

RD

BUYER'S GUIDE

2026

From the first *yes* to your keys.

10 steps to buying a home in San Diego.
No fine print.

Richard De León
DRE #02221674 · (619) 552-6295



A LETTER FROM RICHARD

You're not short on money. You're short on a *map*.

Every week I meet families paying $2,800 in rent who think buying isn't for them.

This guide is the map: ten steps, what each one costs and what you decide. Bring it to our first call.

Richard

"My job is making sure *nothing* catches you off guard."

THE FULL MAP

Ten steps. *One at a time.*

GET READY
2–8 weeks

SEARCH
2–8 weeks

ESCROW
30–45 days

KEYS
1 day

01 Build your team — p. 4

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01

BUILD YOUR TEAM

You don't buy *alone*.

A buyer's agent works **for you**, not the seller. This is your team:



Richard De León
YOUR AGENT



Eddie Ortega
TEAM LEAD · TOP 1%



Jesús Zavala
AGENT



Iron Gersten
YOUR LOAN

NEW SINCE 2024

Before touring homes you sign a buyer agreement. It states what your agent does and how they're paid; that fee is negotiable.

02



THE 20% MYTH

What you *really* need.

3.5%

minimum down with FHA. Example: a **$700,000** home.

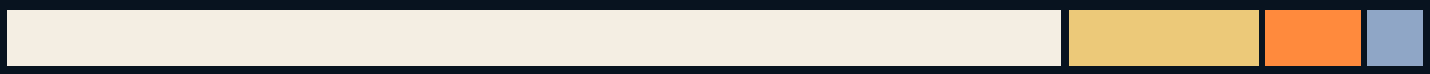
$24.5k

DOWN PAYMENT

$39–53k

TOTAL TO GET THE KEYS, NO HELP

$5,392 A MONTH, APPROX.



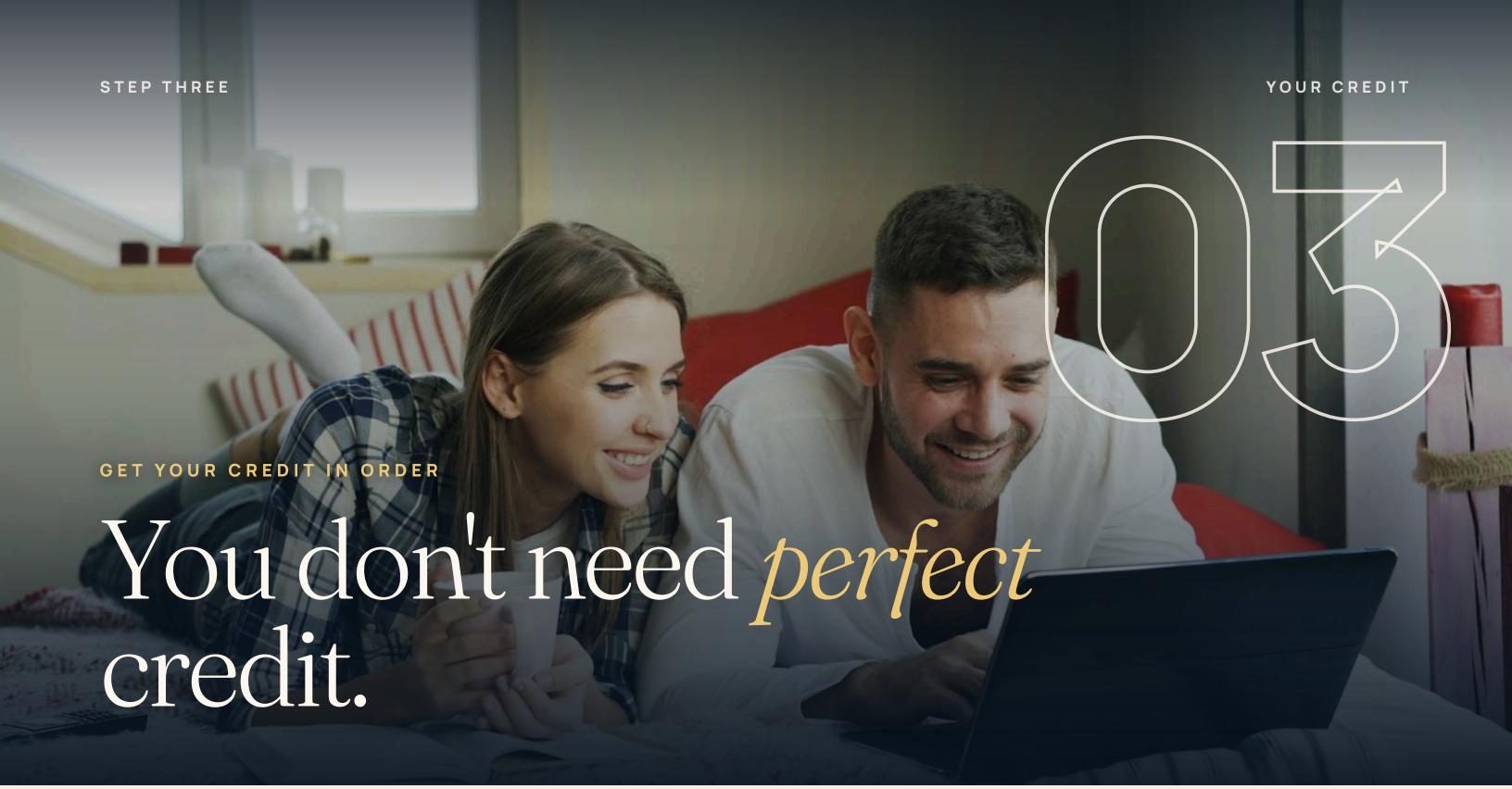
$4,232
Principal & interest · 6.25%

$700
Property tax

$310
FHA insurance

$150
Home insurance

Illustrative example, 30-year fixed. Closing costs (2–4%) drop with seller credits and assistance (p. 7).



03

GET YOUR CREDIT IN ORDER

You don't need *perfect* credit.



580
FHA at 3.5%

620
Conventional

640
CalHFA help

700+
Better rates

BRING THIS TO YOUR LENDER

- [ ] ID or ITIN
- [ ] W-2 / 1099 · 2 yrs
- [ ] Pay stubs · 30 days
- [ ] Bank · 2 months
- [ ] Tax returns · 2 yrs
- [ ] Gift letter



Seven loans. *One is yours.*

FHA

3.5%

First home

Credit from 580. Monthly mortgage insurance.

CONV. 97

3%

Good credit

620+. Insurance drops off at 20% equity.

VA

0%

Veterans

And active duty. No monthly insurance.

USDA

0%

Rural areas

Ramona, Alpine, Campo… with income limits.

CONVENTIONAL

5–20%

Anyone

No mortgage insurance at 20%.

FHA 203(K)

3.5%

Fixer-uppers

Repairs are rolled into the loan.

ITIN

10–20%

No SSN

Traditional or alternative credit (rent, utilities).

+ HELP

$$

For the down payment

Stack them with your loan ↓

CalHFA MyHome

up to **3.5%**

Deferred loan: repaid when you sell.

Dream For All

up to **20%**

First generation. Opens in rounds.

SD Housing Comm.

loan

City of San Diego, with income limits.

Reference requirements as of November 2026. Iron confirms yours.

04



GET PRE-APPROVED

The letter that *opens doors*.

Pre-qualification	Pre-approval
What you say	Your credit and documents
Minutes	1 to 3 days
Barely counts	What sellers ask for

UNTIL CLOSING, DON'T DO THIS

- ✕ Open cards or new credit
- ✕ Finance a car
- ✕ Change jobs without telling us
- ✕ Deposit cash you can't document

05



SEARCH WITH A METHOD

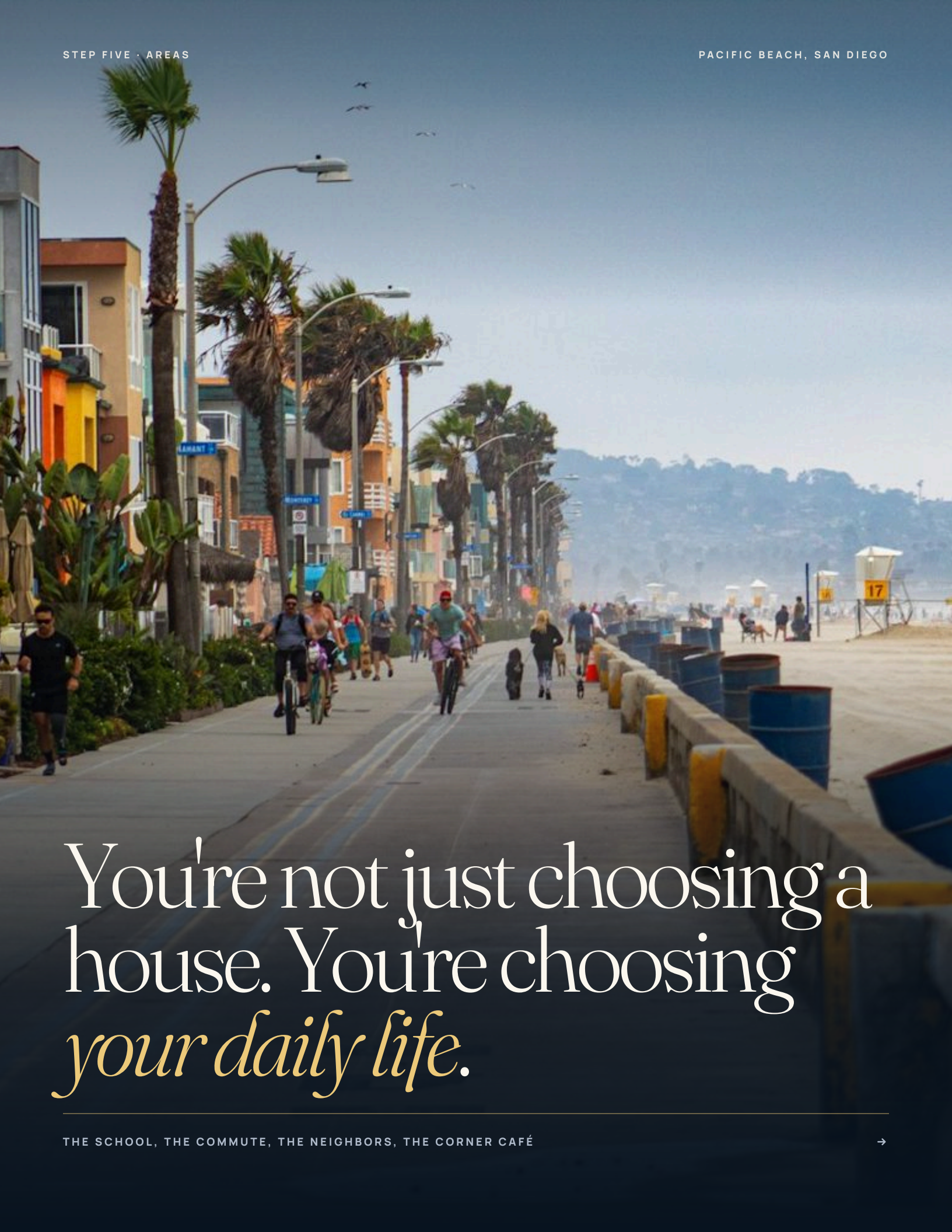
Shop with your head. *Fall in love later.*

ON EVERY TOUR WE CHECK

- [ ] Roof
- [ ] Moisture
- [ ] Electrical panel
- [ ] Water heater
- [ ] Windows
- [ ] Water pressure
- [ ] Cracks
- [ ] Noise
- [ ] Parking
- [ ] Natural light

TIP

Record a video in each home saying the address first. After the third tour, they all blur together.



You're not just choosing a house. You're choosing *your daily life*.

THE SCHOOL, THE COMMUTE, THE NEIGHBORS, THE CORNER CAFÉ →



THE COUNTY BY BUDGET

Where does it *fit*?

Condos & townhomes	Otay Mesa · National City · Chula Vista	$450k
First house	Spring Valley · El Cajon · Santee	$650k
Newer & bigger	Otay Ranch · Eastlake · San Marcos	$850k
Near the coast	Imperial Beach · Oceanside · Vista	$900k+

BEFORE CHOOSING AN AREA

- ☐ Drive at rush hour
- ☐ Visit at night
- ☐ Check schools
- ☐ HOA & Mello-Roos
- ☐ Fire risk

Approximate entry prices; they change monthly. Richard sends you current ones.



Three homes. *One decision.*

	A	B	C
Address			
Price			
Beds · baths			
Total monthly with HOA & Mello-Roos			
Condition roof, water heater			
Commute rush hour			
Loved			
Didn't like			
Score	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

06



MAKE YOUR OFFER

The *cleanest* wins, not the highest.

01
Price
Based on sales from the last 3–6 months.

02
Deposit
1–3%. Counts toward your down payment.

03
Contingencies
Let you exit and keep your deposit.

04
Closing date
Usually 30–45 days.

05
Seller credit
For your costs or a lower rate.

06
Pre-approval
Proof you can close.

Offer →

Accepts
Into escrow!

Counters
We negotiate

Rejects
On to the next



07

ESCROW

30 days that *protect your money.*

0
Accepted
Escrow opens

3
Deposit
To escrow

10
Inspection
We check it all

17
Contingencies
Stay or exit?

21
Loan ready
Clear to close

25
You sign
Closing Disclosure

30
Keys
Deed records

$450–800
GENERAL INSPECTION

$100–250
TERMITE

$200–400
SEWER · PRE-1980 HOMES

IF THE INSPECTION FINDS SOMETHING

Credit
Most common

Repairs
Before closing

Price cut
On the price

Walk away
With your deposit

08



THREE CHECKS

Before the final *yes*.

i

Appraisal

Is the home worth what you pay? If it's low: we renegotiate or you exit with your contingency.

$600–900

ii

Title

Confirms the owner and that no debts are attached to the home. Your policy is paid once.

1×

iii

Insurance

No insurance, no loan. In fire zones get quotes in week 1; plan B: the FAIR Plan.

Wk 1

09



COUNTDOWN

Four weeks. *Zero rush.*

4 WEEKS

- [ ] Notify landlord
- [ ] Get 3 mover quotes
- [ ] Declutter

3 WEEKS

- [ ] Book a truck
- [ ] Get boxes
- [ ] Buy insurance

2 WEEKS

- [ ] SDG&E & water
- [ ] Internet
- [ ] USPS address

1 WEEK

- [ ] Confirm movers
- [ ] Day-one box
- [ ] Final walk-through

YOUR FIRST DAY IN THE HOME

- [ ] Change the locks
- [ ] Test detectors
- [ ] Find the water shut-off
- [ ] Take photos



Just *hours* to go.

FROM THE FIRST YES TO YOUR KEYS

10



KEY DAY

They're *yours.*

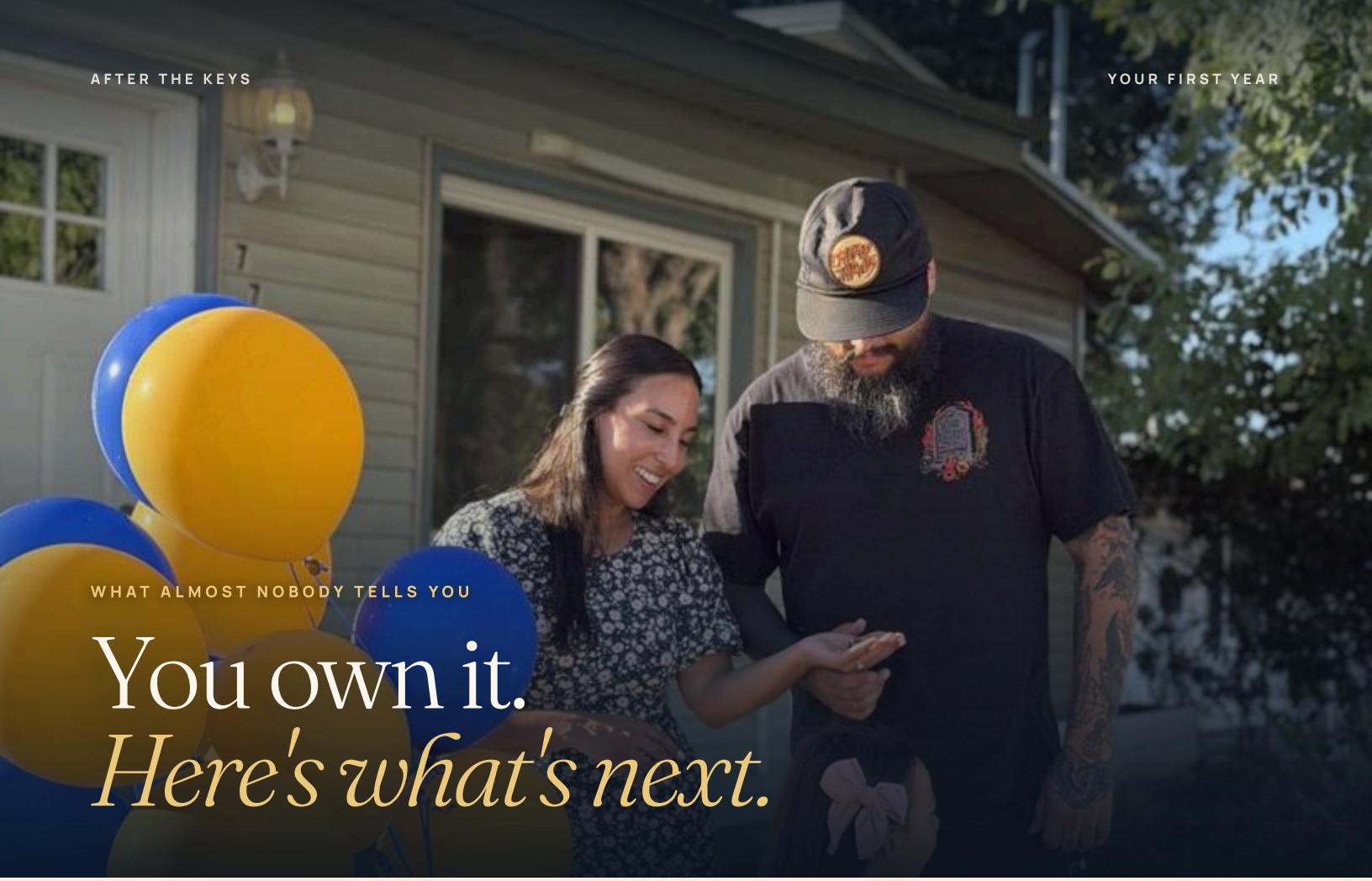
−3 days
Closing Disclosure: we check every number

−2 to 5
Sign with a notary. Bring your ID

−1 to 3
Final walk-through

Day 0
Deed records. Keys!

WATCH OUT: FRAUD Before wiring, call escrow at a number you already had. Nobody changes bank details by email.



WHAT ALMOST NOBODY TELLS YOU

You own it. *Here's what's next.*

MONTH 1

Homeowners' Exemption

File with the County Assessor. Just once.

-$7k

MONTHS 2–6

Supplemental tax bill

Adjusts your tax to the new value. Set money aside.

$

DEC · APR

Property taxes

Due December 10 and April 10.

10

AT 20%

Drop PMI

On conventional, once you owe 80%.

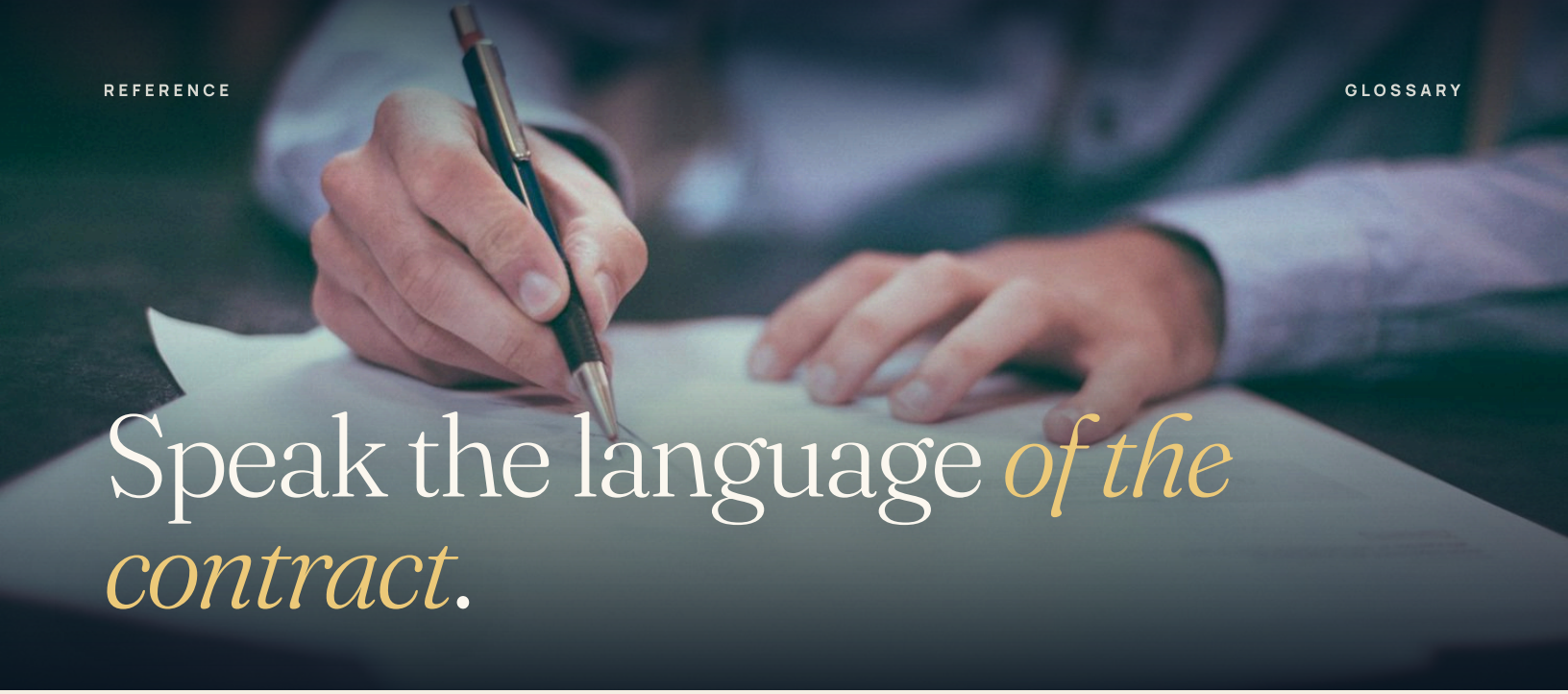
20%

IF RATES DROP

Refinance

Richard and Iron tell you when it pays.

↓%



Speak the language *of the contract*.

Down payment
ENGANCHE

Earnest money
DEPÓSITO DE BUENA FE

Pre-approval
PRE-APROBACIÓN

Contingency
CONTINGENCIA

Counteroffer
CONTRAOFERTA

Seller disclosures
DIVULGACIONES

Escrow
ESCROW

Final walk-through
RECORRIDO FINAL

HOA dues
CUOTA DE HOA

Appraisal
AVALÚO

Title insurance
PÓLIZA DE TÍTULO

Closing costs
COSTOS DE CIERRE

Seller credit
CRÉDITO DEL VENDEDOR

MIP / PMI
SEGURO HIPOTECARIO

Debt-to-income (DTI)
RELACIÓN DEUDA-INGRESO

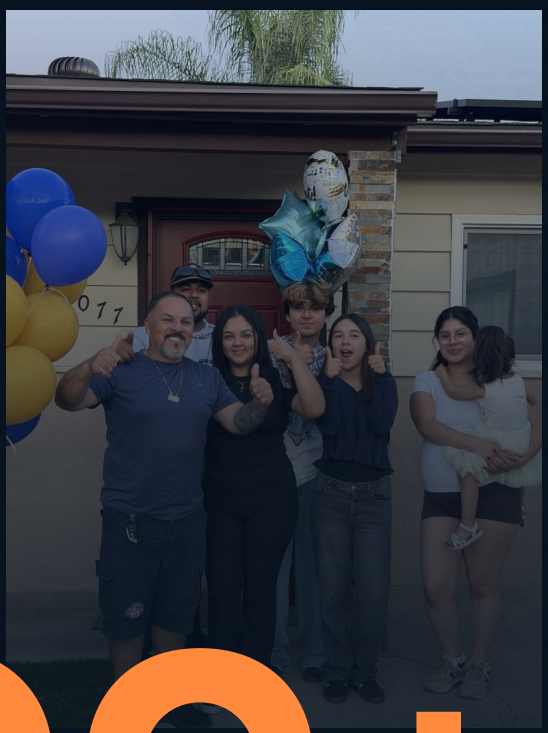
Clear to close
APROBACIÓN FINAL

Recording
REGISTRO

Mello-Roos (CFD)
MELLO-ROOS








200+

families with keys on Eddie Ortega's team · Premier Agency.
More than 30 bought with an ITIN.

Same-day answers
In English or Spanish.

Nothing unexplained
I walk you through every signature.

Zero pressure
You offer when you're ready.

The truth
Even when it's not what you want to hear.



Richard De León · DRE #02221674 · Premier Agency Real Estate · CalDRE #02240990 · 900 Lane Ave Ste 100, Chula Vista, CA 91914
For information only; not legal, tax or financial advice. Sample figures as of November 2026. Additional photos: Unsplash. · Equal Housing Opportunity
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