BARNARD GROUP
WASHINGTON

PIERCE COUNTY, WASHINGTON

The home buyer guide.

More choices. A clear payment plan.
A smarter way home.



A NOTE FROM JOSH

Your next home. Your life. Your plan.

You have more choices, but a higher payment can make the next step feel harder. You deserve a plan that brings the home, the numbers and the timing together.

Josh Barnard

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Tap a section to jump ahead. Start with the examples that fit your move; there is nothing you need to print or fill in.

01 / THE MARKET

More choice. Keep your standards.

Pierce County residential homes and condos | September 2026

+21.6%

Active listings, year over year [1]

3.79

Months of inventory [1]

7.40%

National 30-year fixed mortgage average | October 15, 2026 [2]

More homes to compare. Different leverage on each one.

A home with strong demand can still receive competing offers. Compare its price, condition and alternatives before choosing your approach. More county inventory does not make every listing a bargain.

Inventory is not a forecast of selling time. The national rate is not your lender quote. Figures checked October 15, 2026. Local conditions and lender quotes change.

01 / YOUR TIMING

Buy when your plan works.

Move forward when...

The home fits your needs, the full payment fits your budget and you can keep a cash cushion.

Prepare a little longer when...

You need stronger savings, steadier income or a clearer plan for your current home.

Compare the cost of waiting

Weigh rent, moving needs and savings progress. Future rates, prices and competition can move either way.

You do not need to predict the market. You need a purchase you can sustain if rates do not fall.



01 / MONTHLY COMFORT

Your payment is only part of the picture.

Fictional $550,000 purchase	Monthly amount
Principal & interest	$3,618
Property taxes / home insurance	$575 / $150
Mortgage insurance / HOA	$150 / $100
Estimated housing payment	$4,593
Utilities / maintenance savings	$300 / $400
Total planned monthly spending	**$5,293**

Start with the money left after your housing costs. Leave room for food, transportation, family needs, saving and the things you enjoy.

Illustration only: 5% down, $522,500 loan, 30-year fixed at 7.40%; principal/interest rounded. All other costs are invented allowances, not property quotes. Taxes, insurance, dues and upkeep can increase. Maintenance savings are a budget reserve, not a mortgage charge.

01 / CASH TO CLOSE

Protect your savings after you get the keys.

Fictional example	Amount
5% down on $550,000	$27,500
Assumed closing costs & prepaids	$14,000
Total purchase cash before credits	$41,500
Less earnest money already deposited	-$5,000
Estimated remaining cash to close	**$36,500**

Plan separately for early expenses

Inspections, moving and expenses paid before closing still use cash. Do not count the same cost twice in your lender estimate.

Keep a cushion

Your down payment is one part of the plan. Keep money for repairs, normal upkeep and unexpected changes.

Fictional allowances. Earnest money is credited toward the purchase when applied at closing; it is not an extra down payment. Any buyer-paid brokerage amount must also be included. Your actual Loan Estimate controls your estimate. [3]

01 / FINANCING READINESS

Be ready before the right home.

Get a useful preapproval

Have your lender review income, debts, credit and funds. Ask what still needs approval and when the letter expires.

Explore the right loan

Ask about conventional, FHA, VA and assistance options. Compare eligibility, fees, mortgage insurance and repayment terms.

Keep your plan current

Before changing jobs, opening credit or moving large sums, ask your lender how it affects your approval.

VA loans may offer no down payment for eligible buyers; appraisal, entitlement and lender requirements still matter. Funding fees may apply. [10]



02 / BUYER AGENCY

Know who represents your interests.



Your buyer agent

Your agent owes you loyalty, confidentiality and disclosure of conflicts. They should point you toward specialists when a question goes beyond their expertise. [4]

Your decisions, supported by a team

Ask for help evaluating homes, comparing sales, planning offers and tracking deadlines. Confirm the exact services in your written agreement.

Before sharing your budget or strategy, ask: who do you represent?

A listing agent represents the seller unless a different agency relationship is established. This guide explains the basics; your agreement and current Washington law govern. [5]

02 / YOUR WRITTEN AGREEMENT

Understand the terms before you sign.

Washington requires a services agreement before, or as soon as reasonably practical after, brokerage services begin. Review it early. The statutory buyer default term is 60 days, with the option of a longer term. [5]

Review together	What you want to understand
Who & where	Your appointed broker, service scope and covered properties or area.
Time & exclusivity	Start/end dates and the exclusive or nonexclusive choice.
Compensation	The agreed amount, payment terms and any potential amount you pay.
Agency consent	Any limited dual agency consent and its limits.
Changes & ending	How changes, cancellation and any continuing obligations work.

Ask for the Washington real estate agency pamphlet and time to read it. Keep your signed agreement. Ask questions about any term you do not understand. [5, 6]

02 / COMPENSATION

Know the cost. Know who pays.

Brokerage compensation is negotiable. Your agreement sets what you agree to pay and the terms. Payment can come from the buyer, seller or another permitted source; seller payment is not automatic. Who pays does not determine whom the broker represents. [7]

Fictional compensation example	Amount
Agreed brokerage compensation	$12,000
Seller contribution accepted in the contract	$9,000
Potential buyer-paid difference	$3,000

Resolve the payment plan before you offer

Confirm how contributions are applied, what you could owe and how that fits your available cash. Any change to your agreement needs the proper written approval.

Invented dollar amounts, not a required fee or quote. Actual obligations depend on your agreement, purchase terms and lender rules. Also review whether your broker agrees to show homes with no compensation offer. [7]

02 / LIMITED DUAL AGENCY

When one broker represents both sides.



Washington allows limited dual agency only with written consent from both parties. A limited dual agent cannot advocate terms that favor one party to the other party's detriment. Ask how this changes the advice you receive. [5, 8]

Different agents, same firm

When separate agents in the same firm represent the buyer and seller, each appointed agent represents their own client. The designated broker and any managing broker supervising both act as limited dual agents. [8]

Ask who represents you, who supervises the transaction and what consent you are giving.

03 / SHOP THE WHOLE LOAN

A lower rate can come with a higher upfront cost.

Compare on matching assumptions	Ask this question
Loan type, term & down payment	Are these truly comparable offers?
Rate & lock	Is the rate locked, and until when?
Points & lender fees	What does this rate cost upfront?
APR & five-year comparison	How do the wider borrowing costs compare?
Credits & cash to close	What do I pay now, and over time?

Use written Loan Estimates

Compare quotes from a short time window. Review the monthly payment, cash needed and the five-year cost section together. APR helps compare costs but does not tell the whole story. [3, 9]

Choose the loan that fits your plans and cash position.

03 / FOUR FINANCING TOOLS

Choose the tool for your biggest need.

Your option	What it can do	What to check
Lower price	Reduce purchase cost and financed debt.	Actual payment change and cash needed.
Seller credit	Cover eligible closing costs or approved financing costs.	Loan limits and usable costs; not unrestricted cash.
Discount points	Trade an upfront cost for a lower rate.	Cost, savings and how long you keep the loan.
Temporary buydown	Subsidize payments during an initial period.	Every payment stage and the full later payment.

Keep seller and lender credits separate

A lender credit generally trades a higher rate for lower upfront costs. Ask your lender to price each option in writing. A credit does not automatically lower your rate. [9]

Loan program rules, seller agreement, eligible costs and underwriting control availability. Credits generally cannot replace your required down payment. [3, 9, 11]



03 / A WORKED EXAMPLE

Lower price or help with closing costs?

Same fictional home	No credit	Lower price	With credit
Purchase price	$550,000	$540,000	$550,000
Down payment, 5%	$27,500	$27,000	$27,500
Loan amount	$522,500	$513,000	$522,500
Seller credit	$0	$0	$10,000
Cash needed*	$41,500	$41,000	$31,500
Monthly P&I	$3,618	$3,552	$3,618

The price reduction lowers principal and interest by about $66 a month. The credit preserves $10,000 upfront. Your biggest need helps you choose which request to pursue.

*Total purchase cash before earnest-money credit. Assumes $14,000 eligible closing costs/prepaids in all columns and a 30-year fixed loan at 7.40%, no points. Taxes, insurance, mortgage insurance, HOA and other ownership costs are excluded from P&I. Costs held constant to isolate the tradeoff; actual amounts vary. Credits need lender approval and seller acceptance.

03 / TEMPORARY BUYDOWNS

Know the payment after the subsidy ends.

Fictional 2-1 buydown	Buyer P&I portion
Year 1 - calculated at 5.40%	$2,934 / month
Year 2 - calculated at 6.40%	$3,268 / month
Years 3-30 - full 7.40% note rate	$3,618 / month

The note rate stays at 7.40%

The subsidy covers part of the scheduled payment early on. It does not permanently change the loan rate. Budget for the full payment before committing. [11]

Do not build the plan around refinancing

Refinancing depends on future rates, qualification, equity and costs. Choose a purchase you can carry if refinancing never makes sense.

Illustration only: $522,500 loan, 30 years. Approximate subsidy needed: $12,397; not a lender quote. All figures exclude taxes, insurance, mortgage insurance and HOA. Availability and funding rules vary. Fannie Mae requires qualification at the note rate for eligible loans. [11]

04 / NEGOTIATING ROOM

Look for evidence. Then ask.

Study the alternatives

Compare recent sales, competing homes and the home's price history. Long market time can be a clue, not proof of a discount.

Learn the priorities

Ask about timing, known repairs and verified seller needs. Do not assume a vacant home means a distressed seller.

Make the request count

Lead with the term that helps you most. Keep a clear walk-away point if the home or numbers stop working.



04 / LOCATION & DAILY LIFE

Choose the place that fits your days.



Your daily routine

Test your commute at the times you travel. Consider access to shops, parks, healthcare and the places you use most.

The full cost of the location

Compare taxes, utilities, HOA dues and upkeep. Verify services, restrictions and property-specific hazard information.

Across Pierce County, choose a location that fits your life and budget.

Research schools through district and state resources using your own priorities. Verify boundaries and programs directly. Evaluate each address using current information.

04 / THE HOME TOUR

Look past the beautiful finishes.

Picture ordinary days

Check layout, storage, work space, stairs, parking and outdoor use. Listen to the home and its surroundings.

Notice future costs

Ask about the roof, heating, windows and drainage. A fresh kitchen does not answer questions about the systems.

Bring back the questions

Separate what you observe from what an inspector or specialist needs to verify. A tour is not an inspection.



04 / NEW CONSTRUCTION

An incentive is one part of the offer.



Compare the complete cost

Review base price, lot premium, upgrades, appliances, landscaping, HOA dues and estimated taxes. Ask which advertised incentives require a preferred lender or other conditions.

Understand the contract and timeline

Ask about deposit refunds, completion delays, rate-lock costs, warranty limits and inspection access. Have your agent review the process before you register or sign.

Compare builder financing with an outside lender using the same assumptions.

A model home may include upgrades outside the advertised base price. Ask for the written specifications and terms for the actual home.

04 / YOUR OFFER

Give every term a clear purpose.

Offer term	Your decision
Price & credits	Use comparable sales and a lender-approved payment plan.
Earnest money	Choose an amount you can deliver on time; understand when it is at risk.
Financing & appraisal	Match approval needs and your ability to cover a shortfall.
Inspection & review	Leave time for the checks this property needs.
Closing & possession	Choose dates that fit your financing and move.

In a competitive offer, know the cost of every protection you change.

Contract language and deadlines control your rights. Never assume earnest money is automatically refundable or that any contingency covers every problem.

05 / PURCHASE PROTECTIONS

Understand what each review can reveal.

Your review	What it helps you evaluate
Inspection	Condition and specialist follow-up; an appraisal is not an inspection.
Financing	Whether you can obtain the agreed loan within the contract terms.
Appraisal	Lender valuation; plan for a low value without assuming an automatic exit.
Seller disclosures	Known information and questions to verify independently.
Title & HOA documents	Ownership exceptions, restrictions, dues, reserves and assessments.

Build a deadline plan right away

Ask who tracks each date and how notices must be delivered. Your contract determines when you can request changes or end the purchase.

A protection is useful when you understand and follow its terms.

05 / INSPECTION DECISIONS

When a finding changes the plan.



A cosmetic choice

Worn carpet may fit your budget for later. Decide what you can live with and what you can realistically change.

A larger concern

A roof, moisture or electrical issue may call for specialist review and estimates before a decision.

Choose the next step

Proceed, investigate further, request repairs or a permitted credit, or end the purchase when your contract allows. Some lender or insurance repairs must be completed before closing.

Sellers do not have to accept every request. Keep negotiations within the response windows and notice requirements in your agreement.

05 / LOCAL PROPERTY CHECKS

Check the property behind the address.

Check when relevant	Verify before you commit
Parcel & permits	Match records to the home; investigate additions, access and use restrictions.
Flood, lahar & other hazards	Use official parcel-specific maps and expert advice; city labels are not a hazard assessment.
Insurance	Get a quote early. Confirm coverage, exclusions and any separate policy needed.
Septic, sewer & water	Confirm service, inspections, records and likely repair obligations.
HOA or condominium	Read dues, rules, reserves, insurance and special-assessment information.

A lower price can come with costs you need to understand.

Start with Pierce County parcel and property resources [12], then confirm details with the responsible agency, insurer or specialist. Records and maps can be incomplete and do not replace professional review.

05 / ALREADY OWN A HOME?

Build both moves into one plan.

Sell first

Know your sale proceeds before buying. Plan for temporary housing, storage and another move if needed.

Buy first if qualified

Know the cash, overlapping payments and financing costs. Test a slower sale and lower proceeds.

Use a sale contingency

Tie the purchase to your current sale under agreed terms. Understand seller acceptance, deadlines and fallback options.

Bridge or buy-before-you-sell options can add fees, debt and repayment deadlines. Ask for written terms; availability is not guaranteed.



05 / CONTRACT TO KEYS

A clear path through closing.

01 ## After acceptance

Deliver earnest money on time. Build your lender, inspection and document-review schedule.

02 ## During your reviews

Resolve questions, obtain insurance and keep lender requests moving. Track every contractual deadline.

03 ## Before signing

Review final loan figures and cash needed. Confirm how any approved credit appears.

04 ## Before possession

Complete the final walkthrough. Verify the agreed condition and completed repairs.

05 ## When the home is yours

Signing, funding, recording and possession can happen at different times. Follow the contract for keys and access.

Verify wire instructions by calling escrow at a trusted, independently confirmed number. Treat emailed changes to payment instructions as a reason to stop and verify.

05 / COMMON QUESTIONS

A few answers before your next move.

Should you wait for lower rates?

Compare what works today with the cost and flexibility of waiting. Rates, prices and competition are uncertain.

Can you offer below asking?

Yes. Support the offer with current evidence and the home's alternatives. The seller can decline or counter.

Do you need 20% down?

Not for every loan. Ask about eligibility, mortgage insurance, fees and the full cash needed.

Can the seller pay your closing costs?

You can request eligible costs, subject to seller acceptance and loan limits. Confirm how much credit you can use.

What if the appraisal is low?

Review the contract, lender options and your available cash. Negotiation or cancellation depends on the agreed terms.

What if you never refinance?

Your purchase should still fit at its full scheduled payment. Treat refinancing as a future option.



YOUR NEXT CHAPTER

Make your next move with a clear plan.

Start with your comfortable payment, available cash, preferred areas and timing. The Barnard Group helps you turn those priorities into a thoughtful home search and offer strategy.

Schedule Your Buying Plan Call

Josh Barnard | The Barnard Group

REAL Broker | Puyallup, Orting, Bonney Lake and surrounding Pierce County communities

BarnardGroupRE.com

SOURCES & HELPFUL RESOURCES

Explore the details.

Market and agency information checked October 15, 2026.

1. NWMLS | September 2026 market snapshot
2. Freddie Mac | Weekly mortgage rate benchmark
3. CFPB | Understanding your Loan Estimate
4. Washington | Buyer agent duties, RCW 18.86.050
5. Washington | Agency agreements, RCW 18.86.020
6. Washington | Agency pamphlet, RCW 18.86.120
7. Washington | Compensation, RCW 18.86.080
8. Washington | Limited dual agency, RCW 18.86.060
9. CFPB | Points and lender credits
10. VA | Purchase loan eligibility and benefits
11. Fannie Mae | Temporary interest rate buydowns
12. Pierce County | Parcel and property resources

Educational information, not a loan commitment or legal advice. Financing and contract terms vary. All purchase examples are fictional, with assumptions stated beside them. Confirm current details with your lender, agent and appropriate specialists.

Images are AI-created illustrations of homes and lifestyle settings, not identified listings or verified local properties. Each photo appears once in this guide. Equal housing opportunity.