase price for closing costs.

The largest closing cost for most buyers is Ontario's land transfer tax. It is calculated on a sliding scale.

ONTARIO LAND TRANSFER TAX (HOMES WITH ONE OR TWO SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENCES)

PORTION OF THE PURCHASE PRICE	TAX RATE
First \$55,000	0.5%
\$55,000 to \$250,000	1.0%
\$250,000 to \$400,000	1.5%
\$400,000 to \$2,000,000	2.0%
Above \$2,000,000	2.5%

On a \$650,000 home, that is about \$9,475. First-time buyers can get a rebate of up to \$4,000. Ottawa has no municipal land transfer tax: unlike Toronto buyers, you pay the provincial tax only.

OTHER CLOSING COSTS

- 01

Legal fees

Typically \$1,500 to \$2,500 for a standard purchase. Your lawyer searches title, reviews the agreement and moves the funds on closing day.
- 02

Home inspection

Usually \$400 to \$600 in Ottawa. Do not skip this.
- 03

Title insurance

A one-time premium, often \$200 to \$400. It protects against title problems a search might not reveal.
- 04

Adjustments

You reimburse the seller for property taxes or utilities they prepaid, calculated to the closing date. Budget a few hundred dollars.

Fee ranges are typical estimates, not quotes. Your lawyer and inspector will confirm their own fees.

How to search without losing your mind.

The home search feels exciting at the start and exhausting by week four. Here is how to do it without burning out or making a decision you regret.

The Glebe and Westboro Walkable and urban, with older homes and premium prices.	Barrhaven, Kanata and Orléans Newer builds, larger lots and family infrastructure at lower price points.
Hintonburg and Wellington West Established but still evolving: character and momentum.	Manotick and Carp Rural character inside the city's boundaries. A genuinely different way to live.

Start with non-negotiables	A wish list is infinite. Non-negotiables are the two or three things that genuinely cannot be compromised: bedrooms for children, a specific school catchment, a maximum commute, ground-floor accessibility. Start there. Everything else is a preference.
Know what you are buying	A detached home in Barrhaven gives you full control and full responsibility. A downtown condo gives you simplicity and shared costs through condo fees, and shared decision-making through the condo corporation. A townhome in Kanata splits the difference. Know what you are signing up for before you tour it.
For condos, the status certificate matters	It is a package from the condo corporation covering the building's finances, the rules you will live under and any legal issues. Your lawyer reviews it during the conditional period. Never waive a status certificate condition on a condo purchase.

There is no wrong neighbourhood. There is the wrong neighbourhood for your life. And there are many more than these four. Ask us the specific questions about the one you are considering, or browse our neighbourhood guides.

BROWSE OTTAWA NEIGHBOURHOOD GUIDES —>

What an offer actually is.

An offer to purchase, called an Agreement of Purchase and Sale in Ontario, is a legally binding contract. Once both sides sign and any conditions are met, you are committed. Treat it accordingly.

WHAT GOES INTO AN OFFER

01 Purchase price

The amount you are offering for the property.

02 Deposit

Often \$10,000 to \$50,000 depending on the price, paid within 24 hours of acceptance and held in trust until closing.

03 Conditions

Financing, inspection, status certificate: the protections you include.

04 Closing date

The day ownership and possession transfer to you.

05 Inclusions and exclusions

What stays with the home and what does not.

06 Irrevocable period

How long the seller has to respond, typically 24 to 48 hours.

Financing condition

Time to confirm your mortgage is approved on this specific property.

Inspection condition

The right to inspect the home, then negotiate or walk away based on what is found.

Conditions are normal in Ottawa. Do not let anyone pressure you into waiving them casually: waiving conditions means accepting whatever you find after the fact.

In a balanced market, conditional offers are standard and accepted. When there are multiple offers, buyers sometimes remove conditions to strengthen their position. That is a personal risk decision, not a strategy we push. We will tell you the market conditions clearly and let you decide what you are comfortable with.

The deposit is not your down payment. It is a show of good faith, held in trust by the listing brokerage and applied to your price on closing. It is refundable if you properly exercise a condition. It is generally not refundable if you simply change your mind after going firm.

The part that actually protects you.

The conditional period is your window to verify everything before you are fully committed. Use it properly.

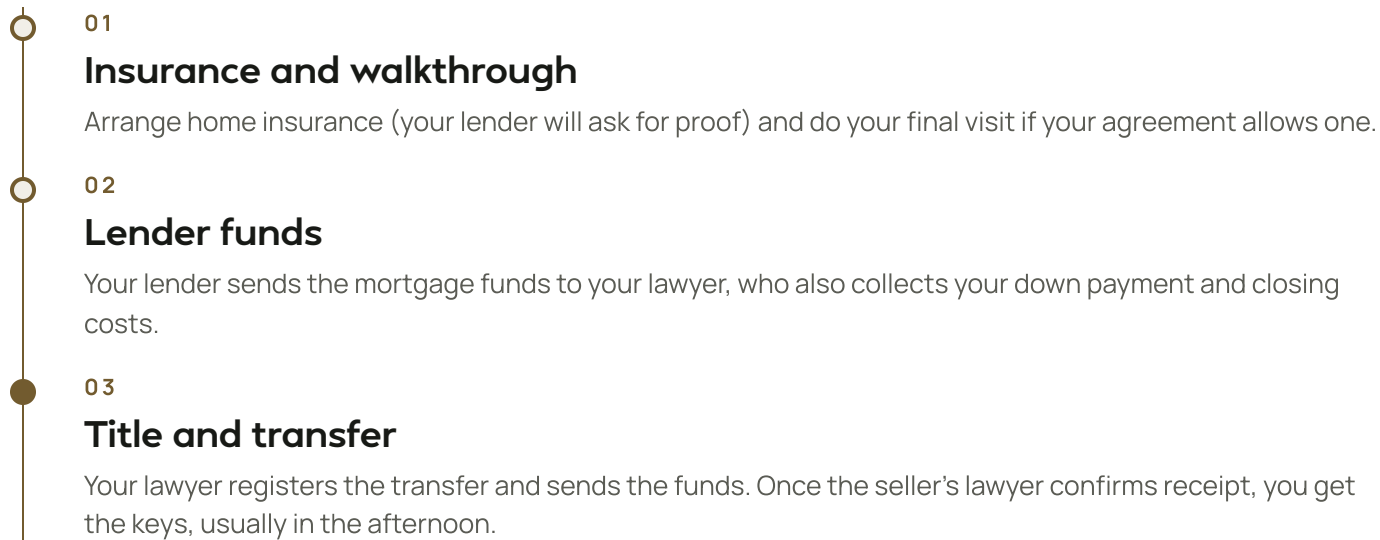
The home inspection	A qualified inspector examines the structure, roof, foundation, electrical, plumbing, heating and insulation. It takes two to three hours, and you should be there. The inspector is not there to scare you or kill the deal, but to give you an accurate picture of the home.
The financing condition	Even with a pre-approval, the lender has to approve the specific property, sometimes with an appraisal. If the appraisal comes in low, we need to talk. We have been through this and know how to handle it.
The status certificate (condos)	It shows the building's financial health, the reserve fund balance, any planned special assessments, the rules, and any current or pending legal action. The condo corporation has ten days to provide it, so build enough time into your condition for your lawyer to review it properly. Do not rush this.

Every home has something. Older homes in areas like Sandy Hill, the Glebe and Alta Vista may have knob-and-tube wiring, lead pipes or ageing oil tanks. Newer builds in Barrhaven or Orléans have fewer surprises but are not exempt.

After the inspection you can proceed as agreed, negotiate a lower price or a repair credit, ask the seller to complete specific repairs before closing, or walk away if the findings are serious enough.

From firm offer to closing day.

Once conditions are removed and your offer is firm, the deal is committed. Here is what happens next.

- 
- 01**
Insurance and walkthrough
Arrange home insurance (your lender will ask for proof) and do your final visit if your agreement allows one.
 - 02**
Lender funds
Your lender sends the mortgage funds to your lawyer, who also collects your down payment and closing costs.
 - 03**
Title and transfer
Your lawyer registers the transfer and sends the funds. Once the seller's lawyer confirms receipt, you get the keys, usually in the afternoon.

BEFORE CLOSING DAY, SET UP

- Hydro Ottawa for electricity
- Enbridge for natural gas
- City of Ottawa water account
- Internet and any other services
- Canada Post mail forwarding
- Change of address with your employer, bank and the Canada Revenue Agency

In Ontario you usually meet your lawyer in the days before closing to sign the documents. It takes 30 to 45 minutes, and some lawyers do it remotely.

What makes buying in Ottawa different.

Federal government employment

Ottawa's largest employer shapes the market. Government hiring and relocation programs drive steady demand. If you are a federal employee being relocated, we have worked within that process and its timelines.

A diverse, bilingual city

We serve clients in English and French. If neither is your first language, we will introduce you to a trusted agent we know who can serve you properly in yours. We would rather refer you to the right person than give you a lesser experience.

No municipal land transfer tax

Toronto buyers pay both provincial and municipal land transfer tax. Ottawa buyers pay the provincial tax only, which is a meaningful saving on a typical purchase.

LRT and transit corridors

Being near O-Train Line 1 (Confederation) or Line 2 (Trillium) affects both lifestyle and value. Ask us about specific stations and what surrounds them.

New construction or resale

New builds in Barrhaven, Kanata, Stittsville and Orléans come with Tarion warranty coverage of up to seven years, plus longer timelines, upgrade costs that add up and a few years of living in a construction zone. Resale gives you an established neighbourhood, a known history and a faster process. Both are valid.

Ottawa winters

Heating, insulation, roof condition and driveway drainage matter more here than in most Canadian cities. Ottawa usually gets well over two metres of snow a winter. How old is the furnace? When was the roof last done? Is there enough attic insulation? Does the driveway drain in a thaw? Is there a backup sump pump?

These are not deal-breakers. They are the right questions. We ask them on every property we see, and we make sure you have the answers before you commit.

READ OUR NEW CONSTRUCTION GUIDE —→

What we actually do, and what it costs you.

In most Ottawa resale purchases, the seller pays the commission and part of it pays the buyer's brokerage, so you get representation, negotiation and guidance without writing us a cheque. Ontario's rules (TRESA) require a written buyer representation agreement that sets out exactly how we are paid. We walk you through it before you sign, including what happens in the rare case a seller offers less.

WHAT YOU CAN COUNT ON

- We will tell you what we think a home is worth before you offer, not just what you want to hear.
- We will flag what concerns us about a property, even if you are excited about it.
- We will negotiate with your interests as the priority.
- We will be honest with you when the right move is to walk away.

Our reputation is built one honest conversation at a time.

We work best with buyers who want honest advice, who understand the process sometimes takes patience, and who are open to direct conversations when the numbers or the property do not add up.

If we think a property is wrong for you, we will tell you. If we think you should wait, we will tell you that too. Our job is not to get you into a home. It is to get you into the right one.

NO PRESSURE. NO PITCH.

Let's talk about *your move*.

When you are ready to talk about your situation, budget and timeline, we are easy to reach. We will give you an honest read on what you can afford, which neighbourhoods fit your life, and what to expect in this market.

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