

Homebuyer Hidden Costs Checklist

Repairs, fees, and surprises to prepare for before you buy:

1. Repairs and maintenance

Structural and systems

Roof:

- Ask: How old is the roof
- Ask for: Any past leaks or repairs

Furnace and AC:

- Ask: Age and last service date
- Get: Home inspection to check the condition

Water heater and plumbing:

- Ask: Age, rental or owned
- Check: Signs of leaks, water damage

What to do

- Budget: Set aside 1 to 3 percent of the home value per year for repairs
- Inspect: Always get a professional home inspection
- Ask: Request a list of recent repairs and upgrades from the seller

2. Property taxes

Research

- Check: City or town website for property tax rates
- Find: Current property tax bill for the home
- Compare: Taxes for similar homes in the area

What to do

- Estimate: Use the assessed value, not just the listing price
- Plan: Add property taxes into your monthly budget
- Prepare: Expect taxes to rise over time

3. Home insurance

Research

- Get quotes: From at least three insurance companies
- Ask: About coverage for fire, theft, water damage, and liability
- Check: If the area has flood risk or other special risks

What to do

- Compare: Deductibles, coverage limits, and exclusions
- Bundle: Ask about discounts if you bundle home and auto
- Plan: Add insurance to your monthly cost of owning

4. Extra ongoing expenses

Common extras

- Lawn care or landscaping
- Snow removal
- Gutter cleaning
- Pest control
- Seasonal maintenance

What to do

- Decide: What you will do yourself and what you will hire out
- Estimate: Monthly or seasonal costs for each
- Schedule: Create a yearly maintenance calendar

5. Closing costs

Typical items

- Legal fees
- Land transfer tax
- Title insurance
- Appraisal
- Home inspection

What to do

- Estimate: 2 to 4 percent of the purchase price
- Ask: Your lawyer or agent for a detailed estimate
- Save: This amount separately from your down payment

6. Utilities

Research

- Ask seller: For 12 months of utility bills, if possible
- Check: Heating type (gas, electric, oil)
- Look at: Age of windows, insulation, and doors

What to do

- Compare: Current rent utilities vs expected home utilities
- Plan: For higher costs if moving from an apartment to a house
- Upgrade: Over time, improve insulation and efficiency

7. Furniture and upgrades

Before you buy

- Measure: Each room and note what you actually need
- List: Must-have items vs nice-to-have items
- Plan: Which upgrades are urgent and which can wait

What to do

- Set a budget: For furniture and first-year upgrades
- Start simple: Focus on essentials first
- Use: Second-hand, Facebook Marketplace, or sales to save

8. HOA and condo fees

What HOA means

HOA stands for Homeowners Association. It manages shared spaces and services in a community, such as landscaping, snow removal, and amenities.

Research

- Ask for: The latest HOA or condo fee amount
- Read: The rules and bylaws
- Review: The last two years of financial statements
- Check: The reserve fund balance and planned major repairs

What to do

- Understand: What is included in the fees and what is not
- Watch for: Special assessments or upcoming big projects
- Plan: Add monthly fees to your long-term budget

General research checklist

- Get a home inspection before finalizing the purchase
- Ask for utility history from the seller
- Request repair and upgrade history
- Get quotes for insurance, lawyers, and movers
- Create a full monthly budget including mortgage, taxes, insurance, utilities, and fees
- Set aside an emergency fund for home repairs