

THE HOME BUYER'S GUIDE

Let's find *home.*

Your step-by-step guide to buying a home in West Michigan, from pre-approval to keys in hand.



Austin & Traci Gresham

GRESHAM REALTY · BROKERED BY FIVE STAR REAL ESTATE LEADERS

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WELCOME

Your next chapter starts here.

Buying a home is one of the biggest decisions you'll ever make, and it should feel exciting, not overwhelming. This guide walks you through every step, from your first conversation with a lender to the moment we hand you the keys.

As a family-run team, we bring two sets of eyes, two phones and one shared commitment to every client. You'll always know what's happening, what comes next and why. Keep this guide handy, jot notes in the margins, and ask us anything along the way.

Austin & Traci

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MEET YOUR TEAM

Two agents. One family. *One standard of care.*



Austin Gresham

REALTOR® · GRESHAM REALTY

SE HABLA ESPAÑOL

With a background in hospitality and public education, Austin brings a calm, service-driven approach and clear communication to every real estate experience. Known for his patience and ability to simplify complex decisions, he helps clients move forward with confidence. He is also fluent in Spanish, allowing him to serve a broader range of clients throughout West Michigan.

As a real estate investor and rental property owner, Austin has a strong eye for value and a practical understanding of the numbers behind every purchase. Whether guiding a first-time buyer or working with an investor, he offers thoughtful insight and steady advocacy every step of the way.



Traci Gresham

ASSOCIATE BROKER · GRESHAM REALTY

Traci is one of the most trusted agents along the lakeshore and ranks among the top agents in West Michigan. She is known for her marketing expertise and for communicating clearly and often with every client she serves. Her business is built almost entirely on referrals and repeat clients, earned by working tirelessly on their behalf.

Originally from Michigan, Traci earned her Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Michigan, and it shows in how she listens. Away from work you'll find her exploring Lake Michigan beaches with family and friends or exploring local biking trails.

ALWAYS REACHABLE

Two agents means showings, calls and questions get covered quickly, even on busy weekends.

TWO PERSPECTIVES

Marketing and negotiation expertise, plus an investor's eye for value and the numbers.

ENGLISH & SPANISH

Bilingual service so every client feels fully understood at every step.

CLIENT STORIES

In our clients' *own words*.

★★★★★

"As a first-time home buyer I was extremely nervous and didn't know what to expect, but Austin walked me through everything with zeal and competency. The agreement he signs with you has a clause that states you can back out at any time for any reason. So you have literally nothing to lose. HIGHLY recommend!"

Daniel Lee

FIRST-TIME BUYER

★★★★★

"As a lender, it's incredibly refreshing to partner with a real estate team that is not only knowledgeable but also genuinely friendly, responsive, and attentive to every detail. If you're looking for a real estate agent that truly puts people first, I can't recommend Austin Gresham enough!"

Emily Paul

LENDER PARTNER

★★★★★

"When we moved to Michigan, Traci proactively put us in touch with local school administrators, provided extensive information on the surrounding communities, and even coordinated a day where local contractors met with us in our home. Traci is the most dedicated and professional realtor we have had the pleasure to work with."

Wendy Inlow

RELOCATION BUYER & SELLER

★★★★★

"Her knowledge of the market, ease of communication, warmth, attention to detail and genuine care for us in the process was exhibited at every step. She was proactive in guidance, thorough in explanations. She doesn't promise results, she gets them."

Jill Landman

REPEAT CLIENT



READY WHEN YOU ARE

Let's talk about *your* move.

Call or text 616.268.9900 or email hello@greshamrealty.com to set up your buyer consultation.

Five-star reviews shared on Google. Lightly excerpted for length.

SIX STEPS TO YOUR FRONT DOOR

The home buying *process*.

Every purchase is a little different, but most follow this path. On average, buyers search about ten weeks before finding their home, and closing usually takes 30 to 45 days once you're under contract.

01

Plan

- ◇ Meet for a buyer consultation
- ◇ Review and sign your buyer agreement
- ◇ Define budget, timeline and must-haves

02

Finances

- ◇ Gather your documents
- ◇ Get pre-approved or show proof of funds
- ◇ Plan for down payment and closing costs

03

Home search

- ◇ Get instant MLS alerts for new listings
- ◇ Tour your favorite homes together
- ◇ Narrow in on "the one"

04

Offer & contract

- ◇ Write a strong, strategic offer
- ◇ Negotiate terms and sign
- ◇ Deposit earnest money

05

Due diligence

- ◇ Complete home inspections
- ◇ Negotiate repairs if needed
- ◇ Appraisal, insurance and title work

06

Closing

- ◇ Receive your clear-to-close
- ◇ Final walk-through
- ◇ Sign, fund and get your keys!

STEP 01 • PLAN

Let's start with *a conversation.*

Before we tour a single home, we'll sit down together (in person, by phone or on video) to talk through what you're looking for and how we'll work together.

WHAT WE'LL COVER

- ◇ **Your goals and timeline.** When you want to move and anything that could affect timing, like a lease end or a home to sell.
- ◇ **Neighborhoods and must-haves.** Schools, commute, lake access, lot size, and the features you can't live without.
- ◇ **Budget and financing.** A comfortable monthly payment, not just a maximum approval, plus trusted local lenders if you need one.
- ◇ **The current market.** What homes in your price range are selling for right now.

Understanding your buyer agreement

Since August 2024, national rules require every buyer to sign a written agreement with their agent before touring homes together. It's a simple document that protects you and makes everything transparent. It spells out:

- ◇ The services we'll provide as your agents.
- ◇ How we're compensated, stated as a specific amount or percentage. Commissions are fully negotiable and are not set by law.
- ◇ How long the agreement lasts and how it can end.

In many transactions the seller agrees to cover some or all of the buyer agent's compensation, and we can request that as part of your offer. And our agreement lets you end it at any time, for any reason, so there's no risk in getting started. We'll walk through every line before you sign.

GOOD TO KNOW

You'll also receive Michigan's agency disclosure form, which explains who we represent. As your buyer's agents, our loyalty is to you.



STEP 02 • FINANCES

The mortgage *process.*

Your first real step is a pre-approval letter from a lender stating how much you qualify to borrow. Sellers expect to see one with every financed offer.

Don't understand something your lender says? Stop and ask. This is your home buying journey, and you deserve to understand every step. Pre-approvals are typically good for 30 to 90 days depending on the lender, so it's smart to start the conversation early and refresh your letter when you're ready to write offers.

QUESTIONS TO ASK POTENTIAL LENDERS

- 01 What type of loan do you recommend for me, and why?**
Conventional, FHA, VA and USDA loans all work differently. Whichever you choose, understand why it fits.
- 02 How much will I need for a down payment?**
Requirements vary by loan type. If you'd rather keep more cash on hand, say so.
- 03 Do I qualify for down payment assistance?**
Programs like those offered through MSHDA can help eligible Michigan buyers.
- 04 What is the interest rate and the APR?**
The APR combines your rate with lender fees, so it's the better way to compare offers.
- 05 Can I lock my rate, and for how long?**
Ask what a lock costs and what happens if rates drop after you lock.
- 06 What will my closing costs be?**
Buyer closing costs often run about 2% to 5% of the purchase price. Ask for a Loan Estimate so you can compare.



STEP 02 • FINANCES

Budgeting beyond *the down payment.*

Knowing your full cost to buy keeps surprises off the table. Here's what to plan for:

Earnest money deposit	Shows the seller you're serious. Held in escrow and credited toward your purchase at closing.
Home inspection	Paid at the time of inspection. Add-ons like radon, well and septic, or sewer scope cost extra.
Appraisal	Ordered by your lender and usually paid by you, either upfront or at closing.
Homeowners insurance	Your first year's premium is typically paid before or at closing.
Prepays and escrow	Lenders often collect several months of property taxes and insurance upfront.
Lender and title fees	Origination, lender's title policy, recording fees and closing fees.

YOUR LENDER CHECKLIST

- ☐ Pay stubs from the last 30 days
- ☐ W-2s and tax returns from the last two years
- ☐ Two months of bank and asset statements
- ☐ Photo ID
- ☐ Details on current debts and monthly payments
- ☐ Gift letter, if family is helping with the down payment

MICHIGAN TIP

Property taxes reset after a sale. In Michigan, a home's taxable value "uncaps" the year after it sells, so your taxes may be noticeably higher than what the current owner pays.

We'll help you estimate the real number before you write an offer, so your monthly payment has no surprises.

STEP 03 · HOME SEARCH

Know what *matters most*.

Before you start scrolling, list your needs (the deal-breakers) and your wants (the nice-to-haves). It keeps you focused and helps us find the right homes faster.

MY NEEDS

MY WANTS

Searching strategically online

USE FILTERS, LIGHTLY

Don't filter so tightly that you miss great homes. Widen your map and price range a little beyond your comfort zone and let your needs list guide you.

TAKE A VIRTUAL STROLL

Photos can be deceiving. A quick look at Google Street View shows you the street, the neighbors and the surrounding area.

SEND US YOUR LIST

We'll set up MLS alerts so you see new listings first, then call listing agents to learn history, interest and seller motivation.

STEP 03 · HOME SEARCH

Making the most of *your showings*.

You're so ready to get inside those homes! Go in excited, but also calm, cool and with your thinking cap on.

REVIEW YOUR LIST FIRST

Revisit your needs, wants and budget before each showing. Take photos and videos to jog your memory later.

LOOK PAST THE DECOR

Furniture and staging leave with the seller. Focus on what can't be changed easily: layout, light, systems and structure.

LOVE THE LOT AND LOCATION

You can change the paint, but not the lot or the location.
We'll also help you see how the home compares to its neighbors.

TAKE YOUR TIME

If a home makes a great first impression, tell us and stay a while. This is one of the largest purchases you'll ever make.

SHOWING SCORECARD

[illegible]

STEP 04 · OFFER & CONTRACT

An offer that *stands out*.

So you've found "the one." We'll pull recent comparable sales and talk strategy with you, then build an offer designed to win on more than price alone.

- ◇ **Include a strong pre-approval** (or proof of funds) from a reputable lender that shows you're qualified and ready.
- ◇ **Lead with your best price.** You may only get one shot. We'll use comps and current trends to find a number sellers take seriously.
- ◇ **Show commitment** with a solid earnest money deposit and a clear, confident timeline.
- ◇ **Be flexible where you can.** Accommodating the seller's preferred closing or move-out date can tip the scales.
- ◇ **Keep contingencies purposeful.** Protect yourself where it matters most, like the inspection, without cluttering the offer.

We keep offers professional and let our agent-to-agent relationships do the talking. Personal "love letters" to sellers are discouraged under fair housing guidance.

We're under contract. Now what?

- ◇ We'll email you a summary of every key date and deadline in your purchase agreement.
- ◇ You'll deposit earnest money and finalize your loan application and rate lock with your lender.
- ◇ We'll schedule inspections right away so we have time to negotiate before the inspection period ends.

STEP 05 · DUE DILIGENCE

Inspections & insurance.

What is a home inspection?

A licensed inspector evaluates the home's structure and systems and gives you a written report. We recommend being there so you can ask questions and learn about your future home.

What is the inspection period?

Your purchase agreement sets a window, often 7 to 10 days, to complete inspections. If issues come up, you can ask the seller to make repairs, offer a credit, or reduce the price. If you can't reach an agreement, you can typically cancel within that window and have your earnest money returned.

The home seems fine. Do I really need one?

Some of the costliest problems are the hardest to spot: leaks, foundation issues, poor ventilation, faulty wiring and aging roofs. An inspection gives you the facts before you commit.

TIP

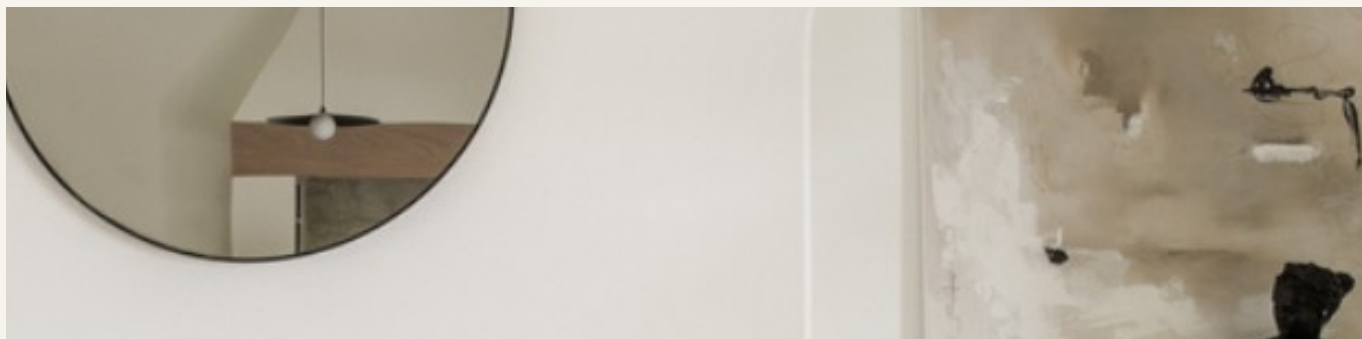
Schedule every inspection immediately after acceptance. The sooner we have reports, the more room we have to negotiate.

COMMON ADD-ONS IN WEST MICHIGAN

- ◇ Radon testing
- ◇ Well and septic
- ◇ Sewer scope
- ◇ Wood-destroying insects
- ◇ Chimney and fireplace

Homeowners insurance

If you're financing, your lender will require insurance before closing. Start shopping quotes as soon as you're under contract. Insurers may ask about the roof's age, the electrical panel or other items from the inspection, so we'll share reports as needed to keep everything on track.



STEP 06 • CLOSING

Almost *home*.

We're so close to the closing table! Here's what happens behind the scenes:

Appraisal

Your lender orders an appraisal to confirm the home's value. If it comes in below the purchase price, we'll head back to the negotiating table to find a solution.

Final loan approval

Over the next 30 to 45 days your lender finalizes the loan. Avoid job changes, big purchases, new credit cards or new loans until after closing, as any of these can change your approval.

Title work

The title company searches public records for liens, judgments, easements, unpaid taxes or other issues, then issues title insurance. In Michigan, the seller typically pays for the owner's policy and the buyer pays for the lender's policy.

Survey

A survey maps boundaries and shows any encroachments. It's optional in many Michigan purchases, but can be worth it for larger lots, lake properties or fences near the line. We'll help you decide.

Clear-to-close!

The magic words. Your underwriter has approved everything needed to fund the loan, and all that's left is signing.

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM WIRE FRAUD

Scammers target real estate closings. Before wiring any money, call the title company at a phone number you've verified independently. We will never email you wiring instructions or changes to them.



STEP 06 · CLOSING

Closing *day!*

You've received your clear-to-close and we've scheduled the signing. Here are answers to the questions we hear most:

When do we do the final walk-through?

Usually within 24 hours of closing. It's your chance to confirm agreed-upon repairs are complete and nothing has changed since you were under contract.

Where is closing, and who will be there?

In Michigan, closings usually happen at the title company. You can expect you, us, and a closing agent. Sellers often sign separately.

What should I bring?

A valid photo ID and your funds to close, either by a verified wire or a cashier's check, as directed by the title company. We'll let you know about anything else specific to your purchase.

What will I do?

Stretch those fingers and get ready to sign, sign, sign. The closing agent will explain each document. Ask questions anytime. Once the last page is signed and the loan funds, the keys are yours!



AFTER YOU MOVE IN

Welcome *home.*

Congratulations, homeowner! A few important to-dos for your first weeks:

- ☐ **Property Transfer Affidavit.** Michigan requires new owners to file this with the local assessor within 45 days. Your title company often helps, but confirm it's done.
- ☐ **Principal Residence Exemption.** If this is your primary home, file Form 2368 with your township or city to lower your school property taxes. Deadlines are June 1 or November 1, depending on the tax season.
- ☐ **Change the locks** and reset garage, keypad and alarm codes.
- ☐ **Transfer utilities** and set up internet, trash and any well or septic service.
- ☐ **Update your address** with USPS, the Secretary of State, your bank and your employer.
- ☐ **Save your closing documents** in a safe place. You'll want them at tax time and when you sell someday.
- ☐ **Test smoke and CO detectors** and note your furnace filter size and water shutoff location.

WE'RE STILL YOUR AGENTS

Need a painter, plumber or landscaper? Curious what your home is worth? Our relationship doesn't end at closing. Reach out anytime for trusted local referrals and market updates.



GRESHAM
REALTY

Thank *you.*

Thank you for trusting us with the purchase of your home. We're honored to represent you and to guide you through every step, and our goal is for you to feel comfortable and confident from the first showing to the final signature.

Have a question? Call or text us anytime. We're always happy to help.

Austin & Traci

CALL OR TEXT

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EMAIL

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WEB

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