

The Road Home

A HOME BUYER'S GUIDE



Colleen Johnson

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— REAL ESTATE —

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Welcome to the Journey!

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Buying a home is one of the most exciting chapters in your life, but I know it can also feel a little overwhelming. That is exactly why you have this guide—and me—in your corner.

As a former educator of 31 years here in Chester County, I view real estate a little differently than most. I believe my job isn't just to "sell" you a house; it is to guide you, educate you on the market, and empower you to make the best decision for your future. Whether we are exploring the neighborhoods of Malvern or navigating inspections in Downingtown, I am here to make sure you never feel lost.

Think of this "Road Home" guide as your syllabus for success. It outlines the steps we will take together to get you from "just looking" to "welcome home."

I am honored to be your trusted neighborhood expert and your guide on this adventure. Let's get started!

Sincerely,

Colleen Johnson
REALTOR®

Chester County

YOUR LOCAL DISCOVERY GUIDE

#1



Longwood Gardens (Kennett Square)

Explore over 1,000 acres of world-class horticultural displays and breathtaking botanical beauty.

#2



Gay Street Open-Air Dining (West Chester)

Experience a vibrant, pedestrian-only culinary zone featuring diverse local flavors and outdoor seating.

#3



Brandywine River Museum of Art (Chadds Ford)

Visit a beautifully restored 19th-century mill housing the iconic art of the Wyeth family.

#4



West Chester Gallery Walk

A biannual community event that showcases the creative works of talented local artists in downtown galleries.

#5



Brandywine Battlefield Park

Stand on the historic site of the largest land battle of the American Revolution.

#6



The West Chester Farmers Market

Discover fresh local produce, artisan goods, and community spirit every Saturday morning.

#7



American Helicopter Museum

Explore the premier museum dedicated to the history and innovation of rotary-wing aircraft.

#8



Historic Walking Tours

Take a step back into the 1700s while exploring the Borough's stunning Greek Revival architecture.

#9



Chaddsford Winery

Enjoy tastings at one of Pennsylvania's oldest and most acclaimed wineries.

#10



Boutique Shopping

Discover the unique charm of over 60 independent boutiques located throughout the Borough.

Local Resource Sources: downtownwestchester.com and brandywinevalley.com

Welcome to your new community!

Ten Steps

TO BUYING A HOME

01/

FIND THE RIGHT AGENT

02/

PREPARE FINANCES

03/

GET PRE-APPROVED

04/

START HOME SHOPPING

05/

MAKE AN OFFER

06/

ORDER AN INSPECTION

07/

NEGOTIATE FINAL OFFER

08/

APPRAISAL ORDERED

09/

SCHEDULE THE MOVE

10/

CLOSING DAY

HOME BUYING *process*





FIND THE RIGHT AGENT

Buying a home is one of the most significant purchases in a lifetime. It is essential to have an experienced agent in your corner, always looking out for your best interest. A buyer agent's fiduciary responsibility is to represent the buyer and to ensure that they are protected.

After all, a seller has someone in their corner. A listing agent has an allegiance to the seller. Their goal is to get the seller top dollar for their home. There is incredible value in having someone working for YOUR best interests when buying a home.



GETTING YOU IN THE DOOR

We will narrow down the homes that fit your unique wants and needs and get you in the door! I look at dozens of homes every week, and I can help you identify potential problems within a home.

HANDLING CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

When repairs or changes in price need to be made, I will be your guide and handle requesting any repairs or changes in price to the sellers.

STAYING ON TOP OF THE PAPERWORK

Buying a home involves many types of documentation. I have the experience and knowledge to navigate real estate contracts. Ensuring that nothing is overlooked, and that you truly understand what a paper means before ever signing on the dotted line.

ON YOUR SIDE

A buyer's agent will represent your best interests. With a pulse on the local market and a sound understanding of how various amenities effect the value of a home, we will make sure we submit a competitive offer on the right house for you.

NEIGHBORHOOD EXPERT

I work daily in neighborhoods with inspectors, contractors, and negotiating with sellers. I have the market knowledge you need to get you the home of your dreams at the best price! Understanding the local real estate market is essential when it comes time to make an offer on a house.

PROBLEM SOLVER

I will work hard to protect all of your interests and take on any issues that may arise throughout the entire process. I work tirelessly to make sure buying a home is a fun and stress-free process.

AFFORDABILITY

The seller typically pays the commission for both the seller's agent and the buyer's agent.

02

PREPARE FINANCES

HOW MUCH HOUSE CAN YOU AFFORD?

Mortgage lenders recommend you do not buy a home that is more than 3 to 5 times your annual household income. If you are not purchasing a home with cash, you will need a mortgage pre-approval provided by your mortgage lender. A lender will work with you to get a loan that meets your needs. Some buyers are concerned with keeping their monthly payments as low as possible, others want to make sure that their monthly payments never increase.

CHECK YOUR CREDIT

A mortgage requires a good credit score. You can improve your score by:

- Paying down credit card balances
- Continuing to make payments on time
- Avoid applying for a new credit card or car loan until you have been approved
- Avoid making big purchases until you have been approved
- If possible, avoid job changes until you have been approved

SAVE CASH FOR A DOWN PAYMENT & OTHER EXPENSES

In order to make your dream of buying a home a reality, you will need to save cash for your down payment, earnest money, closing costs & home inspector.

- A Down Payment is typically between 3.5% & 20% of the purchase price
- Earnest Money is money you put down to show you're serious about purchasing a home. It's also known as a good faith deposit.
- Closing Costs for the buyer run between 2% & 5% of the loan amount
- A Home Inspection costs \$500 to \$700



03

GET PRE-APPROVED

Being pre-approved, unlike being pre-qualified, means you've actually been approved by a lender for a specific loan amount. You will need to provide documented financial information (income, statements, assets, debt & credit reports etc.) to be reviewed & verified by the lender.



A still life photograph with a soft, muted color palette. In the foreground, a tall, slender, light-colored ceramic vase holds a bouquet of baby's breath flowers. To the left of the vase are two round, woven baskets made of natural fibers, one larger than the other. In the background, a round mirror with a white frame is mounted on a light-colored wall, reflecting a blurred interior scene. The overall mood is calm and minimalist.

CLIENT FOCUSED & RESULT DRIVEN

A top-down view of a white laptop keyboard on a light-colored desk. To the right of the keyboard is a grey pen and a spiral-bound notebook. The background is a soft, neutral-toned surface.

PREPARING

for a home loan



GET *qualified*

TYPE OF LOAN	CREDIT SCORE	DOWN PAYMENT
VA LOAN	620	NO DOWN PAYMENT
USDA LOAN	620	NO DOWN PAYMENT
FHA LOAN	580+	3.5%
	500-579	10%
203K LOAN	640	3.5%
CONVENTIONAL 97	620	3%
CONVENTIONAL LOAN	640	5-20%

INCOME *qualifications*

QUALIFYING INCOME

- W-2 Income/Salary
- Income from part-time jobs
- Income from a second Job
- Overtime & Bonuses
- Seasonal jobs
- Self-employed Income
- Alimony & child support (Documentation required)

NON-QUALIFYING INCOME

- Income from the lottery
- Gambling
- Unemployment pay
- Single bonuses
- Non-occupying co-signer income
- Unverifiable income
- Income from rental properties

NEEDED *documents*

- W2'S FROM THE PAST 2 YEARS
- 3 MONTHS WORTH OF PAY-STUBS
- BANK STATEMENTS (PAST 3 MONTHS)
- PREVIOUS 2 YEARS OF TAX RETURNS
- LIST OF YOUR DEBTS & ASSETS
- DIVORCE DECREE
- ADDITIONAL INCOME DOCUMENTS

TYPES OF *mortgage* LOANS

TYPES OF LOANS

	WHO QUALIFIES	DOWN PAYMENT	UPFRONT MORTGAGE INSURANCE	MONTHLY MORTGAGE INSURANCE	MINIMUM CREDIT SCORE
VA Department of Veteran Affairs	Veterans Personnel with honorable discharge Reservists & National Guard Surviving Spouses	NONE	NONE	NONE	580
USDA Department of Agriculture	Someone who is buying a home in a USDA -designated rural area.	NONE	2% of the loan amount. Can be rolled into loan amount.	REQUIRED	640
FHA Federal Housing Administration	Anyone who meets the minimum credit and income levels.	At least 3.5% of purchase price	1.75% of loan amount	REQUIRED	580-640
203K Federal Housing Administration	Anyone who plans to purchase a fixer-upper or needs to renovate their home and meets credit & income requirements	At least 3.5% of purchase price	1.75% of loan amount	REQUIRED	580-640
CONVENTIONAL 97	Depending on the program, available first time home buyers (a buyer who hasn't owned in the last three years) can put 3% down with a Conventional 97 program.	Varies from 3%-20% of purchase price	NONE	REQUIRED	620
SELECT SMART PLUS	Anyone who meets lenders credit, income & debt level requirements	Varies from 3% -20%, but typically ranges from 5-20%	NONE	REQUIRED	620



START Shopping

Bright

MLS PORTAL

Think of this portal as our shared digital office. Unlike public sites that can often be outdated, this data feeds directly from the MLS in real-time. It is the most accurate view of the market available, empowering us to collaborate seamlessly.

Organizing Your Search



Favorites: Love it? Save it as a Favorite so we can schedule a tour ASAP.



Possibilities: Not sure yet? Mark it as a Possibility to keep an eye on it.



Discards: Not for you? Discard it so we can focus only on better matches.



Real-Time Feedback

See something you like (or hate)? Leave a Note directly on the listing page. I see your feedback instantly, which helps me refine future search results to match your specific style.



Drive Time Search

Commute matters. Use the Drive Time feature to filter homes based on your actual travel time to work or school, rather than just an arbitrary radius on a map.

Check your inbox for the subject line:
“Access Your Portal Now” to get started!



START HOME SHOPPING

START TOURING HOMES IN YOUR PRICE RANGE

Time to start shopping! We will take notes on all the homes we visit. It can be hard to remember all the details of each home, so take pictures or videos to help you remember each home, and review the notes you have written. Once we have found THE house for you, we will present an appropriate offer based on recent sales and current buyer activity in the area, as well as the value of the property in its current condition. Negotiations may take place after the offer is presented.

TIP

We will make sure to check every little detail of each house

- Test the plumbing
- Test the electrical system
- Open and close the windows & doors to make sure they work properly

Evaluate the neighborhood and surrounding areas

- Are the surrounding homes well maintained?
- How much traffic is on the street?
- Is it conveniently located to schools, shopping, restaurants, & parks



MAKE AN offer

Reskt CLIENT PORTAL

YOUR DIGITAL ROADMAP



Total Clarity

Like a clear lesson plan, y'll always see the big picture of the transaction. No guessing games about where we stand.



Timely Alerts

You receive automated text or email prompts for crucial milestones—like wiring earnest money or scheduling inspections—so you never miss a deadline.



Confidence & Calm

I manage the complex logistics and paperwork chaos behind the scenes. You just follow the simple, organized prompts on your dashboard.



05/

MAKE AN OFFER

WHEN TO MAKE AN OFFER:

So you have found THE house! Congrats! In today's market when the demand is higher than the amount of homes available it is important to act fast!

HOW MUCH TO OFFER:

We will sit down and look at recent sales and current buyer activity in the area, as well as the value of the property in its present condition. Putting all this information together, we will determine the price that you would like to offer.

SUBMITTING AN OFFER

There are some components to an offer that makes it more appealing to the sellers.

•Put Your Best Foot Forward

We will work together to discuss your options and create your very best offer. Depending on the circumstances, you may have only one chance to make a good impression.

•Put Down a Healthy Earnest Deposit

A large earnest money deposit shows the seller you are serious

•Cash Talks

A transaction that is not dependent on receiving loan approval is more attractive to a seller

•Shorter Inspection Periods

Try shortening the inspection period to 10 days

•Offer to Close Quickly

Many sellers prefer to close within 30 days.



THE PROCESS

AFTER YOU SUBMIT AN OFFER

THE SELLER COULD

•ACCEPT THE OFFER

•DECLINE THE OFFER

This happens if the seller thinks your offer isn't close enough to their expectations to further negotiate.

•COUNTER-OFFER

A counter-offer is when the seller offers you different terms. If this happens, you can:

•ACCEPT THE SELLER'S COUNTER-OFFER

•DECLINE THE SELLER'S COUNTER-OFFER

•COUNTER THE SELLER'S COUNTER-OFFER

You can negotiate back and forth as many times as needed until you reach an agreement or someone chooses to walk away.

OFFER IS ACCEPTED - CONGRATS!

You will sign the purchase agreement and you are now officially under contract! This period of time is called the contingency period. Now inspections, appraisals, or anything else built into your purchase agreement will take place.





ESCROW *period*

06/ ORDER AN INSPECTION

During the inspection period, we will schedule an inspection with a reputable home inspector to do a thorough investigation of the home. Once this is complete, the inspector will provide us with a list of their findings. You can take the issues as-is or request the seller to address some or all of the findings. We will be mindful and reasonable on smaller items while being very cautious and vigilant of potentially significant issues.



07/ NEGOTIATE FINAL OFFER

Issues typically arise after the home inspection, and those issues tend to result in another round of negotiations for credits or fixes.

- 1. Ask for credit for the work that needs to be done.**
Likely, the last thing the seller wants to do is repair work.
- 2. Think “big picture” and don’t sweat the small stuff.**
A tile that needs some caulking or a leaky faucet can easily be fixed. Repairs are still up for negotiation and perhaps a small credit would help with closing costs.
- 3. Keep your poker face.**
The listing agent will be present during inspections and revealing your comfort level with the home could come back to haunt you in further discussions or negotiations.



08/ APPRAISAL ORDERED

Your lender will arrange for a third party appraiser to provide an independent estimate of the value of the house you are buying. The appraisal lets all parties involved know that the price is fair. The loan file then moves on to the mortgage underwriter.

If approved you will receive your final commitment letter that includes the final loan terms & percentage rates.

Property Title Search

This ensures that the seller truly owns the property and that all existing liens, loans or judgments are disclosed.

Homeowner's Insurance

You'll need insurance for the new home before closing. This will protect against things like fire, storms, and flooding



CLOSING *day*

09

scheduling YOUR MOVE



AFTER SIGNING

- Finalize Home Mortgage
- Schedule Home Inspection
- Declutter! Sort through every drawer, closet, cupboard & shelf, removing items you no longer need or like. Donate or sell items that are in good condition
- Get copies of medical records and store them with your other important documents
- Create an inventory of anything valuable that you plan to move
- Get estimates from moving companies

4 WEEKS TO MOVE

- Give 30 days notice if you are currently renting
- Schedule movers/moving truck
- Buy/find packing materials
- START PACKING

3 WEEKS TO MOVE

- Arrange appraisal
- Complete title search (Title company will do this)

2 WEEKS TO MOVE

- Secure Home Warranty
- Get quotes for home insurance
- Schedule time for closing
- Contact utility companies (water, electric, cable)
- Change address: mailing, subscriptions, etc.
- Minimize grocery shopping
- Keep on packing

1 WEEK TO MOVE

- Obtain certified checks for closing
- Schedule and attend a final walkthrough
- Finish packing
- Clean
- Pack essentials for a few nights in new home
- Confirm delivery date with the moving company.



10

closing day



CLOSING DAY

Closing is when you sign ownership and insurance paperwork and you receive your new home's keys! Typically, closing takes four to six weeks. During this time, purchase funds are held in escrow, where your money is held safe until the transaction is complete.



CLOSING DISCLOSURE

Lenders are required to provide you with a closing disclosure, at least three days before closing. This will show you what your final loan terms and closing costs will be. You will have three days to review the statement. This is done to ensure that there are no surprises at the closing table. If there is a significant discrepancy between the loan estimate and the closing disclosure, we must notify your lender and title company immediately.



FINAL WALKTHROUGH

We will do a final walk through the home within 24 hours of closing to check the property's condition. This final inspection takes about an hour. We will make sure any repair work that the seller agreed to make has been done.

We will be sure to:

- Make sure all appliances are working properly
- Run the water in all the faucets and check for any possible leaks
- Open and close garage doors with opener
- Flush toilets
- Run the garbage disposal and exhaust fans



CLOSING TABLE

Who will be there:

- Your agent
- The seller
- The seller's agent
- A title company representative
- Your loan officer
- Any real estate attorneys involved in the transaction

The closing typically happens at the title company. You will be signing lots of paperwork so get your writing hand warmed up! Some of the papers you will be signing include: the deed of trust, promissory note, and other documents



CLOSING COSTS

Closing costs can vary depending on your home's purchase price and where you are located. You can generally expect your closing costs to be around 3% to 4% of the home's sales price. These closing costs can sometimes be shared with the seller.



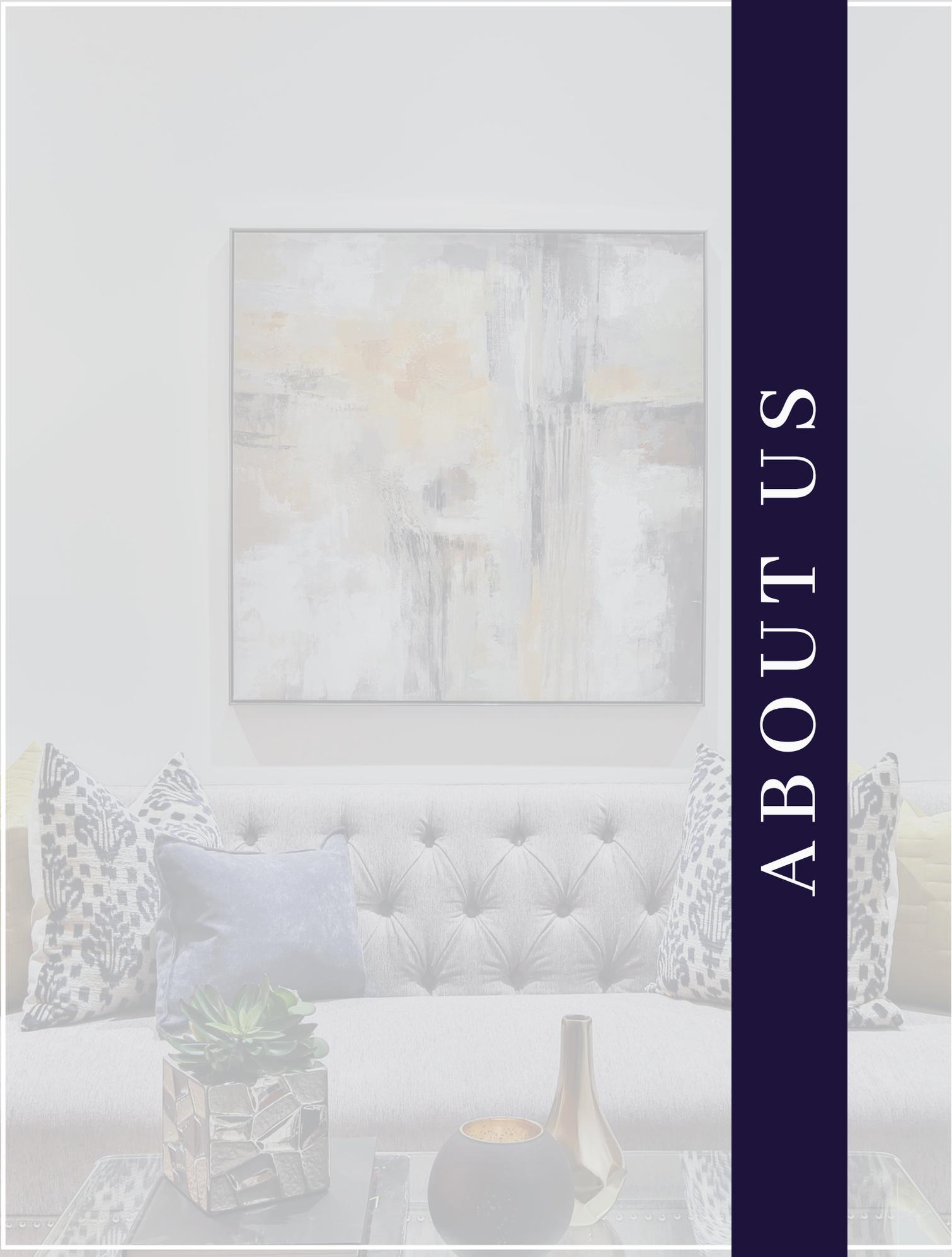
BRING TO CLOSING

- Government-issued photo ID
- Copy of the sales contract
- Homeowner's insurance certificate
- Proof of funds to cover the remainder of the down payment and your closing costs



RECEIVE YOUR KEYS

Congratulations! It was a lot of hard work but you are now officially homeowners!! Time to throw a party and get to know your new neighbors!



ABOUT US

**ONE UNIFIED TEAM OF EXPERTS
DELIVERING
GREAT SERVICE AND REAL VALUE.**

Real estate involves many moving parts—mortgages, inspections, title work, insurance, and more. Long & Foster brings it all together under one roof. Our experts work together to make sure buying or selling your home is smooth, stress-free, and designed around you.

IT'S THE **ONE.**

MEET THE TEAM



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REVIEWS

REVIEWS



Colleen Johnson is amazing! She listened to my needs and was very intentional in her strategy to ensure the optimal result for me in selling a property that was part of an estate. She is informed and insightful with masterful marketing, pricing and negotiating skills. Through her expertise, we received an offer on the property at the asking price, and within an incredible four days of it being listed. To top that - closing was within thirty days, beginning to end!! Throughout the process, Colleen assured me that no question was too naive or nonsensical, and she happily guided me through the terminology and expectation of each step. The professionalism she exhibited while safeguarding my wishes as her first priority was exceptional. If you are looking for a realtor who keeps abreast of the industry, in both a nuanced and well-defined approach, makes you the top priority and gets the job done, her name is Colleen Johnson. I highly recommend her to anyone looking to buy or sell a home.

Marcia

Colleen was very informative, she took her time with me to explain this process thoroughly even when I asked her the same questions . She is very professional and I really appreciated her kindness ... Great job Colleen!

Angie

Had a great experience. I relocated temporarily for my job and Colleen made the transition truly painless. She was helpful, polite, attentive and very accommodating throughout the process. I told her if my relocation turns permanent, I would be calling her for help house hunting! Highly recommend.

JW

REVIEWS



When I inherited my home, I felt overwhelmed by the thought of selling it. Fortunately, I had the privilege of working with Colleen. She guided me through each step of the process, making everything make sense and significantly easing my anxiety. Her expertise in marketing and pricing strategies, combined with her excellent negotiation skills, led to an incredible outcome: we received an offer at asking price in just four days and closed the sale in under 30 days. I couldn't be more grateful for her dedication and professionalism. Colleen made a potentially stressful experience smooth and successful. I highly recommend her to anyone looking to buy or sell a home.

Judea

Colleen teaches with my wife. We have known Colleen, her husband and son for 15 years. She is someone my wife and I would trust to help manage a life change in moving and selling our home.

Albert S.



WHAT TO EXPECT

FROM INITIAL CONTACT TO CLOSING AND BEYOND,
I AM HERE FOR YOU.

BUT WHAT DOES THIS MEAN, REALLY?

I AM BACKED BY A FAMILY OF COMPANIES THAT WORKS TOGETHER SEAMLESSLY TO HELP REACH YOUR REAL ESTATE GOALS IN FINANCING, INSURANCE, SETTLEMENT, PROPERTY MANAGEMENT AND MORE.

MY GOAL IS TO SEE YOU SUCCEED IN YOUR REAL ESTATE GOALS AND TO DELIVER AN EXPERIENCE THAT EXCEEDS YOUR EXPECTATIONS. I WILL BE YOUR SINGLE POINT-OF-CONTACT THROUGHOUT THE SELLING PROCESS, RESULTING IN A SUCCESSFUL TRANSACTION FROM START TO FINISH.

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THE ROAD

Home

Let the journey BEGIN!
I look forward to working with you!



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