

Florida First-Time Buyer Checklist

A practical, step-by-step list for buying your first home in Florida. Check items off as you go, and call with any question along the way. Updated October 2026.

1. Get ready (2–6 months before you shop)

- ☐ Check your credit reports for free at AnnualCreditReport.com and dispute any errors.
- ☐ Set a monthly housing budget that includes taxes, homeowners, flood and wind insurance, and any HOA or condo fees, not just the mortgage payment.
- ☐ Plan your cash: down payment, closing costs, prepaid insurance and taxes, moving costs, and a cushion for repairs.
- ☐ Keep your job, credit, and bank accounts steady. Avoid new loans, new credit cards, and large unexplained deposits.
- ☐ Ask whether you may qualify for Florida Housing first mortgage and down payment assistance programs, including Florida Hometown Heroes. Availability depends on funding, and all programs are subject to eligibility.

2. Gather your documents

- ☐ Government-issued photo ID for everyone on the loan.
- ☐ Pay stubs covering the last 30 days and W-2s for the last two years.
- ☐ Federal tax returns for the last two years (all pages), especially if you are self-employed, earn commission, or own rental property.
- ☐ Two months of statements for every bank, retirement, and investment account, with all pages.
- ☐ A signed gift letter and proof of transfer if family is helping with the down payment.
- ☐ Proof of any other income you want counted, such as Social Security, pension, child support, or VA benefits (and a Certificate of Eligibility for a VA loan).
- ☐ Explanations for any recent credit events, gaps in employment, or large deposits.

3. Get preapproved and shop

- ☐ Apply and get a written preapproval before you make offers. It is a planning step, not a final loan approval.
- ☐ Compare the full cost of each option using the official Loan Estimate, not just the payment.
- ☐ Before you write an offer, look up the flood zone and get insurance quotes for the specific home.
- ☐ For a condo or HOA community, ask for the budget, reserves, rules (rental limits, pets), and any planned or pending special assessments.

4. Florida items to check under contract

- ☐ Insurance: order quotes right away. Older homes may need a 4-point inspection, and a wind mitigation inspection can lower the wind premium. Many lenders require flood insurance in high-risk flood zones.

- ☐ Condos: request the association documents. Buildings three stories or taller may need a milestone inspection and a structural integrity reserve study (SIRS) under Florida law. Ask how the results affect reserves and assessments.
- ☐ Schedule the home inspection, plus termite (WDO), roof, and pool inspections if they apply.
- ☐ Track every contract deadline: inspection period, financing contingency, appraisal, and closing date.
- ☐ Closing costs in Florida include documentary stamp tax on the note and nonrecurring intangible tax on the mortgage. Your Loan Estimate shows the amounts.

5. Close and after closing

- ☐ Review your Closing Disclosure at least three business days before closing and compare it with your Loan Estimate.
- ☐ Confirm wiring instructions by phone with your title company before sending money. Never trust wiring changes sent by email.
- ☐ Bring photo ID and the funds the title company asks for (usually a wire or cashier's check).
- ☐ File for the Florida homestead exemption with your county property appraiser. You must own and live in the home as your permanent residence on January 1, and the deadline is March 1 of that year. Save Our Homes then limits yearly increases in assessed value.
- ☐ Keep your closing package, insurance policies, and the deed in a safe place.

Questions? Talk with Justin.

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Sources (reviewed 2026-10-29): Florida DOR: Documentary Stamp Tax (floridarevenue.com/taxes/taxesfees/pages/doc_stamp.aspx) · Florida DOR: Nonrecurring Intangible Tax (floridarevenue.com/taxes/taxesfees/Pages/nonrecurring_intangible_tax.aspx) · Florida DOR: Save Our Homes (floridarevenue.com/property/Documents/SaveOurHomes.pdf) · FHFA 2026 county loan limit list (www.fhfa.gov/document/d/cil/fullcountyloanlimitlist2026_hera-based_final_flat.pdf) · Florida Housing Finance Corporation (www.floridahousing.org/live-local-act/hometown-heroes-program) · CFPB: Loan Estimate and Closing Disclosure (www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/)



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