

Your Complete Home Buyer's Guide

NH & ME Seacoast — Prepared by Arllen Susanto, KW Coastal

Welcome

Buying a home is one of the most significant decisions you will ever make — and in the competitive NH and ME Seacoast market, having the right guidance makes all the difference. This guide walks you through every step of the process, from your first conversation with a lender to the moment you receive your keys.

Arllen Susanto is a Keller Williams Coastal agent with over 55 closed transactions across Somersworth, Dover, Rochester, Portsmouth, and Berwick, ME. Whether you are a first-time buyer or relocating from out of state, this guide is designed to give you a clear, honest picture of what to expect.

Step 1: Understand Your Financial Picture

Before you start touring homes, it is essential to understand what you can realistically afford. The Seacoast market moves quickly — homes in Somersworth, Dover, and Rochester regularly go under contract within days of listing. Buyers who are not pre-approved are at a serious disadvantage.

Key financial concepts to understand:

Term	What It Means
Pre-qualification	A rough estimate based on self-reported income and assets — not as strong as pre-approval
Pre-approval	A lender has verified your income, assets, and credit — this is what sellers want to see
Down payment	Typically 3–20% of the purchase price; FHA loans allow as little as 3.5%
Closing costs	Usually 2–4% of the purchase price, covering lender fees, title insurance, and prepaid items
Debt-to-income ratio	Your monthly debt payments divided by gross monthly income; most lenders want this below 43%

In the current Seacoast market, the median home price ranges from approximately 350,000 *in Rochester* to 550,000+ in Dover and Portsmouth. A 5% down payment on a 400,000 *home* is 20,000, plus roughly 8,000–16,000 in closing costs.

Action step: Contact a local lender before you start your search. Arllen works with several trusted Seacoast lenders and can provide referrals.

Step 2: Choose the Right Buyer’s Agent

Your buyer’s agent represents your interests — not the seller’s. In New Hampshire and Maine, the seller typically pays both the listing agent and buyer’s agent commission, meaning working with a buyer’s agent costs you nothing out of pocket.

A good buyer’s agent will:

- Help you identify homes that match your criteria before they hit the open market
- Write competitive offers that protect you with the right contingencies
- Negotiate on your behalf for price reductions, repairs, or closing cost credits
- Coordinate inspections, appraisals, and the closing process
- Be available to answer questions throughout the entire transaction

Why Arllen: With deep roots in the Somersworth, Dover, and Rochester markets, Arllen brings local knowledge that national platforms cannot replicate. His 5.0-star Zillow

rating reflects a commitment to honest, responsive, client-first service.

Step 3: Define Your Search Criteria

Before touring homes, take time to clarify your priorities. Consider the following:

Must-haves vs. nice-to-haves. Separate your non-negotiables (number of bedrooms, school district, commute distance) from features you would like but could live without (finished basement, updated kitchen, large yard).

Location priorities. The Seacoast offers a range of communities, each with a distinct character. Dover and Portsmouth offer walkable downtown areas and higher price points. Somersworth and Rochester offer more space for the money and strong community ties. Berwick, ME provides a quieter, wooded setting just minutes from the NH border — and NH's lack of sales tax makes it attractive for buyers who work remotely or commute south.

School districts. If schools are a priority, research the specific district before making an offer. NH school ratings vary significantly by town.

Commute. Route 16 and the Spaulding Turnpike connect Rochester and Somersworth to Portsmouth and the broader Seacoast in 20–30 minutes. Berwick, ME is approximately 45 minutes to Portsmouth and 90 minutes to Portland, ME.

Step 4: Tour Homes and Make an Offer

Once you are pre-approved and have defined your criteria, the active search begins. In the current market, plan to act quickly when you find a home you love.

What to look for during a showing:

- Foundation and basement: look for cracks, water stains, or musty odors
- Roof condition: ask the age of the roof and look for missing or curling shingles
- Windows and insulation: older single-pane windows can significantly impact heating costs in NH winters

- HVAC systems: ask the age and service history of the furnace, boiler, or heat pump
- Water source: well vs. municipal water; if on a well, a water test is essential

Making a competitive offer. In a seller’s market, your offer needs to stand out. Arllen will prepare a Comparative Market Analysis (CMA) to help you understand what the home is worth and how to price your offer. Strategies may include:

- Offering at or above asking price when the market supports it
- Limiting contingencies while still protecting your interests
- Writing a personal letter to the seller (where legally permitted)
- Offering a flexible closing date that works for the seller

Step 5: Navigate Inspections and Due Diligence

Once your offer is accepted, the due diligence period begins. This is your opportunity to thoroughly evaluate the property before committing to the purchase.

Standard inspections to consider:

Inspection Type	Typical Cost	What It Covers
General home inspection	400–600	Structure, systems, roof, electrical, plumbing
Radon test	100–150	Radon gas levels (common in NH granite bedrock)
Well water test	150–300	Bacteria, nitrates, arsenic, and other contaminants
Septic inspection	300–500	Tank condition, leach field function
Oil tank inspection	100–200	Underground or above-ground tank condition

New Hampshire has elevated radon levels in many areas due to its granite geology. A radon test is strongly recommended for any home with a basement or ground-level living space.

After the inspection. If issues are found, you have several options: request repairs, ask for a price reduction or credit, or in serious cases, walk away. Arllen will help you negotiate the most favorable outcome.

Step 6: The Appraisal and Mortgage Process

If you are financing the purchase, your lender will order an appraisal to confirm the home's value supports the loan amount. The appraisal is conducted by an independent licensed appraiser and typically costs 500–700.

If the appraisal comes in below the purchase price, you have several options: renegotiate the price with the seller, make up the difference in cash, or in some cases, challenge the appraisal with additional comparable sales data.

During this period, avoid making large purchases, opening new credit accounts, or changing jobs — any of these can affect your mortgage approval.

Step 7: Closing Day

Closing typically takes place 30–45 days after your offer is accepted. You will sign a significant amount of paperwork, pay your down payment and closing costs, and receive the keys to your new home.

What to bring to closing:

- Government-issued photo ID
- Certified or cashier's check (or wire transfer confirmation) for closing costs and down payment
- Proof of homeowner's insurance

Closing costs in NH and ME typically include: loan origination fees, title search and insurance, attorney fees, prepaid property taxes and homeowner's insurance, and recording fees. Your lender will provide a Closing Disclosure at least three business days before closing that itemizes every cost.

NH & ME Buyer Resources

Resource	Details
NH Housing Finance Authority	First-time buyer programs, down payment assistance: nhhfa.org
Maine State Housing Authority	Down payment assistance and affordable mortgage programs: mainehousing.org
NH Property Tax	No state income or sales tax; property taxes vary by town
ME Property Tax	Maine has a Homestead Exemption for primary residences
Seacoast School Districts	SAU 56 (Rochester), SAU 21 (Somersworth), SAU 11 (Dover), MSAD 60 (Berwick)

Ready to Start?

Contact Arllen Susanto at **603-866-0135** or visit **arllenrealty.com** to begin your home search. Arllen is available seven days a week and responds to all inquiries within the hour.

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This guide is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal or financial advice. Market conditions change; consult with a licensed real estate professional for current guidance.