

novo

BUYER'S GUIDE

Buying a Home in San Francisco

From the first conversation to the keys

2026 Edition

WELCOME

A clear path to owning in the city

Novo Real Estate is the sales team at AMSI, a San Francisco brokerage and property management company since 1970. This guide covers how buying works here and where we help.

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HOW WE WORK WITH YOU

A dedicated point of contact, backed by our brokerage team.

Financing early, with introductions to experienced lending professionals.

Disclosures read together before you write an offer.

Offers built on comparable sales, market conditions and your priorities.

General education only, not legal, tax, financial or lending advice. We are not a lender. Laws and figures change, so verify what matters with your own advisors. Commissions are negotiable and not set by law. This guide does not create an agency relationship. Sources are on page 12.

01 · THE BUYING PROCESS

Nine steps to the keys

01 **Buyer consultation**
Budget, neighborhoods and timing, plus the written buyer representation agreement California requires by your offer.[1]

02 **Get preapproved**
A lender reviews your finances. It is not final approval, but it backs your offer.

03 **Tour homes**
Homes that fit, on your schedule.

04 **Review disclosures**
We read the seller's reports with you before you write.

05 **Write the offer**
Price, deposit, contingencies and closing date.

06 **Sign**
The signed purchase agreement sets the deadlines from here.

07 **Open escrow**
A neutral escrow holder takes your deposit.

08 **Remove contingencies**
Inspections, appraisal and loan, on the agreement's timeline.

09 **Close**
Sign, fund and record the deed. Possession follows the purchase agreement.

02 · WHAT YOU CAN BUY

Four ways to own a home

Condominium

WHAT YOU OWN

Your unit plus a share of the common areas, run by an HOA.

GOOD TO KNOW

The seller provides the HOA documents before you buy.[2]

Tenancy in common (TIC)

WHAT YOU OWN

A share of the building with the right to live in one unit.

GOOD TO KNOW

Fewer lenders offer TIC loans. Have an attorney review the TIC agreement.

Single-family home

WHAT YOU OWN

The house and the land.

GOOD TO KNOW

Usually no HOA, so upkeep is yours.

2 to 4 unit building

WHAT YOU OWN

The whole building. Live in one unit and rent the others.

GOOD TO KNOW

Older buildings may have rent control and eviction protection. Each one is different.[3]

HOMES WITH A TENANT

A tenancy can affect move-in, financing and how you use the home. We review leases and occupancy with you, and an attorney can confirm the legal side.

03 · COSTS AT CLOSING

What you pay at closing

Your lender's Loan Estimate shows loan costs early. The Closing Disclosure shows final numbers at least three business days before closing.[4]

San Francisco transfer tax

ENTIRE PRICE	RATE PER $500	EFFECTIVE RATE
Over $100 to $250,000	$2.50	0.50%
Over $250,000, under $1,000,000	$3.40	0.68%
$1,000,000 to under $5,000,000	$3.75	0.75%
$5,000,000 to under $10,000,000	$11.25	2.25%
$10,000,000 to under $25,000,000	$27.50	5.50%
$25,000,000 or more	$30.00	6.00%

The rate applies to the whole price.[5] Who pays is negotiated in the purchase agreement, and some transfers qualify for exemptions.

Illustrative example only: at the standard rate, a $1,300,000 sale carries $9,750 in transfer tax. Check your figures with your agent.

Other closing costs

- Lender fees
- Escrow and title
- Appraisal
- Recording fees

04 · PROPERTY TAXES

Property taxes in San Francisco

Under Proposition 13, your tax is generally based on what you pay, not on later market swings.

01 **Reassessed when you buy**
The home is reassessed to market value, generally your purchase price.[6]

02 **A rate of about 1.18%**
San Francisco's rate for fiscal year 2026-27 is 1.18162182% of assessed value.[7,8]

03 **Limited increases**
Assessed value generally rises no more than 2% a year.[6,7]

04 **A supplemental bill**
Expect a separate supplemental bill after you buy.[8]

05 **Two installments**
Delinquent after December 10 and April 10.[8]

06 **Homeowners' exemption**
Up to $7,000 off assessed value for your primary residence. File by February 15.[9]

05 · FINANCING

Lining up the loan

We are not lenders. Here is how lenders typically look at a purchase, so confirm the details with yours.

Conforming loan limits, San Francisco County, 2026

PROPERTY	MAXIMUM CONFORMING LOAN
1 unit	$1,249,125
2 units	$1,599,375
3 units	$1,933,200
4 units	$2,402,625

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac buy loans up to these limits. Larger loans are jumbo, with rules set by each lender.[10,11]

What lenders look at

- Income
- Debts
- Credit
- Savings and reserves
- The property

Down payment

Your lender sets the minimum. Under Fannie Mae guidelines, borrowing more than 80% of the value generally means mortgage insurance.[12]

06 · EQUITY COMPENSATION

When part of your pay is stock

Stock can help you buy, but lenders have rules. Below are selected Fannie Mae guidelines. We are not lenders, so confirm with yours and with your tax advisor.

RSUs as income

Shares must be vested and distributed.[13]

The stock must be publicly traded.[13]

Lenders generally look for 12 months of history with your employer.[13]

Income is generally averaged over 24 months, at the 200-day average share price.[13]

Sign-on grants do not count.[13]

Stock for your down payment

Vested stock can be used once the lender verifies its value.[14]

Check lockups and trading windows against your dates.

Jumbo lenders set their own rules.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO KEEP TOP OF MIND

How much of the down payment depends on selling stock? What if the price moves? Selling can trigger taxes, so talk with your tax advisor first.

07 · MAKING AN OFFER

Writing an offer that competes

A strong offer starts with knowing the property.

Disclosures

For 1 to 4 units, the seller provides a Transfer Disclosure Statement and Natural Hazard Disclosure.[15] Condos add HOA documents.[2]

Inspections

Seller reports help but may not catch everything. Consider your own inspections.

Offer dates

Some listings review all offers on a set date. We confirm how each one works.

What goes in an offer

- Price
- Deposit
- Contingencies
- Closing date
- Any requests, like a rent-back

Contingencies

They protect you on set terms and deadlines. Once removed, cancelling can cost you.

YOUR DEPOSIT

With a liquidated damages clause on a 1 to 4 unit home you will live in, the seller can generally keep no more than 3% of the price, subject to the law's conditions.[16]

ABOUT COMPENSATION

Commissions are negotiable and not set by law. Your agent's compensation is set out in your buyer broker agreement. Any seller concessions are as negotiated in the purchase agreement.

08 · ESCROW TO KEYS

From acceptance to closing

Escrow length is set by the accepted offer.

- **Escrow opens**
  Your deposit goes to escrow.
- **Wire with care**
  Call your escrow officer at a known number before wiring. Never trust emailed instructions alone.
- **Inspections**
  Review results and ask for repairs or credits.
- **Appraisal and loan**
  Your lender appraises and clears final conditions.
- **Contingency removal**
  You sign off in writing.
- **Closing Disclosure**
  Final terms, at least three business days before closing.[4]
- **Signing and funding**
  You sign, the lender funds and the deed records.[5]
- **Possession**
  Keys come with possession, per the purchase agreement.

AFTER YOU MOVE IN

File your homeowners' exemption and watch for the supplemental tax bill.

09 · CHOOSING A NEIGHBORHOOD

Every block is different

Walk the blocks at different hours. These public tools help with the rest. Records can be incomplete, so verify what matters.

01 **SF Planning Property Information Map**
Zoning and nearby projects.

02 **Building permit records**
Permits and complaints with the Department of Building Inspection.

03 **San Francisco Rent Board**
Rent control and eviction rules.

04 **SFUSD enrollment**
How school assignment works.

05 **Muni and BART planners**
Your real commute.

06 **Worth checking**
Unpermitted work, seismic retrofits, insurance and HOA assessments.

SOURCES

Where the figures come from

All sources checked November 21, 2026. Figures may change after that date. The example on page 5 is illustrative.

1 **California Civil Code § 1670.50.** Buyer representation agreements (AB 2992, 2024). leginfo.legislature.ca.gov

2 **California Civil Code § 4525.** HOA documents the seller provides to a buyer. leginfo.legislature.ca.gov

3 **San Francisco Rent Board.** Learn about San Francisco rental laws. sf.gov/learn-about-san-francisco-rental-laws

4 **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.** Loan Estimate and Closing Disclosure timing. consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb

5 **San Francisco Assessor-Recorder.** Transfer tax rates, Article 12-C. sf.gov/transfer-tax

6 **California State Board of Equalization.** Publication 29, California Property Tax: An Overview. boe.ca.gov/proptaxes/pubcont.htm

7 **California Constitution, Article XIII A.** Proposition 13: 1% limit and 2% annual adjustment. leginfo.legislature.ca.gov

8 **San Francisco Treasurer and Tax Collector.** Secured property taxes: FY 2026-27 rate and bills. sftreasurer.org/property/secured-property-taxes

9 **San Francisco Assessor-Recorder.** File for the homeowners' exemption. sf.gov/file-homeowners-exemption

10 **Federal Housing Finance Agency.** Conforming loan limit values for 2026 (Nov 25, 2025). fhfa.gov/news

11 **Federal Housing Finance Agency.** 2026 loan limits by county, San Francisco County. fhfa.gov/document

12 **Fannie Mae Selling Guide B7-1-01.** Provision of mortgage insurance. selling-guide.fanniemae.com

13 **Fannie Mae Selling Guide B3-3.3-07.** Restricted stock units and restricted stock (Oct 7, 2026). selling-guide.fanniemae.com

14 **Fannie Mae Selling Guide B3-4.3-01.** Stocks, stock options, bonds and mutual funds. selling-guide.fanniemae.com

15 **California Civil Code §§ 1102 and 1103.** Transfer and natural hazard disclosures. leginfo.legislature.ca.gov

16 **California Civil Code § 1675.** Liquidated damages on residential deposits. leginfo.legislature.ca.gov

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NEXT STEP

Book a buyer consultation

Reply to your agent's email, or call or text them directly. In one conversation we will set your budget, neighborhoods and timing, and map out your path to the keys.

Budget

Your price range, down payment and monthly comfort zone.

Neighborhoods

Where you want to live and the type of home that fits.

Timing

When you want to move and what has to happen first.

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