

The Complete First-Time Buyer Checklist for Texas

FREE DOWNLOAD — NORTH HOUSTON REAL ESTATE

Step-by-Step From Pre-Approval to Keys in Hand

Built specifically for North Houston buyers. Every step, every document, every deadline — so nothing catches you off guard. Prepared by Christine O'Brien, Licensed REALTOR®.

Phase 1: Before You Search

Pre-Approval Documents — Gather These First

Your lender will need these documents to issue a pre-approval letter. Having them ready before your first conversation speeds up the process significantly.

- Last 2 years of W-2s (or 2 years of tax returns if self-employed)
- Last 30 days of pay stubs
- Last 2 months of bank statements (all accounts, all pages)
- Last 2 months of investment/retirement account statements
- Government-issued photo ID
- Social Security number (for credit pull)
- Landlord contact info for rental history verification
- Employment contact info for verification of employment (VOE)
- Gift letter if any portion of down payment is a gift
- Divorce decree or child support documentation if applicable

Christine's Tip: Pre-approval is not the same as pre-qualification. Pre-approval involves a full credit pull and document review — it's what sellers take seriously.

Understanding Your Budget

Budget Item	Typical Range	Notes
Down Payment	3%–20% of purchase price	FHA: 3.5% min. Conventional: 3% min. 20% avoids PMI
Closing Costs	2%–4% of purchase price	On \$400K home: approx. \$8,000–\$16,000
Earnest Money	1%–2% of purchase price	Applied to closing costs at settlement
Option Fee	\$100–\$500 (Texas)	Buys your right to back out during option period
Inspection	\$350–\$600	Independent inspector — always worth it
Moving Costs	\$1,500–\$5,000+	Budget separately from purchase costs

Phase 2: The Home Search

What to Look for During Tours

Most buyers focus on finishes and staging. Christine trains clients to look at what actually matters for long-term value and cost.

- Foundation: Look for cracks, unlevel floors, doors that stick — common in Texas clay soils
- Roof age: Ask specifically. A roof replacement runs \$8,000–\$20,000+ in North Houston
- HVAC age: Systems over 12 years old may need replacement soon (\$5,000–\$12,000)
- Water heater age: Over 10 years old is a red flag
- Drainage: Walk the lot perimeter — water pooling near the foundation is a serious issue
- Attic insulation and ventilation: Hugely impacts energy bills in Houston summers
- Windows: Single-pane windows significantly increase cooling costs
- Lot grading: Slopes should direct water away from the house, not toward it
- HOA rules and fees: Get the full documentation before you fall in love with a property
- Flood zone: Check FEMA flood maps. Ask seller directly if it has ever flooded

Phase 3: Making an Offer

Offer Strategy Checklist

- Research comparable sales (Christine provides a CMA for every offer)
- Determine your maximum price before negotiating — stick to it
- Decide on earnest money amount (higher shows stronger intent)
- Decide on option period length (typically 5–10 days in Texas)
- Consider seller concessions: closing cost credits, rate buydown contributions

- Review seller disclosures before submitting offer
- Confirm pre-approval letter is current and matches your offer price
- Understand the escalation clause if competing offers are expected

Christine's Tip: In North Houston, most homes in the \$300K–\$500K range are receiving 1–3 offers. You typically have time to think — but not days. Have your decision-making criteria clear before you tour.

Phase 4: Under Contract — The Option Period

Texas Option Period Checklist

The Texas option period (typically 5–10 days) is your window to inspect, renegotiate, or walk away. Move quickly — every day counts.

- Schedule inspection within 24–48 hours of going under contract
- Attend the inspection if at all possible — ask questions
- Review inspection report line by line with Christine
- Categorize issues: safety/structural (negotiate), cosmetic (accept), deferred maintenance (negotiate)
- Submit repair request or price reduction before option period expires
- Review seller's response and counteroffer if needed
- Decide to proceed, renegotiate, or terminate before deadline
- Notify lender to begin full underwriting if proceeding

Phase 5: Closing Day

What to Bring to Closing

- Government-issued photo ID (driver's license or passport)
- Certified check or wire transfer confirmation for closing funds
- Personal checkbook (for small last-minute adjustments)
- Copy of homeowners insurance policy and paid receipt
- Any outstanding documents requested by your lender

After Closing: Don't Forget

- File for Texas Homestead Exemption by April 30 of the following year
- Change locks — you don't know who has keys to the previous owner's home
- Set up utilities before moving in
- Locate your main water shutoff, electrical panel, and gas shutoff
- Find out your home's warranty status (especially on newer builds)

— Save all closing documents in a secure location

Christine's Tip: The Texas Homestead Exemption reduces your home's taxable value by \$100,000 for school district taxes. On a \$400K home in North Houston, this saves you approximately \$2,200/year. File at your county appraisal district's website.

Texas First-Time Buyer Assistance Programs

Program	Provider	Benefit	Income Limit
My First Texas Home	TSAHC	30-yr fixed loan + down payment assistance	Varies by county
Homes for Texas Heroes	TSAHC	Teachers, nurses, veterans: DPA grants	Varies by county
Texas Mortgage Credit Certificate	TDHCA	Federal tax credit up to \$2,000/yr	Varies by area
Home Sweet Texas	TSAHC	Down payment grants (not loans)	Varies by county

Ready to Find Your North Houston Home?

Book a free consultation with Christine O'Brien — Licensed REALTOR® serving Cypress, Conroe, The Woodlands & Magnolia TX.

soldbythecristineobrien.com · obrien.christine.b@gmail.com