
THE 2026 BUYER'S GUIDE

Tampa Bay New Construction Buyer's Guide & Checklist

How to choose the right community, compare builder incentives, understand CDD fees, and avoid the costly mistakes — from a local Realtor who represents *you*, not the builder.

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READ THIS FIRST

Buying new construction is different — and that's where buyers lose money

New construction can be a fantastic buy: modern building codes, lower insurance, energy efficiency, warranties, and builder incentives that can total \$25,000 to \$50,000 or more. But it is still a real estate transaction with contracts, deadlines, lender tie-ins, upgrade traps, and inspections most buyers don't know to ask for. This guide walks you through the decisions that actually move money — and the one step that protects all of them.

1. The #1 rule: get your own agent before you register

The friendly agent in the model home works **for the builder** — their job is to protect the builder's pricing and terms, not yours. Here's what most buyers don't realize: in almost every case the builder has already budgeted for a buyer's agent commission, so bringing your own representation usually costs you **nothing** and does **not** reduce your incentives.

The catch: you typically must be represented from your **first visit or registration**. Register yourself, and you may lose the right to bring an agent later. So the very first step — before you tour a single model home — is to line up representation.

Bring this to your first visit

Tell the on-site agent up front: "I'm working with Erik Michor." That one sentence preserves your representation and your incentives.

2. Compare incentives the right way (the headline isn't the real number)

Builders prefer giving incentives over cutting price, because a lower recorded price becomes a comparable that affects the whole community. That means there's often more room than you think — the question is which *form* of savings is worth the most to *you*.

Incentive type	Best when	Watch for
Rate buydown	You finance most of the purchase and keep the loan for years	Usually requires the preferred lender — compare their rate & fees to an outside quote
Closing-cost credit	Cash to close is your tightest constraint	Often lender-tied; doesn't lower your long-term payment
Free upgrades	The option is structural or hard to add later	Cosmetic upgrades rarely return their cost at resale

Price reduction

You pay cash, put a lot down, or may sell/refi soon

Hardest to get — builders resist setting a comp

The move: convert every offer into two numbers — total cash to close and true monthly payment — then weigh them against how long you'll keep the home. That apples-to-apples view almost always makes the better choice obvious.

3. Budget the TRUE monthly cost (CDD + HOA, not just price)

In most new master-planned communities, the sticker price is only part of the monthly number. Two nearly identical homes can carry very different costs depending on the community and section. Budget for all of it:

- **Mortgage (principal + interest).** Driven by price, rate, and any builder buydown.
- **CDD fee.** A Community Development District assessment billed with your property taxes — separate from HOA, and it varies by section. Always request the exact figure.
- **HOA dues.** Funds amenities and common areas (and sometimes internet in lagoon communities).
- **Property taxes.** County millage on assessed value; homestead exemption can reduce it.
- **Insurance.** Get a real quote during due diligence — newer code-built homes often cost less to insure.

Free tool

Use the CDD Fee Calculator at [MyFloridaHomeMarket.com](https://www.MyFloridaHomeMarket.com) to estimate the real monthly number before you fall in love with a floor plan.

4. Inspect your brand-new home (yes, really)

“New” does not mean “flawless.” Homes are built fast by many subcontractors, and defects are common even from good builders. New construction gives you inspection opportunities a resale never does. Do all three:

Pre-drywall (frame) inspection — after rough-ins, before insulation and drywall. Your only chance to see inside the walls.

Final inspection — right before your walkthrough and closing, while the builder is still responsible.

11-month warranty inspection — near the end of the 1-year builder warranty, to document anything that has settled or failed. Commonly skipped, and it costs buyers money.

YOUR STEP-BY-STEP

New Construction Buyer Checklist

Print this page and check off each step as you go.

Before you tour

- Line up your own buyer's agent (before registering anywhere)
- Get pre-approved so you know your real budget and monthly comfort zone
- List your must-haves: schools, commute, lot type, timeline

Choosing a community

- Compare 2–3 communities on total monthly cost — not sticker price
- Request the exact CDD and HOA for the specific home and section
- Confirm the assigned schools for the exact address
- Check the builder's reputation, warranty, and recent buyer reviews

Evaluating the deal

- Get the full written incentive package and read the conditions
- Compare the preferred lender's Loan Estimate to an outside lender
- Prioritize structural / hard-to-add-later upgrades over cosmetic ones
- Review deposit, change-order, and cancellation terms

Building & closing

- Schedule a third-party pre-drywall inspection
- Schedule a third-party final inspection before closing
- Complete the builder walkthrough; get the punch list in writing with dates
- Get a homeowners insurance quote for the specific address
- Calendar the 11-month warranty inspection before the warranty expires

LET'S TALK

Thinking about a new construction home in Tampa Bay?

Talk to me **before** you register at a model home. I'll represent you from your side of the table, compare the full package, coordinate your inspections, and help you avoid the costly mistakes — at no cost to you in most cases.

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