SPEND HERE, SKIP THAT

A seller's Guide to Preparing Your Home for Market

27 NORTH REALTY
NAVIGATE HOME



Your complete guide to a market-ready home!

IS YOUR HOME MARKET-READY?

I built this guide for our team of outstanding agents and for you, after years of walking hundreds of homes with sellers before listing day and seeing firsthand what buyers notice, what adds value, and what often isn't worth the expense. Every recommendation here has a purpose: to help you focus your time and money where they are most likely to make a difference. Work through it section by section, and when questions come up, reach out to any member of our trained real estate team. We can help you decide what makes sense for your home, your price range, and your local market.

Shawna Calvert



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START HERE: THE PRE-LISTING INSPECTION

This is the most important financial decision you will make before listing your home. A pre-listing inspection tells you exactly where to spend your money, and where not to. Without it, you are guessing. With it, you are investing strategically in the items most likely to protect your price and prevent a buyer from using their inspection report to renegotiate.

☐ Schedule a Pre-Listing Home Inspection

Before making major pre-listing investments, talk with your agent about whether a pre-listing inspection makes sense for your home. If you do decide to have a prelisting inspection-

Ask your inspector to flag "4-point items" specifically: roof**, HVAC, electrical, and plumbing are what Florida buyers and insurance companies care about most.**

☐ Triage the Report into Three Categories

When the report comes back, sort every item into:
(1) Fix before listing: safety issues, water intrusion, code items, anything that will appear on a buyer's inspection and trigger a price reduction or loan issue.
(2) Disclose and price accordingly: items you choose not to repair.
(3) Ignore: cosmetic or normal wear that every inspector notes and no buyer agent will use as leverage.

☐ Prioritize by ROI, Not by Comfort

Spend money on items that affect a buyer's ability to get financing or insurance first. Then spend on items a buyer will visually register and use to negotiate. Cosmetic staging comes last. It only works when the structural and mechanical story is already clean.

THE PRE-LISTING INSPECTION EXAMPLES

Category	Examples	Why It Matters	Priority
Insurance & Finance Blockers	Roof condition, HVAC age, electrical panels, plumbing leaks	can interfere with a buyer's ability to obtain acceptable insurance or financing	**FIX FIRST**
Visible Red Flags	Ceiling stains, caulk/grout failure, wax seal leaks, pest evidence	Buyers see these and mentally triple the cost to fix	**FIX BEFORE PHOTOS**
Confidence Builders	HVAC service records, dryer vent cleaning, updated filters	Signal that the home has been maintained: shifts negotiating posture	**DO BEFORE LISTING**
Cosmetic Staging	Paint, hardware, décor, landscaping, outdoor furniture	Creates emotional connection and justifies asking price	**DO BEFORE PHOTOS**

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS START FAST

- [ ] **The 7–10 Second Rule**

Buyers decide their interest level before they clear the foyer. Your curb appeal, front entrance and foyer are the first impressions, so give them primary focus and look at them with fresh eyes.

- [ ] **Declutter to Expand**

Pack up 30%–50% of your belongings before photography day. Empty half of every closet and clear every surface. Clutter can make rooms and storage feel noticeably smaller. **Decluttering is one of the highest-impact, lowest-cost steps in this guide.**

- [ ] **The Move-Out Aesthetic**

Stage the home like you've already left. Clear countertops to two items maximum. Remove all personal photos, children's artwork, and name-personalized décor so buyers see the home, not your life in it.

- [ ] **Every Room Needs a Single Purpose**

If a room is being used as a catch-all, assign it one clear identity before photography: guest room, home office, reading room. An undefined room reads as wasted square footage.

- [ ] **Art: Go Big or Take It Down**

Remove all small wall hangings, decorative plates, and collections of framed photos. Replace with one or two large statement pieces hung at true eye level. Center at 57–60 inches from the floor. One oversized piece reads as intentional design. A wall covered in small frames reads as clutter.

Pro Tip:
Thrift stores and HomeGoods are excellent sources for oversized neutral art at low cost.

- [ ] **Edit Décor Down to Almost Nothing**

Clear bookshelves to 30% capacity. Remove all knick-knacks, figurines, souvenir collections, and tabletop clutter. Leave only a few intentional, oversized objects: a sculptural vase, a stack of coffee table books, a single plant. Less is worth more on listing day.

EXTERIOR & CURB APPEAL

☐ Front Door: Paint & Natural Light Strategy

Paint the front door, and consider a bold color that sets your home apart. Give it a good scrub down first, especially around the handle and any electronic keypad. If your door is solid with no glass, consider one with a glass panel, sidelights, or a glass insert kit. Natural light in the entry foyer is one of the most powerful first-impression upgrades.

Pro Tip:
Glass insert kits run $150–$400, no full door replacement needed.

☐ Garage Door

Give it a good scrub, and pressure wash it if necessary. Have any dents removed and replace broken windows. Consider inexpensive hardware enhancements, like decorative handles and hinges, to add charm and character.

☐ The Porch Scrub

Brush down every cobweb and mud dauber nest from ceilings, corners, porch columns, and all light fixtures. Do this again the morning of photography.

☐ Hand-Wash All Entry Hardware

Wipe down the door, entry keypads, door handle, knocker, and mailbox. Replace keypads if numbers are worn or sticky. Buyers touch these and a grimy keypad signals neglect within the first 30 seconds.

☐ Landscaping & Hardscapes

Add fresh dark mulch with clean defined edging. Power wash the driveway, walkways, and siding or stucco. Trim all hedges. Remove any dead or overgrown plants. Edge the lawn the day before photography. Garden gnomes, excessive pots and plants, and yard décor need to go. No yard knick-knacks.

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Exterior & Curb Appeal, cont'd.

Exterior Hardware Update

Replace builder-grade house numbers with modern high-contrast metal numbers in matte black or brushed gold. Replace any dated or rusty exterior light fixtures. Both updates together run under $100 and create an outsized impact in photos.



Roof & Gutters

Soft wash the roof if algae or dark streaks are visible. Clean and reattach any sagging gutters. Drone photography will capture the roof clearly. Buyers and their agents notice a dirty or patchy roof and it triggers inspection anxiety before they ever come inside.



2026 Recommended Interior Paint Colors: Warm Neutrals Only

Alabaster
Sherwin-Williams SW 7008
Warm off-white · walls, trim & ceilings

Accessible Beige
Sherwin-Williams SW 7036
Warm greige · pairs with dark trim

Chantilly Lace
Benjamin Moore OC-65
Crisp bright white · modern airy spaces

Antique White
Sherwin-Williams SW 6119
Creamy ivory · great for older homes

White Dove
Benjamin Moore OC-17
Soft warm white · photography favorite

Drift of Mist
Sherwin-Williams SW 9166
Soft warm gray-beige · works in any light

Multicolored rooms are out. If you have an orange room, a green room and a pink room, paint every room the same neutral color. Buyers attribute a repaint cost far larger than it really is. No buyer offers $5K less to repaint a white interior blue, but if they don't like blue, they'll assume it costs $10K to make it white. A 2,500 sq ft interior can easily be painted professionally for well under $5K, and you can DIY a few odd walls for far less.

KITCHEN & BATH

☐ Hardware Swap

Replace all builder-grade knobs and pulls throughout with Matte Black or Brushed Gold hardware. A relatively inexpensive hardware update can make cabinetry feel substantially more current in photos

☐ Appliance Update: The Stainless Hack

If appliances are functional but visually dated, consider replacing front panels before spending money on full replacements.

☐ Bathroom Staging: Strip It Down

Remove every bath rug in every bathroom. Remove all personal toiletries, shampoo bottles, soaps, and countertop items entirely. Replace with two folded white towels and a single eucalyptus stem. Clear the shower completely: no bottles on the ledge or hanging organizers. A bare, clean bath reads as spa-quality in photography.

Pro Tip:
Hardware and appliance film updates typically return 3–5x their cost.

☐ Clear Out Under the Sink

Every toilet brush, plunger, trash can, cleaning spray, and sponge must be stored under the sink or removed entirely before photography and every showing. Buyers open cabinets. Keep under-sink areas clean and organized too.

☐ Lighting Upgrade

Replace generic overhead fixtures and fluorescent boxes with modern semi-flush mounts or pendants. In bathrooms, replace Hollywood strip bulbs with a sleek bar vanity light in matte black or brushed nickel.

☐ Caulk & Grout

Replace any blackened, peeling, or pink-tinged caulk in every shower and tub. Deep-clean or re-grout darkened tile throughout. Buyers read discolored grout as mold, and mold as a major liability.

INTERIOR STAGING & DETAILING

☐ Windows: Clean Inside & Out

Dirty windows visibly suppress natural light in both photography and showings. Clean every window inside and out including tracks and sills. This is one of the highest-impact, lowest-cost items on this entire list.

☐ Primary Bedroom: Stage It as a Retreat

Fresh neutral bedding, white or warm linen, neatly made. Cleared nightstands with one lamp and one item maximum each. Closet doors closed or, if open, organized. Remove gym equipment, laundry, and work items. This is a top-five room for buyer emotional response.

☐ The Drop Zone: Clear It Completely

The garage entry is often the first interior space buyers see. Every surface must be clear. Remove shoes, bags, coats, keys, mail, chargers, and backpacks, and clear out any evidence of pets too: no hanging leashes, bowls or pet beds. A clean drop zone signals an organized home throughout.

☐ Hide the Broom, Vacuum, Mop & All Cleaning Tools

Every broom, vacuum, Swiffer, mop, and dustpan must be in a closed closet before photography and every showing. Same applies to portable fans, C-PAP machines, chargers, and extension cords. All of these break the finished-home aesthetic immediately.

☐ Hide All Evidence of Pets

Remove food and water bowls, pet beds, kennels, crates, litter boxes, toys, leashes, and pet-related décor before photography and every showing. Pet odor must be addressed: have carpets professionally cleaned and HVAC ducts inspected if any smell is present. **Strong pet odor can quickly become a buyer objection**

Stellar MLS rules prohibit pets in listing photos.

☐ Hide TV Remotes & All Visible Cords

Remove all TV remotes from visible surfaces. Tuck, bundle, or hide every visible cord: power strips, charging cables, TV wires, router cords. Visible cords are distracting in photos and create a cluttered impression in person.

INTERIOR STAGING & DETAILING cont'd.

☐ Scrub Every Door & Door Frame

Yes, this is the third time we've mentioned cleaning doors, and that's how important it is. Wash all interior doors and frames, especially the garage entry door, bathroom doors, and doors near the kitchen. Fingerprint buildup at handle height is nearly universal in lived-in homes, and buyers notice it immediately.

☐ Light Bulb Consistency

Every bulb must work and be the same color temperature: 3000K Warm White throughout. Walk every room with a spare bulb and replace anything burnt out or mismatched. Mixed bulb temperatures photograph poorly and create an unsettled feel in person.

☐ Flooring: Clean, Repair, or Replace

Have carpets professionally cleaned or replaced if heavily worn. Deep-clean tile grout throughout. Darkened grout reads as neglect. Touch up scuffed hardwood. Open floor plans amplify floor quality because it is the first surface buyers scan on entry.

☐ The Home Office Corner

Stage any awkward corner or underused space with a small desk, lamp, and plant to create visible functional square footage. **In 2026, a clearly defined workspace appeals to many buyers**

☐ Professional Deep Clean Before Photography

Hire a professional cleaning crew to complete a full deep clean before photography day. They catch what you miss: baseboards, vent covers, cabinet fronts, inside window tracks, appliance interiors, and ceiling fan blades. A $200–$400 investment that protects a $500,000+ asset.

Schedule photography after the deep clean is complete and the home has had its final staging reset.

Mechanical Trust & Deep Maintenance

Pro Tip:Replace the HVAC filter with the ratin recommended for your system. If a musty odor persists, have a HVAC professional identify the source and fix before listing.

- [ ] **HVAC Detailing**

Wipe down the air handler and surrounding floor and wall. Replace all air filters. If any musty smell occurs when the AC runs, have ducts inspected and treated before listing. HVAC smell is a silent deal-killer. Buyers in Florida register it within 30 seconds of entry.

- [ ] **Vent Restoration**

Remove and wash all ceiling and wall vents to eliminate dust buildup and discoloration. Replacement vents are $3–$8 each and the swap takes minutes. Buyers look up and they notice.

- [ ] **The Utility Room**

Must be spotless. Wipe down the washer and dryer, scrub the floors, and clear all shelving of chemical containers and old boxes. Buyers checking the utility room are evaluating mechanical condition. Make it look serviced and cared for.

- [ ] **Slider Door Glides**

Vacuum and scrub all sliding door tracks so every slider opens with one finger. A sticky, grinding slider is a sensory negative that lingers with buyers.

RED FLAG DEFENSE

- [ ] **The "Ghost" Ceiling Stain**

Fix the leak source first. Then repair and repaint the stain so it is invisible. A visible stain, even a resolved one, triggers inspection anxiety and price negotiations. Buyers always imagine the worst-case repair number.

- [ ] **The "Black Gunk": Toilet Wax Seal**

Fix any leaking toilet wax seals immediately. Black staining at the base of a toilet reads as sewage backup or subfloor damage to buyers and inspectors.

☐ Open Permits: Pull Your History Now

Request your permit history from the county before listing. Open or unpermitted work is one of the most common causes of delayed or failed closings in Florida. Address open permits before a buyer's inspector finds them and uses them as a negotiating weapon. In Hillsborough County, permit searches are available through the county's online portal..Open or unresolved permits can delay a Florida closing. Checking the history early gives you time to address issues before a buyer discovers them

☐ Pest Evidence

Address any visible pest activity before listing. In Florida, WDO inspections are common and may be required by certain loan programs. Ask your agent whether completing one before listing makes sense for your home.

SCENT & SENSORY

☐ The Musty HVAC Test

Run the AC and stand in each room. Any musty, stale, or mildew smell when the air kicks on must be addressed before listing. In Florida, this is the number one scent-based deal-killer.

☐ Pet & Cooking Odor

Avoid cooking strong-smelling food for 24 hours before any showing. Remove all pet odor sources. If needed, have carpets professionally cleaned and use a HEPA air purifier in primary living areas the week before photography.

☐ Subtle Scent Strategy

Use a light diffuser with a neutral scent: clean linen, light citrus, or barely-there eucalyptus. Avoid heavy plug-ins, synthetic sprays, or candles left burning. Strong air freshener signals a cover-up to buyers and can trigger allergies during a showing.

☐ Temperature

Set the thermostat at 72–74°F for every showing. A home that is warm or humid inside raises concern about the AC system, the most expensive mechanical system in a Florida home.

THE BUYER EXPERIENCE

GO THE EXTRA MILE

These are the details that buyers remember and talk about. They cost almost nothing and create a disproportionate emotional impression.

The Thank-You Setup

Leave a small handwritten thank-you note with a few bottles of water and a simple snack on the kitchen counter. Buyers touring multiple homes in Florida heat remember the one that felt welcoming. It is a $10 investment that positions you as the sellers worth working with.

The "What I Love Most About This Home" Sign

Write out three to five things you genuinely love about living in this home: the morning light in the kitchen, the manatees you see from the lanai, the walk to the pool, the community golf cart parade. Place it somewhere visible: the fridge, a corkboard, or the kitchen counter near the Home Book. Buyers cannot get this from the MLS. It creates an emotional bridge that competing listings do not have.

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YOUR INVESTMENT SNAPSHOT

Estimated ranges are examples only. Actual costs vary by home, contractor, materials and market

- [ ] **Exterior Hardware Update: Under $100**

New house numbers and updated light fixtures create an outsized impact in photos for a minimal spend, one of the best ROI moves in this whole guide.

Note: Bigger-ticket items, such as your pre-listing inspection, pest treatment, painting, landscaping, and carpet cleaning, vary by your home's size and condition. Ask me for trusted vendor referrals and we'll build your exact number together.

- [ ] **Hardware Swap: $150–$400**

Replacing builder-grade cabinet and vanity hardware with Matte Black or Brushed Gold photographs like a $10,000 renovation.

- [ ] **Vent Restoration: $3–$8 Per Vent**

Buyers look up. Dusty, discolored, or mismatched vents stand out immediately, and the swap only takes minutes.

- [ ] **Professional Deep Clean: $200–$400**

helps protect the presentation of one of your largest asset. A professional crew catches what you miss: baseboards, vents, cabinet fronts, and appliance interiors.

- [ ] **Showing-Day Extras: About $10 Per Showing**

A handwritten thank-you note, water, a snack, and your "what I love about this home" sign. Buyers remember the home that felt welcoming. It's the emotional bridge competing listings don't have.

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YOUR LISTING PREP TIMELINE

☐ Step 1: Right Away

Decide with your agent whether a pre-listing inspection makes sense for your home. Most sellers don't need a whole-home or WDO (termite) inspection ahead of time, but a clean inspection report can be a great sales tool to hand a buyer.

Note: Your title company runs a permit check as part of closing, so there's no need to pull your permit history ahead of time. If you know of an open permit, tell your agent early.

☐ Step 2: Make Your Fix List

If you had an inspection, sort every item into Fix Before Listing, Disclose & Price Accordingly, or Ignore. Either way, start with anything that could block a buyer's financing or insurance.

☐ Step 3: 1–2 Weeks Before Photography

Declutter and depersonalize, handle curb appeal, complete kitchen and bath staging, and detail the HVAC, vents, and utility room.

☐ Step 4: 24–48 Hours Before Photography

Professional deep clean, final window wash, a walk-through with a spare bulb for every room, and a final porch scrub and mulch touch-up.

☐ Step 5: Every Showing

Set the thermostat to 72–74°F, light scent, thank-you note and snack ready, your "what I love about this home" sign visible, and every trace of pets, cords, and personal items tucked away.

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You are not doing this alone!



The most important part of your home selling experience is...YOU!

This roadmap exists because I have walked hundreds of homes before listing day and I know exactly which details move buyers and which ones cost sellers money at the negotiating table. Every item in this guide has earned its place. Work through it, reach out when questions come up, and trust the process. When we get to closing day, you will understand why each step mattered.

Reach out **Today** and let 27North Realty help you get started!

Every home and market is different. These recommendations are general guidance. Before making major repairs or improvements, consult your real estate professional and the appropriate licensed contractors, inspectors, insurance or lending professionals.

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