gambino REALTORS

Real Estate Essentials

Seller's Guide



Introduction



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My name is Margaret “Marge” Bowen. I’m here to educate, facilitate and connect people involved with the most essential part of living – Home. This information will help you navigate the process of selling residential real estate.

I will discuss in detail the aspects involved and what I will do as your agent to represent you to the best of my ability, in adherence to my professional license. If you have any questions don’t hesitate to call, text or email.

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A Little About Me

My professional career began in the animal field, where I spent more than 25 years educating the public, training staff, and advocating for the animals in my care. During that time, I worked as a zookeeper, wildlife rehabilitator, veterinary technician, zoo registrar, zoo curator, and corporate trainer. I earned an A.S. in Zoo Animal Science Technology from Santa Fe Community College Teaching Zoo in Gainesville, Florida, and a B.S. in Zoology from SUNY Oswego.

In 2020, life changes and my desire to be back home on the farm gave my ever-increasing passion for real estate the opportunity to grow. While the subject matter changed, the foundation of my work did not. My years in the animal field taught me that the best decisions come from understanding your options, consulting with fellow professionals, and moving forward together as a team.

Today, that same philosophy guides everything I do as a Real Estate Broker Associate. I've discovered that helping people navigate the complexities of real estate, especially in the small-town, rural, homestead, and farm niche, has become as much of a calling as the animal field. Whether it's explaining contracts, helping someone evaluate acreage, or planning a move with pets and livestock, I believe my job is to educate, communicate clearly, and advocate for my clients so they can make informed decisions at their own pace.
Although my career changed, my experience with animals continues to influence the way I serve my clients. It gives me a unique understanding of the challenges that come with moving pets and livestock while also helping me better serve clients looking for country properties, hobby farms, and homesteads.

My name is Margaret "Marge" Bowen. I am a Real Estate Broker Associate, Animal Husbandry Specialist, and Xennial living in the Midwest. I'm here to educate, facilitate, and connect people involved with the most essential part of living—Home.

Getting Started



Congratulations!

You are about to start the epic adventure of selling residential real estate! Whether this is your first time, you are an experienced investor, or somewhere in the middle I will assist you through each step of the way. Here are the three stages of home selling and detailed list of the selling process.

three stages of
home selling

STAGE 1: PRELISTING PREP
Schedule an appointment
Meet with staging consultant
Discuss the best strategy for selling
Property evaluation
Complete market analysis
Establish sales price
Prepare your home for the market
Complete required paperwork
Execute listing agreement

STAGE 2: ACTIVE ON THE MARKET
Professional photography taken
Marketing campaign started
Submitted to MLS and major websites
Signs installed
Property brochure delivered
Showings scheduled
Keep your home ready for buyers
Showing feedback shared
Review and negotiate offers

STAGE 3: UNDER CONTRACT & CLOSING
Offer accepted
Inspections and disclosures completed
Negotiate any repair requests
Appraisal completed
Contingencies removed
Work with the title company and lender
Final walkthrough
Property closes
Refer friends to us!

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Stage 1: Prelisting Prep

1. Gather Your Information

There are a lot of little things that will need to be readily available for listing information and if potential buyers have questions. Gathering your information into one place will make the start of this journey a whole lot smoother.

Here are some things that I'll need to know:

- Home mechanicals and utility info, including if your appliances are gas or electric and whether they are rented or not.
- Mortgage information.
- Personal property you are willing to leave behind.

For Farms:

- Copy of written leases/rental agreements
- Estoppel Certificate confirming the terms of the lease.
- Written Confirmation from zoning authority.
- Copy of any other subsidy. This may include government, cell tower, windmill or CRP contracts.

2. Set Up a Listing Appointment!

We will set up an appointment for me to come and see your house! Don't worry it doesn't have to be in showing condition. This initial appointment is for me to gather information so I can form a marketing plan that is tailored to your needs. We will take a tour where I may take some photos for my own records (not to share), we will discuss the process, and I'll answer any questions you have.

3. Sign All the Paperwork

In real estate, everything has to be in writing. The paperwork that you'll need to fill out and sign includes your basic information, property, lead (if your house was built before 1978) and radon disclosures, consent forms for photography and dual agency, forms letting us know if you are willing to do a home warranty and if you are going to have an attorney represent you, and your contract with me.

It will feel like a lot, but I'll be there to explain everything. Keep in mind everything is negotiable and my job is to make sure I am representing you to the best of my ability within the scope of my license.

Stage 1: Prelisting Prep

Pricing:

There are several ways to determine what your house might sell for. I will run “Comps” on your property. This meticulous process includes evaluating active, pending, and recent sales of similar properties in your neighborhood. I will go over which properties I chose and why. You can also choose to obtain an independent appraisal. While different appraisers may arrive at slightly different values, I generally expect valuations of the same property to fall within approximately 5–10% of one another when they're based on comparable information and market conditions. Larger differences warrant a closer look at how those values were determined.

If the buyer is financing the purchase, their lender will typically order its own appraisal. I will also provide a spreadsheet showing the cost of closing and an estimate of what your final check might look like.

Property Appraisers

- Courtney Prentice, MAI, SRA | Rally Appraisal | 815.229.3331 | cprentice@rallyappraisal.com | www.rallyappraisal.com
- Caden Prentice | Rally Appraisal | 815.229.3331 | cadenprentice@rallyappraisal.com | www.rallyappraisal.com
- Tony Saladino | Signature Appraisals Inc | 815.315.7005 |
- Aaron Magdziarz | Appraisal Services of Rockford | Does Commercial properties as well | 815.494.0202 | appraisalservicesrfd@tds.net | https://www.appraisalservicesrfd.com/

A Note on “Comps”:

Not all homes are created equal! When determining a property's value, several factors come into play, including location, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, square footage, age, condition, and updates or improvements. Lot size, garages, outbuildings, and other property features can also affect value.

Pricing your home in the right range is important. Buyers often search within specific price brackets, and pricing too high can mean missing buyers who might otherwise be interested in your property. Even buyers willing to negotiate above their original budget may never see your listing if it's outside their search range. The goal is to find a competitive price that attracts the right buyers while maximizing your home's potential value.

4. Get the House Ready

This may seem daunting, but fear not, included is a checklist of things to keep in mind. The biggest thing to remember is to declutter and clean. Make it look like you cared and it will sell itself!

Stage 1: Prelisting Prep

Work on Curb Appeal

The first thing buyers notice about your house is the outside, so start here. Walk toward the street and look at your house to see what kind of first impression buyers are getting.

- Remove clutter. Branches and debris, trash cans, bikes, tools, and toys should all be removed or put away.
- Mow and edge the lawn. Trim trees and shrubs. Make sure they aren't blocking windows or the view of the house.
- Replace, relocate or repaint house numbers.
- Repair, replace or add exterior lighting.
- Add flowers or plants and mulch.
- Repair or add a walkway.
- Paint. You may not need to paint the entire house. A fresh coat or color change on the trim, shutters, front door or garage door may be enough.

Getting the Inside Ready

You'll want the inside of your home to look just as amazing as the outside.

- Declutter. Dispose of, donate or store unnecessary items. Remember, buyers will look everywhere. The less you have to hide or reorganize, the better.
- Minimize personal touches. Consider reducing personal photographs, collections, and decorative items where appropriate. The goal is to help buyers focus on the home's features while keeping the space welcoming.
- Detail clean. Wash walls and baseboards and molding to remove scuff marks and fingerprints. Clean inside cabinets, corners, and window tracks. Every house has those areas that get passed over. Now is the time to make sure they're clean.
- Make small repairs. Potential buyers see burned-out light bulbs, loose handles and doorknobs, and dripping faucets and wonder what else may have been neglected.
- Take a sniff. Weird smells are a major turn-off. Clean, sanitize, or get rid of the source.
- Lock up or relocate valuables.
- Wash windows.
- Paint. If walls are dirty, damaged, or painted an unusual color, a fresh coat of neutral paint may help. Otherwise, repainting usually isn't necessary. Buyers often have their own color preferences and may repaint after moving in anyway.
- Replace damaged or deteriorating caulk and clean grout as needed.

A Note About Staging

Staging doesn't have to mean hiring a professional or renting furniture. Simple changes like rearranging furniture, reducing clutter, and opening up rooms can help buyers envision themselves in the space.
Professional staging services are also available and we'll discuss what makes sense for your property and budget.

What If You're Not Able to Prepare Your Home?

Not every seller has the time, money, or desire to make repairs, update their home, or clean everything out before selling. And that's okay! There are different ways to approach selling a property, depending on your circumstances.
Through Gambino Realtors, I can also explore potential alternatives with Frank Gambino for homeowners who would prefer to sell without making extensive repairs or completely clearing out the property.
We'll discuss your options, including how the property's condition may affect its value, so you can make an informed decision about what works best for you.
Note: Selling "as-is" means the seller isn't providing the standard warranty on the home's systems. If you're unwilling or unable to make repairs, we can make that clear in the listing remarks and contract.

Need help getting your home ready? Let me know what you need assistance with and I can help connect you with a professional contractor to get the job done right.

Stage 2: Active On The Market

5. Marketing Your Property

Professional Photography

First impressions matter, especially online. I arrange for professional photography to showcase your home's best features and help it stand out to buyers browsing listings. Quality photos are one of the most important parts of presenting your property effectively.

MLS Exposure & Online Marketing

As a member of multiple MLS systems covering Northern Illinois and the greater Chicago area, I can give your property broad exposure to real estate agents and their buyers. Your listing can also appear on major real estate websites where buyers are actively searching for homes.

Beyond the MLS, I promote listings through social media, video content, and my professional network. I use a combination of digital marketing, local connections, and targeted outreach to help get your property noticed.

What About Open Houses?

Open houses aren't always the most effective way to attract serious buyers. I prefer to focus on marketing strategies that encourage private showings, but if an open house makes sense for your property, we can certainly discuss it.

Showings & Feedback

Once your property is listed, buyers can request private showings through their real estate agents. You'll receive notifications and have control over approving showing requests and scheduling.

I also use a showing feedback system to gather comments from agents who tour your home. While not every agent responds, the feedback we receive can help us understand buyer reactions and determine whether any adjustments are needed.



6. Prepare for Showings

Once your home is on the market, keeping it ready for buyers can make the showing process much easier. You don't need to keep everything perfect, but a few simple habits can help buyers focus on the property.

Before a Showing

- Keep rooms tidy and put away everyday clutter.
- Open blinds and curtains to let in natural light.
- Make sure kitchens, bathrooms, and floors are reasonably clean.
- Address strong odors without relying on heavy air fresheners.
- Secure valuables, medications, and personal documents.
- Turn on lights where needed, especially exterior lights.
- Keep the lawn mowed, landscaping maintained, and fallen leaves cleared.
- During winter, keep sidewalks, steps, and driveways clear of snow and ice so buyers can safely access the property.
- Plan to leave during showings so buyers can comfortably explore the home.



Selling a Home With Pets

Pets are part of the family, but showings can be stressful for them, too. Whenever possible, arrange for pets to be out of the house during showings. This helps keep your animals safe and allows buyers to tour without distractions.

If your pets must remain at home:

- Keep them securely contained in a kennel or separate room.
- Let me know where they will be, and post a notice on the door.
- Don't rely on buyers or their agents to handle or secure your pets.
- Consider familiar sounds or calming routines to reduce stress.

Keep litter boxes, pet areas, and yards clean, and put away pet supplies when practical.



Communication Is Key

I'll coordinate showing requests with you, but please let me know about scheduling restrictions, pets, or anything else showing agents should know before entering your home.

Remember that once you're under contract, inspections, appraisals, and the final walkthrough may also require access to your home.

7. Review Offers, Negotiate and Go Under Contract

As the offers come in, we will set up a time to review them. I'll break down the offers for you and make sure you understand all the nuances of each contract. You can accept, reject, or counter-offer. Everything is negotiable and most of the time this process goes pretty quickly. I'll be there to negotiate on your behalf and any changes to the offer will be made in writing and signed by all parties.

Once a contract is accepted the buyer's earnest money will be deposited in a non-interest bearing account and will require approval in writing from both parties to release.

Understanding Buyer Financing: Understanding how a buyer plans to pay for your property, and what documentation or approvals may be required, is an important part of evaluating an offer.

Cash: Buyers making an offer without a financing contingency must provide written verification from a financial institution showing they have the funds to complete the purchase within two business days after the effective date (most buyers provide proof of funds with their offer). Some buyers may still choose to obtain a mortgage, but their purchase is not dependent on receiving financing.
Time from accepted contract to closing can be as little as 2 weeks.

Home-Sale Contingency: This can apply to buyers using either cash or financing after the sale of their property. This type of transaction happens all the time but is obviously trickier than cash that's already in their account. It will require a more in-depth conversation with me so I can explain the timelines for closings.

Mortgage: Buyers may use conventional, FHA, VA, or other mortgage programs, each with different requirements. FHA and VA loans may have additional property-condition requirements, such as addressing peeling paint, missing handrails, or safety hazards, which could require repairs before closing. Some buyers may also use down payment assistance programs, such as IHDA, which can involve additional paperwork or approval requirements. Financed transactions typically close in 4–6 weeks, depending on the loan, lender, and assistance programs involved.

8. Contingencies

Depending on the terms of your contract, several contingencies may apply. They can include inspection, attorney review, home insurance, appraisal and several others that I will explain if they arise.

I**nspection:**
Buyers may hire a professional inspector to evaluate the property. Depending on the inspection contingency, they may request repairs, negotiate other terms, or cancel the contract within the specified deadline (usually five business days). If the buyer misses the deadline, they may lose certain rights under the inspection contingency.

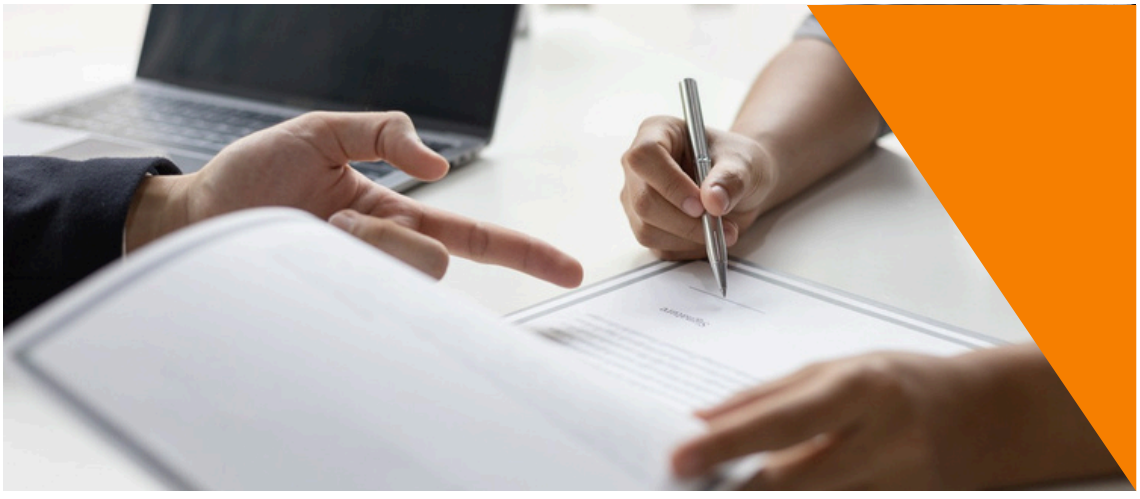
Attorney Review:
There is a contingency in the offer for attorney review for both parties. If you choose to be represented, they can review the contract and request changes within the attorney-review period (typically 5 business days), subject to the contract's terms. It is good to have an attorney involved with any real estate transaction. My license does not cover legal aspects, so having a real estate attorney on standby for contract-related matters is a wise precaution.

Homeowner's Insurance:
The buyer must be able to obtain standard homeowner's insurance at normal rates. If the property cannot be insured under these terms, the buyer has 10 business days after the effective date to notify the seller in writing and cancel the contract.

Appraisal & Financing:
If the buyer is obtaining a mortgage, their lender will typically require an appraisal and final loan approval. The contract establishes deadlines for financing-related requirements, and I'll stay in contact with the buyer's lender to monitor progress and address any issues that arise.

Real Estate Attorneys in the Area

- Trent Ferguson | Ray A. Ferguson & Associates ltd | 815-489-9500 | trentferglaw@yahoo.com | fergusonandassociatesltd.com
- Andrew J Mertzenich | 815.420.8261 | Andrew@mertzenichlaw.com | https://www.mertzenichlaw.com/
- Ami J Oseid, Ajow Law | 773.279.9900 | ami@ajolaw.com | www.ajowlaw.com
- Amy Silvestri | Silvestri Law Offices | 815-227-0700
- David D. Shockey | 815.235.2507 | dave@shockeyandcox.com | https://shockeyandcox.com



Stage 3: Under Contract & Closing

9. Getting Ready for Closing!

As we approach closing, the title company and attorneys work on making sure the title is clean and transferable, and that all the costs associated with the closing, including tax prorations and transfer taxes, are organized and communicated to both parties. The buyer will do a final walkthrough of the property within 48 hours of closing. This allows them to make sure the property's condition is as expected, that everything that is supposed to be there is present and nothing unwanted is left behind.

10. Closing!

The finish line! This is when all the final documentation is signed, and you get paid! The title company handles the final paperwork and disbursement of funds, and I'll be there to help with any last-minute questions or issues and of course, celebrate with you!

