

The Strategic Home Buyer's Guide

A proven, data-driven approach to buying a home across the Greater Seattle Area.

30+ YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

400+ TRANSACTIONS

TRUSTED THROUGH EVERY MARKET CYCLE

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KW GREATER SEATTLE
KELLERWILLIAMS REALTY

YOUR GUIDE



A Calm, Proven Hand in Complex Real Estate Decisions

Everett Talvo has spent more than three decades helping buyers navigate one of the most important financial decisions of their lives. Beginning his career in 1992, Everett built his business the hard way by solving problems other agents couldn't.

What sets Everett apart is not flash, but clarity, honesty, and discipline. He provides direct, data-driven guidance even when it's uncomfortable, because protecting a client's outcome matters more than winning a single transaction. He will advise you against a purchase if the conditions or the property aren't right for you.

Today, Everett serves buyers from Olympia to Marysville, including Seattle, the Eastside, and island properties, offering steady guidance, concierge service, and strategic execution.

30+
YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

400+
TRANSACTIONS CLOSED

100%
CLIENT-FIRST FOCUS

THE MARKET

Why the Greater Seattle Area

The Greater Seattle area remains one of the most dynamic real estate markets in the country. Anchored by a robust technology economy, world-class universities, and an unmatched Pacific Northwest lifestyle, the region consistently attracts buyers from across the nation and around the world.

Everett serves buyers across the full spectrum of this market, from the urban energy of Capitol Hill and South Lake Union to the quiet waterfront communities of Mercer Island, Bainbridge Island, and beyond. His 30+ years of experience across King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties means you benefit from deep local knowledge at every price point.

SERVICE AREA

Olympia to Marysville

PROPERTY TYPES

SFH, Condos, Townhomes, Land, Multifamily

MARKET
EXPERTISEBuyer's,
Seller's and
Transitional
MarketsSPECIAL
EXPERTISECompetitive
Offers and
Complex
Transactions

"Protecting a client's outcome matters more than winning."

STEP BY STEP

The Washington State Buying Process

Buying a home in the Greater Seattle area can feel overwhelming, especially when the stakes are high. When you work with Everett, the process becomes clear, structured, and manageable.

01 Clarify Your Goals and Strategy

Every successful home purchase begins with clarity. You and Everett will review your financial goals, ideal timeline, and the motivations driving your purchase. This ensures every decision is aligned with what matters most to you.

02 Sign the Buyer Brokerage Services Agreement

As of January 1, 2024, Washington State law requires a written Buyer Brokerage Services Agreement before an agent assists with your home search. This agreement ensures complete transparency regarding representation, services, and compensation.

03 Financial Preparation and Pre-Approval

Before touring homes, you will need a strong pre-approval letter from a reputable local lender. Everett can connect you with trusted mortgage professionals who understand the nuances of the Seattle market.

04 Strategic House Hunting

Everett will help you identify properties that match your criteria across King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties. With his trained eye, he helps you look past the staging to evaluate the true condition and value of each home.

05 Craft a Winning Offer

When you find the right home, Everett uses real-time market data to determine a competitive price. In Washington, offers are submitted using the NWMLS Purchase and Sale Agreement (Form 21). Everett structures your offer to protect your interests while appealing to the seller.

06 Earnest Money Deposit

Once your offer is accepted, you will deposit earnest money (typically 1% to 3% of the purchase price in the Seattle market) into a neutral escrow account. This demonstrates good faith and is credited toward your costs at closing.

07 Inspection and Due Diligence

The inspection contingency (NWMLS Form 35) is your opportunity to thoroughly evaluate the property. Everett will help you schedule a professional inspector to uncover any major issues and negotiate repairs or credits as needed.

08 Appraisal and Financing

Your lender will order an independent appraisal to confirm the home's market value. Meanwhile, your financing contingency (NWMLS Form 22A) protects your earnest money while the lender finalizes loan approval.

09 Escrow and Title Review

Washington is an escrow state. A neutral third-party escrow company handles the funds and documents rather than attorneys. You will receive a title commitment to confirm the property is free of liens or legal issues.

10 Closing Day

Before closing, you will conduct a final walkthrough to confirm the home is in the agreed-upon condition. Once the loan funds and the transaction is recorded with the county, the home is officially yours.

PROTECTING YOUR INTERESTS

Understanding Washington State Contingencies

Contingencies are protective clauses in your Purchase and Sale Agreement that allow you to exit the contract under specific circumstances without losing your earnest money. Everett ensures these are used strategically to protect your interests at every stage.

<p>Inspection Contingency</p> <p>NWMLS Form 35 5 to 10 Days</p> <p>Allows you to have the home professionally inspected. You can negotiate repairs, request credits, or terminate the agreement if the property's condition is unacceptable. Silence does not equal approval.</p>	<p>Financing Contingency</p> <p>NWMLS Form 22A 21 to 30 Days</p> <p>Protects your earnest money if your lender ultimately denies your loan application despite your good-faith efforts to secure financing. This is the most protective contingency for your earnest money deposit.</p>	<p>Title Review Contingency</p> <p>Title Commitment</p> <p>5 Days from Receipt</p> <p>Gives you the right to review the preliminary title report and object to any problematic easements, liens, or restrictions on the property before proceeding to closing.</p>	<p>HOA Review Contingency</p> <p>Resale Certificate</p> <p>3 to 5 Days</p> <p>For condominiums and planned communities, you have the right to review the HOA's financial statements, meeting minutes, rules, and resale certificate before committing to purchase.</p>	<p>Seller Disclosure Review</p> <p>NWMLS Form 17</p> <p>3 Business Days</p> <p>Washington State requires sellers to disclose known defects and conditions on Form 17. You have three business days from receipt to rescind the agreement based on the disclosure.</p>	<p>Sale of Buyer's Home</p> <p>NWMLS Form 22B</p> <p>Negotiated</p> <p>If you need to sell your current home before purchasing, this contingency protects you. It is less common in competitive markets, but Everett can advise on when and how to use it effectively.</p>
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Important: In competitive Seattle markets, buyers sometimes waive contingencies to strengthen their offer. Everett will advise you on the risks and alternatives before making any such decision. Never waive a contingency without fully understanding the implications.

KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

Understanding Closing Costs

Closing costs are fees and expenses paid at the end of the transaction, in addition to your down payment. In Washington State, buyers typically pay 2% to 5% of the purchase price in closing costs. Knowing what to expect helps you budget accurately and avoid surprises.

COST ITEM	TYPICAL RANGE	WHO PAYS	NOTES
Loan Origination Fee	0.5% to 1% of loan	Buyer	Varies by lender; sometimes negotiable
Appraisal Fee	\$600 to \$1,000+	Buyer	Required by lender; paid upfront or at closing
Home Inspection	\$400 to \$700+	Buyer	Paid directly to inspector; not included in closing
Title Insurance (Lender's)	\$500 to \$1,500	Buyer	Required by lender to protect their interest
Title Insurance (Owner's)	\$500 to \$1,500	Buyer (optional)	Strongly recommended to protect your ownership
Escrow / Settlement Fee	\$800 to \$1,500	Split	Typically split 50/50 between buyer and seller in WA
Recording Fees	\$200 to \$400	Buyer	County fee to record the deed and deed of trust
Prepaid Interest	Varies	Buyer	Interest from closing date to first payment due date
Property Tax Proration	Varies	Split	Prorated based on closing date
Homeowners Insurance	\$1,200 to \$2,500/yr	Buyer	First year paid at or before closing
HOA Transfer / Setup Fee	\$200 to \$500	Buyer	Applies to condos and HOA communities only

Washington State Note: The Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) is paid by the **seller**, not the buyer. The graduated rate is 1.10% on the first \$500,000; 1.28% on \$500,001 to \$1.5M; 2.75% on \$1.5M to \$3M; and 3.00% above \$3M. This is a significant seller cost that can affect negotiating dynamics.

BE INFORMED

What to Consider in Your Home Search

Every buyer has a different set of priorities. Use this framework to clarify what matters most to you before you begin touring homes. Everett will help you evaluate each property against your criteria.

Location and Neighborhood

- ✓ Proximity to work, schools, and daily errands
- ✓ School district quality and boundaries
- ✓ Access to transit, ferries, and major corridors
- ✓ Neighborhood character, walkability, and safety
- ✓ Future development plans that may affect the area

The Property Itself

- ✓ Lot size, orientation, and outdoor space
- ✓ Natural light and window placement
- ✓ Storage space, garage, and parking
- ✓ Age and condition of major systems (roof, HVAC, plumbing, electrical)
- ✓ Basement, crawl space, or foundation condition

Layout and Livability

- ✓ Number of bedrooms and bathrooms relative to your needs
- ✓ Open versus closed floor plan preference
- ✓ Kitchen size and functionality
- ✓ Primary bedroom location (main floor vs. upper floor)
- ✓ Room for future growth or lifestyle changes

Financial Considerations

- ✓ HOA fees, rules, and financial health (if applicable)
- ✓ Property tax history and current assessed value
- ✓ Utility costs and energy efficiency
- ✓ Flood zone, earthquake, or other insurance requirements
- ✓ Potential for appreciation based on neighborhood trends

BE PREPARED

Open House Dos and Don'ts

Open houses are a great way to explore homes, but what you say and do matters. Here's how to make the most of every visit while protecting your negotiating position.

✓ Do These Things

- 1 Arrive with your pre-approval letter in hand so you can act quickly if you love the home.
- 2 Take notes and photos (with permission) so you can compare homes accurately later.
- 3 Look beyond the staging. Focus on the bones: ceiling height, natural light, room sizes, and flow.
- 4 Check closets, cabinets, and storage areas to assess real-world functionality.
- 5 Inspect the exterior, roof, gutters, and foundation for visible signs of deferred maintenance.
- 6 Ask the listing agent how long the home has been on the market and whether there are any offers.
- 7 Notice the neighborhood: parking availability, noise levels, and the condition of neighboring homes.
- 8 Run water in the sinks and flush toilets to check water pressure and drainage.

✗ Avoid These Mistakes

- 1 Don't reveal your budget, motivation, or timeline to the listing agent. That information can be used against you in negotiations.
- 2 Don't make verbal offers or discuss price with the seller's agent. All offers go through Everett.
- 3 Don't sign any documents at an open house without reviewing them with Everett first.
- 4 Don't let staging distract you from structural or mechanical concerns.
- 5 Don't dismiss a home based on paint colors or carpet. Cosmetic issues are inexpensive to fix.
- 6 Don't fall in love publicly. Enthusiasm is visible, and it weakens your negotiating position.
- 7 Don't skip the open house sign-in sheet. Everett needs to be identified as your buyer's agent.
- 8 Don't make decisions based on emotion alone. Take time to review the data with Everett before acting.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Washington State Buyer Programs

Washington State offers several programs designed to make homeownership more accessible. Many buyers are surprised to learn they qualify. Everett can help you determine which programs may apply to your situation.

WSHFC

Home Advantage

Washington State's most popular first-time buyer program. Offers below-market interest rates paired with down payment assistance of up to \$15,000. Available to buyers who complete a free homebuyer education seminar.

WSHFC

House Key Opportunity

Designed for lower-income buyers, this program offers below-market mortgage rates and is often paired with additional down payment assistance. Income and purchase price limits apply.

WSHFC

Covenant Homeownership Program

Provides down payment and closing cost assistance to buyers from communities that were historically excluded from homeownership through racially restrictive covenants. A meaningful step toward equity in housing.

IRS / WSHFC

Mortgage Credit Certificate (MCC)

A federal tax credit that allows first-time buyers to claim a portion of their annual mortgage interest as a direct tax credit, reducing their federal income tax liability for the life of the loan.

Getting Started with WSHFC

The first step to accessing any WSHFC program is attending a free, Commission-sponsored Homebuyer Education Seminar. These seminars are available online and in-person throughout Washington State. Everett can point you in the right direction.

LEARN MORE

wshfc.org/buyers

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

Common Home Buying Myths

Misinformation can cost buyers time, money, and opportunity. Here are eight of the most common myths Everett encounters, and the truth behind each one.

MYTH

"You need a 20% down payment to buy a home."

TRUTH

Many loan programs allow buyers to purchase with as little as 3% to 5% down. FHA loans require just 3.5%, and VA and USDA loans may require no down payment. Washington State also offers down payment assistance through WSHFC.

MYTH

"You should wait for the perfect time to buy."

TRUTH

Timing the market is nearly impossible. The best time to buy is when you are financially ready and have found a home that meets your needs. Waiting for rates or prices to drop often costs more than it saves.

MYTH

"Getting pre-qualified is the same as getting pre-approved."

TRUTH

Pre-qualification is a quick estimate based on self-reported information. Pre-approval involves a full lender review of credit, income, and assets. In Seattle's competitive market, sellers expect a pre-approval letter.

MYTH

"The listing price is always the right price."

TRUTH

List price is a starting point, not a fact. Everett analyzes recent comparable sales and market conditions to determine whether a home is priced fairly before you make an offer.

MYTH

"You don't need a buyer's agent because the listing agent can help both sides."

TRUTH

The listing agent legally represents the seller's interests. Without your own representation, you are negotiating without an advocate. Everett works exclusively for you at every step.

MYTH

"A new construction home doesn't need an inspection."

TRUTH

New construction homes can have defects just like older homes. Inspectors regularly find issues in new builds. An independent inspection before closing protects you regardless of the home's age.

MYTH

"You can't buy a home if you have student loan debt."

TRUTH

Student loan debt affects your debt-to-income ratio but does not automatically disqualify you from buying. Many buyers with student loans successfully purchase homes. Everett can connect you with the right lenders.

MYTH

"The earnest money is always at risk."

TRUTH

When structured correctly, your earnest money is well protected. The inspection, financing, and title contingencies all provide specific exit rights to recover your deposit if conditions are not met.

PLAN AHEAD

Moving Checklist

Before you know it, it will be time to hire movers, pack up your belongings, and settle into your new home. Use this checklist to make sure everyone who needs to know about your move has been notified.

Utilities

- Electric
- Phone
- Water
- Cable / Streaming
- Gas
- Internet

Insurance

- Auto
- Health
- Home
- Life
- Renters (if applicable)

Professional Services

- Financial Advisor
- Accountant
- Physician
- Dentist
- Attorney

Financial Accounts

- Banks and Credit Unions
- Credit Cards
- Finance Companies
- Cell Phone Provider
- Department Store Accounts

Subscriptions

- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Streaming Services
- Membership Boxes

Government and Civic

- IRS (tax address)
- Post Office (mail forwarding)
- Schools
- State Licensing / DMV
- Veterans Affairs (VA)
- Voter Registration

Personal and Community

- Business Associates
- House of Worship
- Library
- Drug Store / Pharmacy
- Hair Stylist
- Items in Repair
- Items Loaned Out

Clubs and Organizations

- Health and Fitness
- Country Club
- After-School Programs
- Volunteer Groups
- Professional Associations

KNOW THE LANGUAGE

Washington State Real Estate Glossary

Real estate transactions come with a vocabulary all their own, and Washington State has its own specific forms, laws, and customs. This glossary covers the key terms you will encounter throughout your buying journey.

<p>Buyer Brokerage Services Agreement</p> <p>A written agreement, required in Washington State since January 1, 2024, between a buyer and a real estate brokerage that outlines the services to be provided and the compensation structure.</p>	<p>Deed of Trust</p> <p>Washington State's primary security instrument for real estate loans. It involves three parties: the borrower (trustor), the lender (beneficiary), and a neutral trustee who holds legal title until the loan is paid off.</p>	<p>Earnest Money</p> <p>A good-faith deposit made by the buyer after an offer is accepted, typically 1% to 3% of the purchase price in the Seattle market. It is held in escrow and credited toward the buyer's costs at closing.</p>	<p>Escrow</p> <p>A neutral third-party service that holds funds and documents during a real estate transaction. Washington is an escrow state. Attorneys are not required for closing. Escrow fees are typically split between buyer and seller.</p>	<p>NWMLS Form 21</p> <p>The Northwest Multiple Listing Service Residential Purchase and Sale Agreement, the standard offer and contract document used in Washington State real estate transactions.</p>	<p>NWMLS Form 35</p> <p>The Inspection Addendum that creates an inspection contingency, giving the buyer the right to inspect the property and negotiate repairs or credits within a defined timeframe.</p>	<p>NWMLS Form 22A</p> <p>The Financing Contingency Addendum that protects the buyer's earnest money if their loan is ultimately denied despite good-faith efforts to obtain financing.</p>	<p>Pre-Approval</p> <p>A lender's conditional commitment to provide a specific loan amount based on a review of the buyer's credit, income, assets, and debts. A pre-approval letter is essential before making offers in the competitive Seattle market.</p>	<p>Real Estate Excise Tax (REET)</p> <p>A Washington State tax on the sale of real property, paid by the seller. The rate is graduated: 1.10% on the first \$500,000; 1.28% on \$500,001 to \$1.5M; 2.75% on \$1.5M to \$3M; and 3.00% above \$3M.</p>	<p>Seller Disclosure Statement (Form 17)</p> <p>A Washington State required disclosure form completed by the seller covering known property conditions, defects, and legal issues. Buyers have three business days from receipt to rescind the agreement based on the disclosure.</p>	<p>Title Insurance</p> <p>Insurance that protects against losses from title defects, liens, or ownership disputes. Lenders require a lender's title policy; buyers are strongly encouraged to purchase an owner's title policy for their own protection.</p>	<p>WSHFC</p> <p>Washington State Housing Finance Commission, the state agency that administers homebuyer assistance programs including Home Advantage, House Key Opportunity, and the Covenant Homeownership Program.</p>
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CLIENT EXPERIENCES

What Clients Say

"When it came time to sell my mother's estate, I knew it wouldn't be easy. The house was a fixer-upper, not financeable, and required someone who could navigate a challenging situation with patience and skill. Everett did exactly that. He was calm, honest, and got it done."

Estate Sale Client

Seattle, WA

"Everett told me things I didn't want to hear about the first two homes I wanted to make offers on. He was right both times. When we finally found the right one, his negotiation got us in under asking. I trust him completely."

First-Time Buyer

Eastside, WA

"No pressure, no ego, no games. Everett is the kind of agent who actually listens. He helped us navigate a competitive multiple-offer situation and we got the house. His experience showed at every step."

Repeat Buyer

North Seattle, WA

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

What You Can and Can't Control

While no one can control the market or seller behavior, there are key decisions that directly influence your success. Everett helps you focus on the areas where your choices matter most.

Within Your Control

- ✔ **Your Real Estate Professional**
Choosing an experienced agent like Everett ensures you have steady guidance, clear communication, and strong negotiation skills on your side.
- ✔ **Your Financial Readiness**
Getting fully pre-approved and understanding your budget allows you to act quickly and confidently when the right home appears.
- ✔ **Your Offer Terms**
You decide the price, earnest money amount, and contingencies. Everett advises you on how to make these terms as competitive as possible while protecting your interests.
- ✔ **Your Flexibility**
Being open to different neighborhoods or property types can significantly expand your options and improve your chances of success.

Outside Your Control

- ✘ **The Market**
Interest rates, inventory levels, and overall buyer demand are constantly shifting. Everett monitors these conditions and adjusts your strategy accordingly.
- ✘ **The Seller**
You cannot control a seller's timeline, emotional attachment to the home, or how they respond to your offer. Everett's experience helps you navigate these dynamics.
- ✘ **The Competition**
In a competitive market, other buyers will also be bidding on desirable properties. Everett structures your offers to be as compelling as possible.
- ✘ **The Appraisal**
The lender's appraiser determines the home's value based on recent comparable sales, which may differ from the agreed-upon purchase price.

READY TO BEGIN?

Move Forward With Confidence

Buying a home is a significant milestone. With Everett Talvo by your side, you can move on to your next chapter confident that every detail was handled with care, experience, and intention. You will always know what is happening and why.

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