



BRAINERD LAKES AREA · FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER GUIDE

Your first home, **step by step.**

From "thinking about it" to the day you get your keys, plus a home-care guide and maintenance checker for life after closing.

PREPARED FOR YOU BY

Jodi Carley

REALTOR® · CNE · MCNE · AHWD · REDS

218-820-7023 · carleycloses@gmail.com

BUILT BY AGENTS. FOR AGENTS.

Why work with Jodi

Buying your first home is a big step. Here's who will be beside you for it.



Jodi Carley

REALTOR® · Brainerd Lakes Area

CNE

MCNE

AHWD

REDS

"Small town service with big city resources."

Since 2018, Jodi has helped first-time buyers, families and sellers across the Brainerd Lakes area move with confidence. She brings experience, attention to detail and a **no-pressure, collaborative approach** to every transaction.

Her goal is simple: make your real estate journey smooth, stress-free and even enjoyable, with someone you trust by your side from your first question to your keys.

1

First-time buyer focus

Guiding first-time buyers step by step since 2018.

2

A trained negotiator

Holds the CNE and MCNE negotiation designations.

3

No pressure, ever

A collaborative approach. You set the pace.

4

Detail-minded

Careful attention to the details that protect you.

5

Lakes-area local

Small-town service, backed by Ashworth Real Estate.

6

Integrity first

Years of serving her community with professionalism.



Their in-depth knowledge of the real estate market and the buying process are truly impressive!

NICK B., BRANCH MANAGER, CARDINAL FINANCIAL, ON WORKING WITH ASHWORTH REAL ESTATE

EMAIL

carleycloses@gmail.com

CALL OR TEXT

218-820-7023

PROFILE

ashworthre.com/jodi-carley

From "thinking about it" to keys in hand

Every purchase is a little different, but most follow these nine steps. Timing varies with the market, your loan and your contract.

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Think it through
What monthly payment feels comfortable? What matters most in a home? | WEEKS TO MONTHS
BEFORE |
| 2 | Get your finances ready
Check your credit and save for the down payment, closing costs and a cushion. | BEFORE YOU SHOP |
| 3 | Get pre-approved
A lender reviews your income, assets and credit and tells you what you can borrow. | BEFORE YOU SHOP |
| 4 | Choose your agent
Review the agency disclosure and sign a written buyer agreement. | BEFORE TOURING |
| 5 | Shop for homes
Tour, compare and learn what homes like yours really sell for. | DAYS TO MONTHS |
| 6 | Make an offer
Price, earnest money, contingencies and dates, negotiated for you. | DAY 0 |
| 7 | Inspect and appraise
Inspection, any well or septic checks, appraisal and final loan approval. | FIRST WEEKS UNDER
CONTRACT |
| 8 | Close
Review your Closing Disclosure, do a final walk-through and sign. | DATE SET IN YOUR
CONTRACT |
| 9 | Get your keys
Move in, file for homestead and start your home-care routine. | CLOSING DAY |

BUYING UP NORTH? WHAT'S DIFFERENT HERE

Wells and septic. Many lakes-area homes have a private well and septic system instead of city water and sewer. Plan for testing and inspection.

Shoreland and zoning. County shoreland rules can affect docks, additions and tree removal. Ask the county before you plan changes.

Roads and seasons. Check year-round access, who plows private roads, heating fuel (propane or other) and internet options.

Get ready and get pre-approved



The strongest first-time buyers know their numbers before they fall in love with a house. A pre-approval tells you, and sellers, what you can afford.

KNOW YOUR REAL MONTHLY PAYMENT

Your mortgage payment usually includes more than the loan:

- **Principal and interest** on the loan
- **Property taxes**, often collected monthly into an escrow account
- **Homeowners insurance**, also often escrowed
- **Mortgage insurance**, often required with a smaller down payment
- **Association dues**, if there's an HOA or lake association

Up north, also budget for heating fuel such as propane, well and septic upkeep, and snow removal.

GET YOUR FINANCES IN SHAPE

- Check your credit reports for free at **AnnualCreditReport.com** and fix any errors.
- Save for the down payment, closing costs and a cushion for repairs.
- Hold off on new credit cards, car loans or big purchases until after closing.
- Keep your paperwork handy and your deposits easy to explain.

PRE-QUALIFIED VS. PRE-APPROVED

Pre-qualification is a quick estimate based on what you tell a lender. A **pre-approval** means the lender has checked your credit and documents. Sellers take pre-approvals more seriously.

WHAT LENDERS USUALLY ASK FOR

- Recent pay stubs and W-2s or tax returns
- Recent bank and investment statements
- Photo ID and Social Security number
- Explanations for large deposits
- Gift letter, if family is helping with funds

COMPARE LENDERS

Under federal rules, a lender must give you a **Loan Estimate** within 3 business days of your application. Get estimates from more than one lender and compare rates, fees and cash to close on the same standard form.

Loan types to ask about

Conventional, FHA, VA and USDA. Ask whether the home is in a USDA-eligible rural area.

Help with the down payment

Minnesota Housing offers first-time buyer programs through participating lenders.

Take a homebuyer class

Many assistance programs require homebuyer education. It's worth it either way.

Choose your agent, then go shopping

The fun part. A little structure here saves you from falling for the wrong house, or missing the right one.

02

BEFORE YOU TOUR

Minnesota agents must give you an **agency relationships disclosure** early on, explaining who represents whom. Before touring, you'll also sign a **written buyer representation agreement** that spells out your agent's services and compensation. Ask questions; it's your agreement too.

NEEDS, WANTS AND DEAL-BREAKERS

MUST HAVE	NICE TO HAVE	DEAL-BREAKER

TOURING LIKE A PRO

- Look past paint, furniture and staging. Those are easy to change.
- Note the age of the roof, furnace, water heater and windows.
- Look for water stains, cracks and musty smells.
- Drive the area at different times of day and in different weather.
- Take photos and notes; after a few showings, homes blur together.

DISCLOSURES TO READ IN MINNESOTA

- **Seller's property disclosure.** Sellers generally must disclose known material facts, with limited alternatives.
- **Well disclosure.** Sellers must disclose known wells on the property.
- **Radon disclosure.** Sellers give radon information and a state publication before the purchase agreement. Testing isn't required, but it's smart.

LAKES-AREA HOME CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Well:** type, age, last water test
- ☐ **Septic:** age, last pumped, any compliance paperwork
- ☐ **Shoreline:** frontage, erosion, dock and lift condition
- ☐ **Zoning:** shoreland rules for changes you have in mind
- ☐ **Access:** public or private road, who plows
- ☐ **Utilities:** heat source, propane tank (owned or leased), internet
- ☐ **Year-round or seasonal:** insulation, winterizing, pipes
- ☐ **Lake association:** dues and rules, if any

Tip: Ask Jodi to set up a search that alerts you the moment a matching home hits the market.

Making an offer that gets noticed

03

An offer is more than a price. Sellers weigh the whole package: terms, timing and how likely you are to close.

WHAT GOES INTO AN OFFER

- **Price:** based on recent comparable sales
- **Earnest money:** a good-faith deposit, held in trust
- **Financing:** loan type and down payment
- **Contingencies:** inspection, financing, appraisal and others
- **Dates:** closing and when you take possession
- **What stays:** appliances, window treatments and more

DOCKS, LIFTS AND TOYS

On lake property, docks, boat lifts, rafts and other personal property don't automatically come with the house. If you want them, they need to be written into the offer.

AFTER YOUR OFFER IS ACCEPTED

- ☐ Deliver earnest money on time
- ☐ Schedule inspections right away
- ☐ Send the lender everything they ask for
- ☐ Shop for homeowners insurance
- ☐ Put every deadline on your calendar

CONTINGENCIES IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Inspection: time to inspect, then ask for repairs or credits, or cancel within the contract's terms.

Financing: protects you if your loan isn't approved on the terms in the contract.

Appraisal: addresses what happens if the home appraises below the price.

Sale of your home: if you need to sell first. It can make an offer weaker.

IN A MULTIPLE-OFFER SITUATION

- A strong, clean pre-approval letter
- Clear, realistic dates
- A meaningful earnest money deposit
- Fewer or shorter contingencies, only where you're comfortable
- A price you can stand behind if the appraisal comes in low

JODI'S STRENGTH: NEGOTIATION

Jodi holds the CNE and MCNE negotiation designations. Negotiation is about more than price: repairs, credits, dates and terms all count.

Inspection, appraisal and final approval



Now you find out what you're really buying, and your lender confirms the home is worth the loan.

THE HOME INSPECTION

A general inspector looks at the home's visible systems and condition and gives you a written report.

- Roof and attic
- Foundation and structure
- Heating and cooling
- Plumbing
- Electrical
- Windows and doors
- Water heater
- Insulation and ventilation

ADD-ONS WORTH ASKING ABOUT

- **Radon test.** Common in Minnesota and easy to do during inspection.
- **Well water test.** Use a certified lab. The Minnesota Department of Health has guidance on what to test for.
- **Septic inspection.** Some Minnesota counties require a septic compliance inspection when a property sells. Ask what applies where you're buying.
- **Chimney, sewer line or shoreline,** depending on the home.

NEAR THE WATER?

Look up the home on FEMA's flood map at msc.fema.gov. Your lender will tell you if flood insurance is required.

THE APPRAISAL

Your lender orders an appraisal from an independent appraiser, who estimates the home's value from comparable sales.

If it comes in low, options can include renegotiating the price, paying the difference, challenging the appraisal with better comparables, or using your contingency. Jodi will walk you through it.

UNDERWRITING AND "CLEAR TO CLOSE"

The underwriter verifies everything and may ask for more documents. Answer quickly.

Until closing, don't:

- Change jobs or open new credit
- Make large purchases or unexplained deposits
- Co-sign for anyone

HOMEOWNERS INSURANCE

Shop early. Your lender needs proof of coverage before closing.



Closing costs, explained

Closing costs are the fees and prepaid items due at closing, on top of your down payment. Your Loan Estimate shows them early; your Closing Disclosure shows the final numbers.

COST	WHAT IT IS	CUSTOMARILY PAID BY
Lender fees	Origination, underwriting and processing charges	Buyer
Discount points	Optional prepaid interest to lower your rate	Buyer (optional)
Appraisal and credit report	Required by the lender to approve the loan	Buyer
Title and closing services	Title search, exam and the closer who runs the signing	Varies by contract
Lender's title insurance	Protects the lender against title problems	Buyer
Owner's title insurance	Protects you. Optional, but worth considering	Varies by contract
Mortgage registration tax	A Minnesota tax based on the loan amount	Buyer
Recording fees	County fees to record your mortgage and deed	Buyer
Prepaid interest	Interest from closing day to the end of the month	Buyer
Escrow deposits	A starting balance for taxes and insurance	Buyer
Homeowners insurance	Often the first year's premium, paid at or before closing	Buyer
Association fees	Any HOA or lake association transfer or prepaid dues	Varies
Deed tax	A Minnesota tax on the deed transferring the property	Seller

"Customarily" is not a rule. Who pays what is negotiable and set by your purchase agreement.

Down payment + Closing costs + Prepays – Earnest money paid – Credits = **Cash to close**

TWO FORMS TO KNOW

Loan Estimate: within 3 business days of applying. **Closing Disclosure:** at least 3 business days before closing. Compare them line by line.

WIRE FRAUD WARNING

Criminals send fake "updated" wiring instructions. Before wiring money, call your title company at a phone number you already know, not one from an email. Real title companies don't change wiring instructions by email.

Closing day and your keys



The finish line. Here's what to expect so the day feels like a celebration, not a surprise.

1

Review your Closing Disclosure

You'll get it at least 3 business days before closing. Compare it with your Loan Estimate and ask about changes.

2

Confirm your funds by phone

Get cash-to-close instructions from the title company and verify them by calling a number you already know.

3

Final walk-through

Check that agreed repairs are done, included items are there and systems work.

4

Sign, fund and record

The closer explains each document. The lender funds the loan and the deed and mortgage are recorded.

5

Celebrate!

Your keys are handed over at closing or at the possession time in your contract.

BRING

- Government-issued photo ID
- Confirmation your funds were sent
- Any documents the closer requested
- Your questions

WHAT YOU'LL SIGN

- **Promissory note:** your promise to repay
- **Mortgage:** pledges the home as security
- **Closing Disclosure** and settlement statement
- Affidavits and lender forms

GOOD TO KNOW

In Minnesota, closings are usually handled by a title company closer. Plan on about an hour for signing, sometimes more.

AFTER YOU SIGN

Keep a copy of every closing document in a safe place, digital and paper. You'll want them at tax time, when you refinance and when you sell. Your recorded deed arrives later from the county or title company.

After you move in

A few early to-dos protect your money and your home. Then turn to the back of this guide to keep it in great shape.

06

FIRST 30 DAYS: MONEY AND PAPERWORK

- ☐ **Apply for homestead** with your county assessor. It can lower your property taxes. Ask about the deadline.
- ☐ **Set up mortgage payments** and note your first payment date.
- ☐ **File your closing documents** somewhere safe.
- ☐ **Ignore “official-looking” mail** offering a copy of your deed for a fee.
- ☐ **Update your address** with USPS, your bank and your employer.

FIRST WEEKEND: SAFETY

- ☐ Change or rekey the locks
- ☐ Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms
- ☐ Find the main water shutoff
- ☐ Find the electrical panel and label it
- ☐ Find the well pressure tank and septic lid, if you have them
- ☐ Set up utilities, trash and heating fuel delivery

WHY THE NEXT PAGES MATTER

A home is the biggest thing most people ever buy, and small, regular care protects it. The back of this guide includes a **season-by-season maintenance guide** built for Brainerd Lakes winters and lake living, a **12-month maintenance checker** you can mark off, and a **home records log** for warranties, service dates and key details.

JODI IS STILL YOUR RESOURCE

Need a contractor, have a question about your home's value, or thinking about your next move? Call or text Jodi at 218-820-7023. Closing day isn't the end of the relationship.

Your first-home checklist

Keep this page on the fridge. Check off each step as you go.



1 · GET READY

- ☐ Set a comfortable monthly payment target
- ☐ Pull free credit reports at AnnualCreditReport.com
- ☐ Save for down payment, closing costs and a cushion
- ☐ Gather pay stubs, W-2s and bank statements
- ☐ Look into homebuyer education and assistance

2 · PRE-APPROVAL AND AGENT

- ☐ Apply with at least two lenders
- ☐ Compare Loan Estimates side by side
- ☐ Get your pre-approval letter
- ☐ Meet with Jodi and sign a buyer agreement
- ☐ List your must-haves and deal-breakers

3 · SHOP AND OFFER

- ☐ Tour homes and take notes
- ☐ Read the seller's disclosures
- ☐ Ask about well, septic and shoreland rules
- ☐ Decide on price, terms and contingencies
- ☐ Write in any dock, lift or items you want

4 · UNDER CONTRACT

- ☐ Deliver earnest money
- ☐ Schedule inspection, radon and well/septic checks
- ☐ Lock your rate with the lender
- ☐ Choose homeowners insurance
- ☐ Answer underwriting requests quickly

5 · CLOSING

- ☐ Review your Closing Disclosure
- ☐ Verify wiring instructions by phone
- ☐ Do the final walk-through
- ☐ Bring photo ID to closing
- ☐ Get your keys!

6 · MOVED IN

- ☐ Apply for homestead
- ☐ Change locks; test smoke and CO alarms
- ☐ Find water shutoff and electrical panel
- ☐ Start the maintenance checker
- ☐ Save documents in the records log

Homebuyer glossary

Real estate has its own language. Here's what the most common terms mean.

**Agency disclosure**

A Minnesota form explaining the different relationships an agent can have with you.

Appraisal

An independent estimate of a home's value, ordered by your lender.

Buyer representation agreement

A written agreement between you and your agent covering services and compensation.

Clear to close

The lender's signal that loan conditions are met and you can close.

Closing costs

Fees and prepaid items due at closing, beyond the down payment.

Closing Disclosure

Final loan terms and costs, received at least 3 business days before closing.

Contingency

A condition in the purchase agreement that must be met, such as inspection or financing.

Debt-to-income ratio

Your monthly debt payments divided by your gross monthly income.

Down payment

The part of the price you pay up front, not borrowed.

Earnest money

A good-faith deposit made with your offer, credited toward your purchase at closing.

Escrow account

An account your lender uses to pay property taxes and insurance for you.

Homestead

A Minnesota property tax classification for an owner-occupied home.

Loan Estimate

A standard form showing your estimated loan terms and costs, within 3 business days of applying.

Mortgage registration tax

A Minnesota tax on the mortgage, based on the loan amount.

PMI

Private mortgage insurance, often required on conventional loans with less than 20% down.

Pre-approval

A lender's conditional commitment after reviewing your credit and documents.

Purchase agreement

The contract between buyer and seller.

Radon

A naturally occurring radioactive gas found in many Minnesota homes; testing is simple.

Septic compliance inspection

A check that a septic system meets standards; some counties require one at sale.

Shoreland

Land near lakes and rivers covered by special zoning rules.

Title insurance

Protects against problems with ownership records. Lender's and owner's policies are separate.

Underwriting

The lender's review and approval of your loan.

Walk-through

Your final look at the home shortly before closing.

Your home, **season by season**

A Brainerd Lakes home works hard through long winters and busy lake summers. A little care each season prevents most expensive surprises.

Spring

APRIL – MAY

- ☐ Check roof, shingles and gutters after the snow
- ☐ Look for ice-dam water stains inside
- ☐ Test the sump pump, if you have one
- ☐ Make sure downspouts drain away from the house
- ☐ Service the air conditioner
- ☐ Test well water at a certified lab
- ☐ Put the dock and lift in once the ice is out

Summer

JUNE – AUGUST

- ☐ Clean the dryer vent all the way outside
- ☐ Check caulk and weatherstripping
- ☐ Trim trees and brush away from the roof
- ☐ Walk the shoreline for erosion
- ☐ Check deck and dock hardware
- ☐ Watch the septic drainfield for soggy spots
- ☐ Wash windows and repair screens

Fall

SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER

- ☐ Service the furnace or boiler
- ☐ Have the chimney inspected and cleaned
- ☐ Shut off and drain outdoor faucets; disconnect hoses
- ☐ Clean gutters after the leaves drop
- ☐ Take the dock and lift out before freeze-up
- ☐ Fill the propane tank or set up auto-delivery
- ☐ Mark driveway edges, well and septic caps for the plow

Winter

DECEMBER – MARCH

- ☐ Pull snow off roof edges with a roof rake, from the ground
- ☐ Watch for icicles and ice dams
- ☐ Keep furnace and dryer vents clear of snow
- ☐ Keep snow off the gas meter or propane regulator
- ☐ Keep the heat on when away; consider a freeze alarm
- ☐ Open sink cabinets on outside walls in deep cold
- ☐ Check the furnace filter monthly

EVERY MONTH

- ☐ Check the furnace filter; replace as needed
- ☐ Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms
- ☐ Add water-softener salt, if you have one
- ☐ Run water in unused sinks and tubs

KNOW WHERE THESE ARE

- Main water shutoff
- Well pressure tank
- Electrical panel
- Septic tank lid
- Gas or propane shutoff
- Furnace filter slot

Septic: have the tank checked and pumped on the schedule your septic professional recommends. Well: the Minnesota Department of Health publishes guidance on how often to test private well water. When in doubt, call a licensed pro.

Home maintenance checker

Your 12-month plan at a glance. Shaded boxes show when each task is due; skip any that don't apply to your home.

Year: _____

Home: _____

TASK	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Check or replace furnace filter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Test smoke and CO alarms	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Water-softener salt (if any)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clean range hood filter			☐			☐			☐			☐
Test GFCI outlets			☐						☐			
Roof edges and ice-dam check	☐	☐	☐									☐
Gutters and downspouts					☐					☐		
Test sump pump (if any)				☐						☐		
Foundation and grading walk				☐								
Air conditioner service					☐							
Well water test (if any)					☐							
Dock and lift in / out					☐					☐		
Screens and windows					☐							
Caulk and weatherstripping						☐				☐		
Deck and dock hardware						☐						
Dryer vent cleaning							☐					
Septic drainfield look							☐					
Furnace or boiler service									☐			
Chimney inspection									☐			
Flush water heater										☐		
Outdoor faucets off, hoses in										☐		
Garage door auto-reverse test				☐						☐		
Propane level or delivery	☐									☐		
Vacuum fridge coils	☐						☐					
Septic pumping (per your pro)	Last pumped: _____ Next due: _____ Company: _____											

☐ Due this month. Check it off when done.

Make a copy of this page each year, or keep it in a sheet protector and use a dry-erase marker.

My home records log

Write it down once and you'll never hunt for it again.

KEY DETAILS

CLOSING DATE

INSURANCE COMPANY AND POLICY #

FURNACE / BOILER INSTALLED

ROOF INSTALLED OR REPLACED

SEPTIC LAST PUMPED

MAIN WATER SHUTOFF LOCATION

MORTGAGE SERVICER AND PHONE

FURNACE FILTER SIZE

WATER HEATER INSTALLED

WELL LAST TESTED

HEATING FUEL SUPPLIER

PAINT COLORS AND BRANDS

SERVICE LOG

DATE	WHAT WAS DONE	WHO DID IT	COST	NEXT DUE

Keep receipts and warranties with this page. Records of upgrades and repairs help at tax time and when you sell.



READY WHEN YOU ARE

Let's find your **first home.**

Start with a free, no-pressure conversation about your goals,
your timing and your questions.

YOUR AGENT

Jodi Carley, REALTOR®

CALL OR TEXT

218-820-7023

EMAIL

carleycloses@gmail.com

ashworthre.com/jodi-carley · Ashworth Real Estate office 612-584-2234

BUILT BY AGENTS. FOR AGENTS.

Please note: This guide is general information about buying a home in Minnesota. It is not legal, tax, financial or lending advice. Laws, programs, costs and timelines change and vary by transaction. Confirm details with your lender, title company, insurance agent, attorney or tax advisor. Customary practices are not requirements; your purchase agreement controls.

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY