BUYER GUIDE · PBP REAL ESTATE

YOUR BLUEPRINT TO BUYING IN SOUTH FLORIDA

What happens, in what order, who pays for what — and the homes you will never find by scrolling a portal.

GRANT & GIA FREER
561.395.8418 · INFO@PBPRE.COM
700 NW 7TH DRIVE, BOCA RATON, FL 33486

BEFORE YOU LOOK AT A SINGLE HOUSE

Buying a home in South Florida is not difficult because the houses are hard to find. Every portal has the same listings we do. It is difficult because of what happens after you find one: financing, inspection, title, insurance, association approval, and a set of deadlines that do not move because you are busy.

This guide is that process, written down: what happens at each stage, what we do, what you do, and what it costs. We have deliberately left out predictions about prices or interest rates. Nobody knows, and a guide that tells you it is a great time to buy is selling you something.

TWO THINGS WORTH KNOWING BEFORE WE START

1. You will sign a written agreement with us before we tour homes. That has been required across the industry since August 2024. It is explained in full on the next page — there are no surprises in it.

2. We work as transaction brokers, always. What that means in practice is below, and most buyers have never had it explained.

Our brokerage relationship with you

Florida law recognizes more than one kind of brokerage relationship. PBP Real Estate works as a **transaction broker** in every transaction, with every client, without exception. Under Florida Statute 475.278 that means we owe you:

- honesty and fair dealing;
- skill, care and diligence in the transaction;
- disclosure of all known facts that materially affect the value of residential property and are not readily observable to you;
- presenting all offers and counter-offers, and accounting for all funds;
- limited confidentiality — we will not volunteer what you are willing to pay, your motivation, or your offer terms, unless you tell us to or the law requires it.

It also means we do not act as an advocate for one side against the other. You get our analysis, the comparable sales and every option we can see; the decision about what to offer, and on what terms, is yours. If a home you want is one of our own listings, we tell you in writing before you offer, and the same duties apply on both sides.

THE AGREEMENT YOU SIGN FIRST

Since August 2024, a written agreement between the buyer and the brokerage is required before touring homes. Plenty of buyers meet it for the first time in an agent's car, on a phone screen, minutes before walking into a house. That is not how this should happen.

What it is	A short written agreement between you and PBP Real Estate that sets out what we will do for you, how long it lasts, and how we are paid. Industry-wide, a written agreement is required before we can show you a home.
How long it lasts	For as long as you and we agree, and no longer. We are happy to start with a short term. If you are not satisfied with how we work, you should not be locked in.
Which properties it covers	The area and property type you are actually looking for. It does not follow you around forever or claim a house you found and bought years later.
How we are paid	The agreement states the amount, in writing, before you tour anything. In most transactions the seller has already offered compensation to the brokerage working with the buyer, and that offer covers it. Where the seller's offer is lower than the amount in your agreement, you have three choices and we will walk through all of them: ask the seller to cover the difference as part of your offer, pay the difference yourself, or look at other homes. You will never be surprised by this number at the closing table.
What you are not agreeing to	You are not agreeing to buy anything, to use a particular lender, title company or inspector, or to pay us if you do not buy.

WHY WE PUT THIS ON PAGE THREE

Compensation used to be something buyers never saw and never discussed. It is now written down, negotiable, and yours to understand before you are emotionally attached to a house. We would rather you read it here, unhurried, than skim it in a driveway.

HOW BUYING A HOME WORKS IN FLORIDA

Eight stages. The order matters, and stage two is where most buyers lose a house they wanted.

01 **Decide whether now works for you**
How long do you plan to stay? Under three years, the transaction costs of buying and selling can outweigh the appreciation. We will tell you that honestly, even though it is not in our interest to.

02 **Get pre-approved, not pre-qualified**
A pre-approval means a lender has actually reviewed your income, assets and credit. In our market a seller will rarely take a financed offer seriously without one. The document checklist on the next two pages is what your lender will ask for.

03 **Define the search properly**
Area, price, property type, association rules, insurance exposure, flood zone, school boundaries, and the things that only matter to you. This conversation saves months.

04 **See homes — including the ones not on a portal**
How we find those is later in this guide. Showings are booked through ShowingTime, the system Florida brokerages use to schedule access.

05 **Write the offer**
Price is one term of several. Deposit size, closing date, financing and appraisal periods, inspection period, and who pays for what can matter more to a seller than the number. We will show you where you have leverage.

06 **Contract, deposits and the inspection period**
Once signed, your escrow deposit goes to the title company or closing agent named in the contract — never to us. Your inspection period starts immediately and it is the most important deadline in the whole transaction.

07 **Financing, appraisal, title and insurance**
The lender orders the appraisal, the title company runs title and prepares the settlement statement, and in Florida you will want an insurance quote early — not the week before closing. Condominium and HOA approval, where it applies, runs in parallel and has its own timetable.

08 **Final walk-through and closing**
In Florida you close at a title company or with a closing attorney, not through an escrow company. You will receive the settlement statement in advance; we go through it with you line by line before you sign anything.

WHAT YOUR LENDER WILL ASK FOR

Assemble this before you start looking, not after you find a house. Buyers who have it ready close on time; buyers who do not are the reason closings get extended.

Personal

- Full names of all purchasers as they are to appear on title.
- Social security numbers of all purchasers. **Provide these directly to your lender. PBP Real Estate never collects social security numbers.**
- Current address, and previous addresses going back two years.
- Phone numbers and email address.

Employment and income

- Present employer: name, address, and a contact for employment verification.
- Two years of employment history, with an explanation of any gap.
- Year-to-date pay stub and the last two years of W-2s.
- If you are self-employed: two years of signed federal returns, plus a profit and loss statement and balance sheet.
- If commission, bonus, overtime or interest income is being used to qualify: two years of signed returns and the supporting 1099s.
- Other income — rental (current lease), alimony or child support (ratified decree, only if used to qualify), notes held, retirement, Social Security or disability (award letter and latest payment).

WHAT YOUR LENDER WILL ASK FOR

Assets

- Bank accounts: institution, account numbers, type and current balances, plus the two most recent statements for each.
- Stocks and bonds: certificates or a broker statement from the last 30 days.
- Vehicles: year, make and value; title if under four years old and free of any lien.
- Other real estate: address and market value; payoff or release if owned outright.
- Present home: sales contract, settlement statement or lease.
- Gift funds: gift letter on the lender's form. The donor's capacity must be verified and the funds must be shown arriving in your account.

Liabilities

- Credit cards: account numbers and balances.
- Loans of every kind: institution, account number, balance, monthly payment and months remaining.
- Present mortgage: twelve months of statements or cancelled checks.
- Alimony and child support: ratified decree and property settlement.

VA loans

- Certificate of Eligibility. You will need a DD-214, or a Statement of Service signed by your commanding or personnel officer if you are still serving.
- If serving: authorization to live off base (DD-1717) and transfer orders where applicable.

Every item on these two pages goes to your lender, not to us. We never need your account numbers, your balances or your social security number, and we will never ask for them.

DO THIS.
NOT THAT.

Your credit, income and assets are usually re-verified shortly before your loan funds — sometimes days before closing. Everything here applies from application until the deed is recorded.

DO

- Keep every account current — mortgages, car loans, credit cards.
- Make all payments on or before the due date, even on an account that will be paid off with your new loan.
- Get any lender-required funds to your loan officer promptly.
- Return calls from your lender, the title company or us the same business day. Deadlines in a Florida contract are measured in days, and they do not pause.
- Ask questions the moment something is unclear. There is no such thing as a stupid one at this stage.

DO NOT

- Do not quit or change jobs. If it is likely, tell your loan officer and us first.
- Do not apply for credit anywhere else, or let anyone but your lender pull your credit.
- Do not change bank accounts or move money between existing accounts.
- Do not co-sign for anyone, for any reason.
- Do not buy a car, furniture or appliances on credit before closing — this is the single most common way a approved loan falls apart.

WHY IT MATTERS MORE THAN IT SOUNDS

Anything that alters your credit profile can put you in default of your purchase contract, put your escrow deposit at risk, and expose you to being sued by the seller. The rule is simple: between application and closing, change nothing.

WILL GETTING PRE-APPROVED HURT MY CREDIT SCORE?

This is the most common reason buyers delay the one step that matters most. The short answer is almost certainly not.

What a single inquiry actually costs

A mortgage inquiry typically costs a few points, and often less. Unless you are sitting exactly on the boundary between two credit tiers, that difference will not change your loan terms.

Shopping several lenders is treated as one event

The credit bureaus understand how mortgage shopping works. Multiple mortgage inquiries made within a short window — commonly 45 days, depending on the scoring model — are bundled and counted once. Comparing lenders does not stack up damage.

What it buys you

A pre-approval tells you what you can actually borrow before you fall in love with something you cannot, and it is what makes your offer credible. In our market, a seller with two offers in hand will take the pre-approved one, and a financed offer with no pre-approval letter attached often does not get a serious look at all.

OUR ONLY REAL ASK OF YOU

Do this first, before the search. Buyers who wait until they find the house lose it to somebody who did not.

WHERE THE HOMES COME FROM

Every buyer can see the MLS. Zillow, Realtor.com and Trulia all show you the same inventory we do, and we are not going to pretend otherwise. The difference is what sits either side of that list.

01 **Everything in the MLS, the moment it is listed**
Your saved search runs against the BeachesMLS data our own website is built on. When something matching it comes on the market, changes price, or comes back on after a failed contract, you hear from us — not three days later from a portal that bought the lead.

02 **Our own listings, before the rest of the market**
PBP takes listings. When one of ours is coming to market and it fits what you are looking for, you will know about it as soon as we are permitted to market it.

03 **Expired and cancelled listings**
Homes that were on the market in the last few years and did not sell. Many of those owners still want to move and have no wish to relive a six-month listing. We reach them by mail, and their response comes to us.

04 **Owners who reach us directly**
We publish a great deal about selling in Palm Beach and Broward, and owners thinking about it find us and get in touch. Some of them have not spoken to another agent yet.

05 **Our own database of past clients and owners**
People we have worked with, who know us, and who in the right circumstances would sell.

06 **Agents working the same streets**
We speak to listing agents who are active in the areas you want, about what is coming before it is public.

WHAT WE DO NOT DO

We do not cold-call neighborhoods on your behalf, and we do not knock on doors asking whether anyone wants to sell. Unsolicited calling of that kind is heavily restricted under federal and Florida law, and the alternative works better anyway: when the owner is the one who gets in touch, they are ready to talk.

FIVE KINDS OF SELLER, FIVE DIFFERENT NEGOTIATIONS

Who owns the house changes the timeline, the paperwork, the flexibility on price and what happens if the inspection turns up a problem. Knowing which one you are dealing with before you write is most of the advantage.

An owner with equity	The overwhelming majority of South Florida sales. You negotiate with the seller through their listing agent, and closing normally lands 30 to 45 days out, or sooner for cash.
An estate or a probate sale	Far more common here than a distressed sale. The seller may be a personal representative with court timetables to respect and several heirs to satisfy. Condition is often as-is, the timeline is less flexible than it looks, and knowing how these run is a genuine advantage. It is a large part of our practice.
A seller who owes more than the home is worth	A short sale. The lender has to approve the price, which takes months and can change. These are uncommon in the current market but they do occur, and our brokerage has specialist experience in them.
A bank-owned property	Also uncommon now. The lender sells on its own paperwork and addenda, on its own timetable, and usually as-is with limited disclosure.
A new-construction builder	The builder's contract, not the standard Florida contract. The terms are drafted for the builder, the deposit is often non-refundable at a defined point, and the completion date may move. Read it with us before you sign.

WHAT GETS AN OFFER ACCEPTED

Sellers do not accept prices. They accept packages. Here is what we work through before you sign one.

Is it priced correctly, and what is the competition doing?

What has actually closed nearby, what is under contract, what is still sitting, and how long this one has been on the market. A property that has been available for four months is a different negotiation from one listed on Friday.

What does this seller actually want?

Price is not always the answer. A closing date that matches their next purchase, a short post-closing occupancy, a clean inspection resolution, or certainty of funding can all be worth more to a seller than a few thousand dollars — and cost you less.

Your deposit, your periods, your financing

A larger escrow deposit signals commitment. A shorter inspection period signals seriousness, but never shorten it below what you need to actually inspect the property. Your financing and appraisal periods have to be realistic for your lender, not aspirational.

Closing costs and concessions

Title, lender and government fees generally run between 1 and 3 percent of the price, and in Florida who pays for what varies by county and by negotiation. If you need the seller to contribute, it is part of the offer strategy from the start, not an afterthought.

If there are several offers

Expect it on anything priced correctly and in good condition. You may be asked for your highest and best. Our advice on that is consistent: name the number you would be at peace with if somebody else paid more. Not the number that wins at any cost.

What happens after acceptance

Every deadline in your contract — deposit, inspection, loan approval, association approval, walk-through, closing — is tracked and confirmed in writing by our transaction system, and you receive the dates rather than being expected to remember them.

INSPECTORS, LENDERS, ATTORNEYS AND EVERYONE ELSE

We keep a working list of the inspectors, lenders, title companies, attorneys, insurance agents, contractors and trades we have watched perform on real transactions in Palm Beach and Broward. Ask us and we will send you the current version, with more than one option in each category.

HOW WE ARE PAID ON REFERRALS: WE ARE NOT

PBP Real Estate receives no compensation of any kind — no fee, no commission, no gift, no reciprocal arrangement — for referring you to any vendor, lender, title company, inspector or attorney. We suggest them because of how they have performed, and you are free to use anyone you like. If a vendor ever tells you otherwise, we want to hear about it.

Choosing a home inspector

This is the vendor decision that matters most, and the one buyers rush. Use a licensed Florida home inspector, attend the inspection if you possibly can, and read the whole report rather than the summary. In this market, ask specifically about the roof age, the air conditioning, any signs of prior water intrusion, and whether a four-point or wind mitigation inspection is needed for your insurance.

Insurance, early

Get a quote during your inspection period, not afterwards. Florida property insurance can change what a house costs you every month by a meaningful amount, and it is occasionally the reason a buyer decides against a property. Better to know on day four than day thirty.

Attorney or title company

Either can close a transaction in Florida. You choose, and you are never obliged to use anyone we mention. We will explain the difference and what each will charge you.

We keep the vendor list out of this document deliberately. Printed directories go stale — people retire, licenses lapse, phone numbers change — and a name in a brochure is not a recommendation we can stand behind two years later. A current list, sent when you need it, is worth more.

TWELVE QUESTIONS TO ASK ANY AGENT

Including us. If an agent cannot answer the middle four without hesitating, that tells you something.

01	Will I hear about new listings, price changes and homes coming back on the market the day it happens, and how?
02	Can I search and adjust my own criteria on your website?
03	Do you work solo, or with a team, and who will actually be at my showings and my closing?
04	How will you tell me about homes that are not yet on the MLS — and specifically, how do you find those?
05	What brokerage relationship will I have with you, and what does it mean in practice?
06	What will I sign before we tour homes, and what does it say about how you are paid?
07	If the seller's offer of compensation does not cover your fee, what happens then?
08	Who watches my file after we are under contract, and how will I know my deadlines?
09	How many transactions have you closed in the last twelve months, and in my price range?
10	Do you have experience with the kind of seller I may be buying from — an estate, a probate sale, a condominium association with approval requirements?
11	What is your availability to show me homes, including evenings and weekends?
12	Will you still be in touch after closing, or do I go looking for a new agent when I sell?

Questions six and seven are new since 2024, and they are the two most buyers still do not know to ask. Anyone who is vague about how they are paid is a problem you will meet again at the closing table.

LET US START WITH YOUR ANSWERS

So the first hour we spend together is about your search, not paperwork.

NAME

CURRENT ADDRESS

MOBILE

EMAIL

PRICE RANGE

AREAS / NEIGHBORHOODS

BEDROOMS · BATHS · SQUARE FEET

SCHOOL DISTRICT, IF IT MATTERS

ARE YOU ALREADY WORKING WITH ANOTHER BROKERAGE?

HAVE YOU BEEN PRE-APPROVED? WITH WHICH LENDER?

FINANCING: FHA VA CONVENTIONAL CASH

DOWN PAYMENT

WHEN DO YOU NEED TO BE IN?

PROPERTY TYPE: SINGLE FAMILY TOWNHOUSE CONDO

ANYTHING THAT WOULD RULE A HOME OUT FOR YOU

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT US?

NOTES

WHAT HAPPENS WITH WHAT YOU WRITE HERE

It goes into our own system so that your search runs against live MLS data and you hear about the right homes first. We do not sell or share your information with anyone, and you can ask us to delete it at any time.

PBP REAL ESTATE

An owner-led brokerage in Boca Raton. You deal with an owner of the company from the first call, backed by our team of licensed agents — not a hand-off to whoever is free.

Gia Freer

Broker of Record, Co-Owner · BK689801
Licensed Florida real estate broker and notary public.

Gia leads our sales side and runs the transactions. Nineteen years in South Florida residential real estate, with particular depth in estate and probate sales and in condominium and association approval — the two situations where buyers most often get caught out.

Grant Freer

Broker Associate, Co-Owner · BK3077984
Licensed Florida real estate broker associate.

Grant runs the systems: the search that alerts you, the deadline tracking that keeps your contract on schedule, and the technology behind both. It is the reason our whole team works off one system rather than off memory.

WHERE TO START

Call or text **561.395.8418**, or email info@pbpre.com. Tell us where you are in the process — even if the answer is "just thinking about it" — and we will tell you what the next useful step is, whether or not it involves us.

This guide is general information about buying residential property in Florida and is not legal, tax, insurance or lending advice. Loan program requirements, closing costs and insurance availability change, and vary by property. For advice on your own situation, speak to your lender, your insurance agent and, where appropriate, an attorney.