

ROOTED IN MARYLAND

BEFORE YOU LIST

What Every Homeowner Should Do Before Selling

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Seller's Guide | 2025 to 2026 Edition

HOC REALTOR® Workforce and Affordable Housing

As a Housing Opportunity Certified (HOC) REALTOR®, I specialize in helping Maryland homeowners get the most out of their sale. I created this guide to walk you through every step you should take before your home hits the market so you can sell with confidence, attract serious buyers, and close on your terms.

Selling a home is one of the biggest financial decisions you will ever make. In my experience, the sellers who prepare thoroughly before listing consistently get stronger offers, shorter days on market, and smoother closings. This guide gives you the complete roadmap.

1 KNOW YOUR NUMBERS FIRST

Before you do anything else, get clear on your financial picture. This is where every successful listing starts, and it shapes every decision that follows.

Request a Comparative Market Analysis (CMA)

I provide every seller with a detailed CMA at no cost. This shows you what similar homes in your neighborhood have sold for recently, what is currently active, and what expired without selling. This is the foundation of your pricing strategy.

Know Your Mortgage Payoff

Contact your lender to get an exact payoff amount. This is the minimum your sale needs to cover before you see any proceeds. Factor in any prepayment penalties and request a 30-day and 60-day payoff figure to cover your likely closing window.

Understand Your Net Proceeds

Work with me to estimate your net sheet before listing. This accounts for your payoff, agent commissions, transfer taxes, title fees, and any seller concessions. You want to know your walk-away number before the first buyer ever walks through the door.

Check Your Equity Position

If you have built substantial equity, you may have flexibility on price and terms that other sellers do not. If equity is tight, we plan accordingly and make sure your pricing is precise from day one.

2 DECLUTTER AND DEPERSONALIZE

Buyers need to be able to picture themselves living in your home. That becomes much harder when your personal belongings, family photos, and years of accumulated items fill every room. This is the step most sellers underestimate, and it is one of the highest-return things you can do.

- › Clear countertops in the kitchen and bathrooms down to the essentials only
- › Remove at least one-third of items from every closet so they read as spacious
- › Pack away family photos, personal collections, and anything that signals a specific lifestyle
- › Clear out furniture that makes rooms feel crowded; less is almost always more for showings
- › Organize the garage, basement, and attic so buyers see usable space rather than storage chaos

- › Remove pet items from visible areas during showings including beds, bowls, and toys

I often tell my sellers to think of this as your first move. You are going to pack this stuff anyway. Doing it now gives your home its best shot at a fast, top-dollar sale.

3 DEEP CLEAN AND FRESHEN UP

A spotless home signals to buyers that it has been well maintained. This is one of the most cost-effective investments you can make before listing. I recommend a professional deep clean for every seller I work with.

Professional Deep Clean

Hire a professional cleaning crew for a top-to-bottom clean including baseboards, inside cabinets, window tracks, ceiling fans, light fixtures, and grout lines. Budget \$200 to \$500 depending on home size.

Carpets and Flooring

Steam clean all carpets. If carpets are badly worn or stained, replacement may deliver a return that far exceeds the cost. Hardwood floors that are dull should be cleaned and buffed or refinished.

Windows

Clean all windows inside and out. Natural light sells homes, and grimy windows cut it in half. This detail gets noticed immediately by buyers.

Odors

This is critical and often overlooked by sellers because they have become nose-blind to their own home. Ask a trusted friend to give you an honest assessment. Address pet odors, cooking smells, and mustiness before any buyer steps through the door.

Paint Touch-Ups

Walk every room and touch up scuffs, nail holes, and worn areas. If walls are a bold or unusual color, consider a neutral repaint. Fresh paint has one of the best returns of any pre-listing investment.

4 COMPLETE REPAIRS AND UPDATES

Buyers will hire inspectors, and inspectors will find issues. I always recommend addressing known issues before listing rather than after a buyer's inspection, when repairs become a negotiating lever that almost always costs sellers more than the fix itself.

Priority Repairs to Address Before Listing

Roof and Gutters

Have your roof inspected if it is more than 15 years old. Clean gutters and downspouts and confirm they drain properly away from the foundation.

HVAC Systems

Replace filters. Have your heating and cooling systems serviced and obtain documentation. Buyers find maintenance records reassuring and they reduce negotiating friction.

Plumbing

Fix all dripping faucets, running toilets, and slow drains. Check under sinks for any evidence of past leaks and address water stains.

Electrical

Replace any non-functioning outlets, switches, or fixtures. If your panel is older, have it assessed. Outdated electrical is a common inspection flag.

Water Heater

Know the age of your water heater. If it is older than 10 years, budget for a potential credit or proactive replacement.

Doors and Windows

Ensure all doors open, close, and lock properly. Repair or replace broken window seals that show fogging between panes.

Smart Updates That Add Value

Not every update pays off equally. Here are the improvements I consistently see deliver the strongest return for Maryland sellers:

UPDATE	RETURN	MY TAKE
Kitchen hardware and fixtures	High ROI	Replace dated cabinet pulls, faucets, and light fixtures for a fresh look at low cost
Bathroom vanity lighting	High ROI	Updated lighting modernizes a bathroom without a full renovation
Fresh neutral paint throughout	High ROI	One of the best investments per dollar before any listing
Garage door replacement	Very High ROI	Consistently ranks among the top national returns on investment
Full kitchen renovation	Low ROI	Rarely recouped in a sale; cosmetic updates are smarter
Luxury master bath remodel	Low ROI	Buyer preferences vary too much to justify full remodel costs

5 MAXIMIZE CURB APPEAL

Buyers form their first impression before they ever step inside. Studies consistently show that curb appeal influences offer decisions significantly. In my experience, the exterior of your home sets the emotional tone for everything that follows. Do not let buyers arrive skeptical before they even open the front door.

- › Power wash the driveway, walkways, siding, and front porch
- › Mow, edge, and fertilize the lawn and pull all visible weeds
- › Trim overgrown shrubs and trees, especially those blocking windows or the entry
- › Plant fresh seasonal flowers or add potted plants near the entrance for color
- › Repaint or replace the front door; it is the focal point of every exterior photo
- › Replace or polish house numbers, exterior light fixtures, and the mailbox
- › Clean or replace the doormat and add simple staging to the front porch if space allows
- › Remove all vehicles, trash cans, garden hoses, and clutter from the driveway and yard
- › Repair any cracked walkways, steps, or fence sections visible from the street

6 STAGE YOUR HOME TO SELL

Staging is not about decorating. It is about helping buyers emotionally connect with your home as their next home. Staged homes sell faster and for more money. I work with my sellers to stage effectively whether we use professional stagers or a thoughtful DIY approach.

Define Every Room's Purpose

Every room should communicate a clear purpose. A cluttered spare room that doubles as a home office and storage space should become one thing. Buyers buy square footage, and ambiguous rooms feel smaller than they are.

Arrange Furniture for Flow

Pull furniture away from walls and arrange it to create conversation areas and clear traffic paths. Proper furniture placement makes rooms feel larger and more intentional.

Layer Lighting

Replace any burned-out bulbs throughout the entire home. Use consistent warm white bulbs for a cohesive look. Add lamps to any dark corners. Bright, well-lit homes photograph better and feel more welcoming during showings.

Add Finishing Touches

Fresh white towels in bathrooms, a simple centerpiece on the dining table, a bowl of fresh fruit in the kitchen, and new bedding in the master bedroom are low-cost details that make a significant impression in photos and in person.

Consider Professional Staging

For vacant homes or homes that need a design lift, professional staging is one of the strongest investments a seller can make. I can connect you with trusted stagers in the Maryland market who deliver excellent results at competitive rates.

7 GET A PRE-LISTING INSPECTION

This is one of the most valuable things I recommend to every seller, and it is still one of the most underused tools in the Maryland market. A pre-listing inspection typically costs \$300 to \$500 and can save you thousands.

Here is why I recommend it: when a buyer's inspector finds issues after you are under contract, those findings become negotiating leverage. Buyers ask for repairs, credits, or price reductions at a moment when you are emotionally and financially committed to the deal. A pre-listing inspection eliminates that vulnerability.

Control the Narrative

You discover issues on your schedule, not under contract pressure. You can fix them, disclose them, or price them in deliberately.

Reduce Deal Fall-Through Risk

The majority of failed contracts in Maryland involve inspection disputes. Removing surprises dramatically reduces this risk.

Build Buyer Confidence

Providing a clean pre-listing inspection report to buyers signals transparency and builds trust. Confident buyers make stronger offers.

Negotiate from Strength

When buyers know the condition is documented and disclosed, they have less room to ask for concessions after going under contract.

8 PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND MARKETING

More than 97 percent of buyers begin their home search online. Your photos are your first showing. I invest in professional photography for every listing because it directly impacts how quickly your home sells and at what price.

Professional Photography

I always hire a professional real estate photographer for my listings. Phone photos simply do not compete. Professional images with proper lighting, composition, and editing make your home look its best and drive significantly more showing requests.

Aerial and Drone Photography

For homes with notable lot size, location advantages, or exterior features, drone photography provides context that ground-level photos cannot. I use drone coverage whenever it adds value to the story of the home.

Video Walkthrough or 3D Tour

Matterport 3D tours and video walkthroughs allow out-of-area buyers to experience your home remotely and arrive at showings already emotionally invested. I offer virtual tours as part of my listing package.

Floor Plans

Including a floor plan in your listing helps buyers understand the layout and remember your home after seeing multiple properties. It is a small detail that sets professional listings apart.

My Marketing Approach

Listing on the MLS is the starting point, not the strategy. Here is what I do to make sure your home reaches the right buyers:

- › MLS listing with professional photos, full description, and all key features highlighted
- › Syndication to Zillow, Realtor.com, Redfin, Homes.com, and all major search platforms
- › Targeted social media advertising to buyers actively searching in your price range and area
- › Email marketing to my database of active buyers and buyer's agents in the Maryland market
- › Open house strategy to generate foot traffic and create competitive urgency
- › Yard signage, directional signs, and neighborhood-level marketing as appropriate
- › Network outreach to top buyer's agents in the market before the listing goes live

9 UNDERSTAND YOUR LEGAL DISCLOSURES

Maryland law requires sellers to disclose known material defects and certain conditions about the property. These are not optional, and failing to disclose properly can expose you to significant legal liability even after closing. I walk every seller through the disclosure process carefully.

Maryland Residential Property Disclosure and Disclaimer Statement

Maryland sellers must complete this state-mandated form. You have the option to provide a full disclosure of known conditions or to sell the property 'as is' with a disclaimer. I will help you understand the pros and cons of each approach for your situation.

Lead Paint Disclosure

For homes built before 1978, federal law requires a lead paint disclosure and the buyer must be given an EPA-approved pamphlet. Maryland has additional lead paint laws that may require testing or certification. I handle this documentation as a standard part of every pre-1978 listing I manage.

HOA Disclosures

If your home is in a homeowners association, you are required to disclose this and provide governing documents, meeting minutes, and financial statements to buyers. Request these from your HOA management company as soon as you decide to list.

Known Defects

Any material defects you are aware of must be disclosed regardless of whether you plan to repair them. This includes past flooding, structural issues, roof leaks, HVAC failures, and anything else that would materially affect a buyer's decision. Disclosure protects you and builds trust with buyers.

10 PRICE IT RIGHT FROM DAY ONE

Pricing is the single most powerful lever you have as a seller, and it is also the one that causes the most costly mistakes. I have seen sellers leave tens of thousands of dollars on the table by pricing too low, and I have seen sellers sit on the market for months by pricing too high. The right price is both strategic and data-driven.

The Cost of Overpricing

Overpriced homes sit on the market. Days on market accumulate and become visible to buyers and agents. A stale listing signals something is wrong, even if the only thing wrong was the original price. Price reductions attract low offers because buyers sense urgency and weakness. You almost always net less from an overpriced listing than you would have from a correctly priced one from day one.

The Power of Competitive Pricing

A home priced at or just below market value generates more showings, more offers, and in a healthy market, can produce offers above asking price through competition. I have consistently seen competitively priced homes sell for more than sellers expected because buyer competition drives the price up naturally.

What the CMA Tells Us

Your Comparative Market Analysis accounts for location, square footage, condition, age, upgrades, and recent comparable sales. I go beyond simple averages and analyze absorption rates, price-per-square-foot trends, and current buyer demand to land on a price that positions your home to win.

PRICING FACTOR	WHAT I LOOK AT
Recent Comparable Sales	Homes sold within 0.5 miles in the past 90 days, adjusted for condition and features
Active Competition	What buyers are choosing between right now; your direct competition
Expired Listings	Homes that failed to sell; these define where pricing goes wrong

Days on Market Trends	How fast is the market moving in your price band and neighborhood
Absorption Rate	How many months of inventory exist; determines buyer vs. seller market conditions
Seasonal Demand	Maryland buyer activity peaks spring through early summer; timing affects strategy

11 YOUR PRE-LISTING CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to track your progress. My goal is to have every item checked before your home goes live on the market.

Financial Preparation

Request a Comparative Market Analysis from your agent
Obtain your mortgage payoff amount
Review your estimated net proceeds sheet
Confirm your target listing and closing timeline

Condition and Repairs

Schedule a pre-listing home inspection
Address all priority repairs identified
Service HVAC system and replace filters
Touch up paint throughout interior and exterior
Clean or replace carpets and floors as needed

Declutter and Clean

Remove at least one third of items from every room
Pack away personal photos and collections
Hire a professional cleaning crew for deep clean
Clean all windows inside and out
Address any pet or cooking odors

Curb Appeal

Power wash exterior surfaces, driveway, and walkways
Mow, edge, and refresh landscaping
Repaint or replace front door

	Replace or clean exterior fixtures and house numbers
	Stage front porch and entry area

Staging and Photography

	Define a clear purpose for every room
	Arrange furniture for flow and spaciousness
	Replace all burned-out bulbs with warm white
	Add finishing touches: fresh towels, simple decor
	Professional photography and video scheduled

Legal and Administrative

	Complete Maryland Property Disclosure or Disclaimer
	Gather lead paint disclosure materials if applicable
	Request HOA documents if in a homeowners association
	Locate survey, permits, and appliance warranties
	Review and sign listing agreement with your agent

READY TO LIST? LET'S TALK.

If this guide gave you a clearer picture of what it takes to sell well, I would love to be the one who helps you do it. As an HOC-certified REALTOR®, I bring specialized knowledge, a proven marketing system, and a genuine commitment to getting you the best outcome possible.

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Let's talk. Schedule a free seller consultation and I will walk you through your home's value, your preparation plan, and exactly what to expect from list to close.

Disclaimer: *This guide is for informational purposes only and reflects general best practices as of 2025 to 2026. Maryland real estate laws, disclosure requirements, and market conditions are subject to change. Always verify current legal requirements with a licensed Maryland attorney or real estate professional before making financial decisions. I am always happy to help you navigate this process.*