CREDIT TO KEYS™

# 5 Steps to Your First Property

The short version of the path — so you can see the whole thing before you commit to anything.

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28+ years in real estate · 8 properties

Credit rebuilt from the 400s to the 700s

Built on a public servant's salary

Education & coaching only

# Before you look at a single house

Most people start by browsing listings. That's the fun part, and it's the wrong part. Lenders decide whether you buy — so you start where the lender looks.

## 1 Find out what the lender actually sees

Not the score in your banking app. The real report, all three bureaus, in writing.

- Pull all three reports free at **annualcreditreport.com** — the only federally authorized site.
- Write down every account: balance, limit, status, and the date of any late payment.
- Mark anything that is *wrong* — an account that isn't yours, a balance already paid, a late that never happened. You have a legal right to dispute errors yourself, free, under the Fair Credit Reporting Act.
- Mark anything that is *right but ugly*. Those don't get disputed. Those get outgrown.

> **The number that moves fastest:** utilization — what you owe on a card versus its limit. Paying a card from 90% down to under 30% can move a score in one or two billing cycles. No letter, no service, no fee. This is usually the cheapest points you will ever buy.

## 2 Build the down payment on purpose

"I'll save what's left over" is not a plan. Nothing is ever left over.

- Pick a target date and work backwards to a weekly number, then automate it out of your check before you see it.
- Keep it in a separate account you don't carry a card for.
- Learn what your loan type actually requires — the number in your head is usually higher than the number a lender needs, and low-down-payment programs exist for owner-occupants.
- Leave a reserve on top of the down payment. A house you can buy but can't repair is a problem, not an asset.

> **Do these two at the same time.** Credit takes calendar months no matter how motivated you are — so let it run in the background while the savings stack. That's two to three months you don't lose.

# Now you can go shopping

## 3 Get pre-approved before you fall in love

A pre-approval tells you your real ceiling — and it's the difference between an offer a seller takes seriously and one they skip.

- Talk to more than one lender. Terms differ more than people expect.
- Ask directly how they treat future rental income — some count part of it, and that changes what you qualify for.
- Ask what the loan requires of the property, not just of you. Some loans won't close on a house that needs work.

## 4 Run the numbers before you run the tour

A house either pays for itself or it doesn't, and you can tell from the listing before you ever drive over.

- Estimate rent from what comparable units in that area actually lease for — not what the seller says it "could" rent for.
- Subtract everything: mortgage, taxes, insurance, vacancy, repairs, and management — even if you manage it yourself, because your time is real.
- What's left is your cash flow. If that number is negative, it is not a deal at that price. Walking away is a skill.
- Check the boring things early: roof age, water heater, panel, sewer line. Those are the four that turn a good deal into a bad one.

> **Rent-ready beats cheap.** A house that needs $30,000 of work is only a bargain if you have $30,000 and the weekends. Your first one should be able to take a tenant almost immediately.

## 5 Close, then place a tenant who pays

The property doesn't make money the day you buy it. It makes money the day someone good moves in.

- Screen every applicant the same way, in writing, using the same standard for everyone — that's both smart and required by fair housing law.
- Verify income and rental history. Call the previous landlord, not just the current one.
- Use a written lease that matches your state's law and set up a separate account for rent and deposits.
- Know the housing-voucher process in your county before you need it — it is paperwork and inspections, not mystery, and it is a reliable check once you understand it.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

# That's the whole map

It's five steps. It isn't complicated. But most people stall somewhere between step one and step three — not because they're lazy, but because there's nobody to tell them whether what they're looking at is a good decision or an expensive mistake.

That's the part I do. I've been through all five of these steps eight times, and I did it on a correctional officer's salary with credit in the 400s.

**If we work together, here's what I actually promise:**

- My direct line — you text me, not an assistant.
- Every deal run through my numbers *before* you sign anything.
- The same steps I used eight times, in order, with nothing skipped.

I'm not going to promise you a property. Nobody honest can — the lender gets a vote, the market gets a vote, and so does how hard you work. And if you're looking for someone to do it *for* you, I'm not your guy. I'll tell you that on the call.

## Want to talk it through?

Thirty minutes, no cost, no pitch. We look at where you actually are and what your realistic next step is.

**Book Your Free 30-Minute Consultation**

Or reach me directly — I answer my own phone.

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