THE PUGET SOUND OWNER'S GUIDE | 2026 EDITION

How to Maximize Your Home Value Before Selling

We studied six months of King and Pierce County sales, and thousands of real stories from sellers, agents, and buyers. Here is what actually pays, what does not, and what quietly costs sellers real money.

Built from **16,228 closed King and Pierce County sales** (last six months) and **6,277 first-hand accounts** from sellers, agents, buyers, and investors in public discussion forums.

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Housing data from Redfin. Market statistics attributed where shown.

BEFORE WE START

Why this guide is different

Most "get your home ready to sell" advice is the same recycled national list. This guide was built differently: we read the actual sales record of our own market, and we listened to thousands of people describe what they did before selling and what happened next.

Everything in these pages comes from two places:

- **Real local sales.** We looked at 16,228 homes that sold in King and Pierce County in the last six months: what each listing said about the home's condition, what it sold for compared to its neighbors, how long it took, and whether the price got cut along the way. For 7,456 of them we traced the full price history from first listing to closing. Housing data from Redfin.
- **Real stories.** We collected roughly 842,000 public forum posts about getting homes ready to sell, then pulled out 6,277 specific first-hand stories: a seller who painted and what it cost, an agent saying what they tell clients to fix, a buyer explaining why they walked away. Then we counted who said each project was worth it and who said it was a waste.

Straight talk before the numbers: sales data shows patterns, not promises. When we say homes described as renovated sold for more per square foot than their neighbors, that is a fact about past sales, not a guarantee about your home. Nothing in this guide predicts or promises a result. What the data can do is show you where the odds are in your favor, and in what order to spend. That is worth a lot, and it is more than most sellers ever get.

One more thing. This guide will not tell you whether to sell. That is your call, and it depends on where you are in your ownership journey. What this guide can do is make sure that if you do sell, you do not leave easy money on the table.

CHAPTER 1

The market you are selling into

Right now, Puget Sound buyers negotiate. That means how your home shows matters more than it has in years. The numbers tell the story.

46 median days from list to sale, King + Pierce closings, last 6 months (our analysis of 7,098 sales with full history; data from Redfin)	**25%** of homes sold over their original asking price. Three years ago, that was most of the market.	**28%** of sellers had to cut their price at least once before finding their buyer	**-2.7%** King County median home price, year over year, June 2026 (NWMLS monthly report)

The Northwest MLS June 2026 report puts King County's median home price at $889,000, down 2.7 percent from a year ago, with a lot more homes for sale and about three months of supply. Buyers have choices again, and they are using them: on price, on repairs, and on condition.

In our sample of recent closings, the typical home sold at just over 99 percent of its original asking price. Put that next to the 28 percent of sellers who had to cut their price, and the market splits roughly into thirds: about a quarter of sellers still get over asking, about a quarter cut their price publicly and pay for it in extra weeks on market, and everyone else lands close to asking, give or take the condition conversation.

In this market, the homes that show well and inspect clean take the over-asking spots. The ones that do not become the price-cut statistics. The good news, and the reason this guide exists: which group you land in is mostly up to you, and mostly with modest money.

ASK YOURSELF

If your home hit the market this Saturday, exactly as it sits today, which group would it land in?

What would 46 days on market mean for your moving plans, your carrying costs, and your patience?

CHAPTER 2

What 16,228 recent sales say condition is worth

We compared every recent sale against other homes sold in its own ZIP code, based on how the listing described the home. The gap between "renovated" and "dated" is the headline of this whole guide.

Comparing within the same ZIP code matters: it strips out the neighborhood, so a Ballard remodel is measured against Ballard, not against Buckley. Here is how each group did on price per square foot, compared to its own ZIP-code neighbors:

HOW THE LISTING DESCRIBED THE HOME	KING COUNTY	PIERCE COUNTY	SALES ANALYZED
Remodeled or renovated	+2.5%	+6.0%	4,238
Professionally landscaped yard	+4.9%	+5.5%	561
Fixer, TLC, or sold as-is	-3.2%	-6.4%	863
Dated or original condition	-7.5%	-3.6%	188

Median sale price per square foot vs. all homes sold in the same ZIP code. King and Pierce County closings, roughly January through July 2026, grouped by the language in each home's public listing. Data from Redfin. These are patterns, not promises: renovated homes differ in other ways too.

Add up the extremes and the gap between a home marketed as renovated and one marketed as dated is around ten points of value per square foot in King County. On a median-priced King County home, that gap would pay for a full cosmetic refresh several times over. Updated homes also moved faster: homes described as remodeled or renovated went under contract about three days quicker than their neighbors, and homes with a professionally landscaped yard about a week quicker.

The boring stuff pays

Some of the biggest premiums did not come from granite or stainless. They came from the unglamorous claims:

SPECIFIC CLAIM IN THE LISTING	PRICE/SQFT VS. ZIP NEIGHBORS	SALES
New windows	**+5.4%**	282
New furnace, heat pump, or water heater	**+4.9%**	888
New or newer roof	**+3.6%**	1,293
Updated bathroom	**+3.9%**	1,031
Updated kitchen	**+2.1%**	3,029
Quartz or granite counters	**+0.8%**	4,280
Stainless appliances	-0.2%	3,082
Fresh paint (as the headline feature)	**-3.1%**	1,350
New carpet or flooring (as the headline feature)	**-1.9%**	2,203

Same method as above, both counties combined. Data from Redfin.

Look hard at those bottom two rows, because they hide the most useful idea in this chapter. Fresh paint and new carpet did not hurt those homes. But when paint or carpet is the best thing a listing can say, buyers correctly figure the rest of the house is dated, and they pay accordingly. Paint and floors are the ticket out of the discount group. They are not what buyers pay extra for. Buyers pay extra for the words those cheap projects earn: renovated, updated, move-in ready, nothing to do.

ASK YOURSELF

Write the first two sentences of your own listing, honestly, today. Which row of that first table does your home land in?

What would it take, in dollars and weeks, to move up one row?

CHAPTER 3

What 6,277 real people said was worth doing

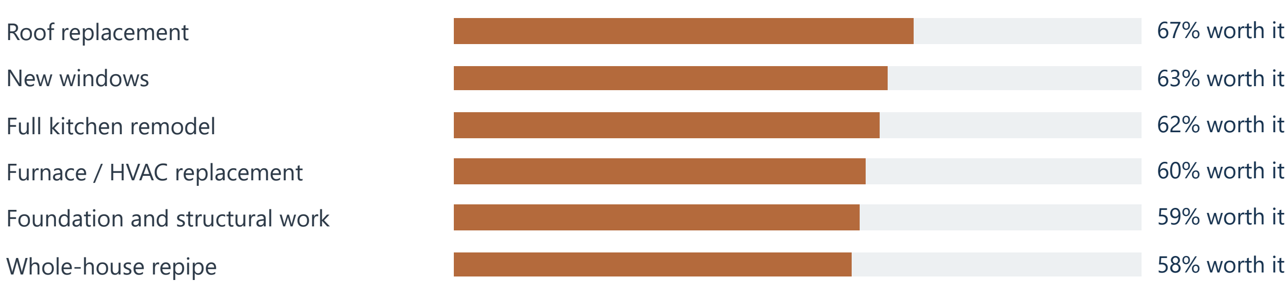
When thousands of sellers, agents, and investors describe what they did before a sale and whether it paid off, a very consistent ranking shows up. It is almost exactly upside down from how most sellers instinctively spend.

For every pre-sale project people discussed, we counted who called it worth doing versus a waste. The pattern is simple: cheap, visible, and preventative wins. Expensive and structural splits the room.

Almost everyone agrees: the cheap visible stuff

Usually yes, with judgment

Genuinely split: the big tickets



Share of people with an opinion who called each project worth doing before a sale, out of 6,277 first-hand accounts from public discussion forums, 2021 to 2026. This measures whether people who did it, or watched clients do it, would do it again. It is not a dollar-return figure.

Notice what the top group has in common: everything costs hundreds to a few thousand dollars, changes how the home photographs and shows, and gets done in weeks. Now the bottom group: five-figure bills, contractor timelines, and a payoff that depends entirely on which buyer walks in. The agents in our collection were even more one-sided than these numbers. The people who watch dozens of sales a year push the top of this list constantly, and talk clients out of the bottom of it just as often.

ASK YOURSELF

Of the money you are tempted to spend before selling, how much lands in the top group, and how much in the bottom?

CHAPTER 4

The cheap seven: where small money does big work

Seven projects came up thousands of times each, usually cost four figures or less, and got near-unanimous approval. Here they are, with the costs people actually reported paying.

1. Declutter like you have already moved typical cost: $400 to $5,500 with hauling and storage

The single most repeated piece of advice we found. Buyers need to see the house, not your stuff in it. Pack half of everything, rent a storage unit or a dumpster, and think of it as early moving, not an expense.

> *"I sold a hoarder house for a client. Ordered a roll off dumpster and got day labor to clear it out. Cost about $1,500." By the teller's account, the home then sold roughly $85,000 over asking.*
>
> A listing agent, public forum

2. Deep clean like the inspector is coming typical cost: $300 to $1,500

A spotless home tells buyers the owners also took care of the things they cannot see. A dirty one says the opposite, and in the stories we read, dirty homes attracted lowball offers and nervous inspectors. Windows inside and out, grout, appliances, light covers, baseboards.

3. Paint the inside, and paint it boring typical cost: $2,000 to $10,000 whole interior

92 percent said worth it. And remember the Chapter 2 finding: paint's job is not to add a premium. Its job is to keep you out of the dated-home discount group, which sold 3 to 7.5 percent below neighbors. Warm neutrals, one color family through the main rooms, ceilings and trim where they look tired.

> *"Had him spend $3k to repaint the whole interior, relisted it, and it sold in one day."*
>
> A listing agent, public forum

4. Fix the view from the street typical cost: $500 to $4,000

Homes whose listings could say professionally landscaped sold about five percent above their ZIP neighbors and about a week faster, one of the biggest effects in our whole analysis. You do not need a landscape architect: bark, clean edges, a mowed and fed lawn, pruned shrubs, pots at the entry, a washed or repainted front door. Pressure-wash the driveway and siding, and deal with roof moss. Around here, moss reads as neglect from the street.

5. Swap the small ugly stuff typical cost: $200 to $2,000 in parts

Dated light fixtures, cabinet pulls, switch plates, faucets, and door handles are the cheapest upgrades in the house, inch for inch, and 95 percent of accounts endorse swapping them. This is what "updated" looks like in photos without doing a remodel.

6. Kill every smell, honestly typical cost: $200 to $3,500

Pet and smoke smell was the number one buyer turnoff in our collection, ahead of roofs and furnaces. Buyers assume the worst about what they can smell and discount for what they imagine, not for what is actually there. Enzyme-clean or replace affected carpet, seal and paint if needed, and get an honest nose from someone who does not live there. Do not mask it. Buyers read heavy air freshener as hiding something.

7. Stage the rooms that sell the house typical cost: $1,300 to $5,000; virtual staging from about $100

Staging got a 93 percent worth-it verdict across 905 accounts, the strongest support of anything that costs real money. Living room, primary bedroom, kitchen and dining: the rooms buyers picture themselves in. An empty house photographs smaller and colder than a staged one, and in a 46-day market your photos are working every one of those days.

> *"ROI tends to be positive even on only a $300k house. Your first price cut will almost certainly be more than the price of staging."*
>
> A listing agent, public forum

One honest note from the same collection: a minority, including some agents, say staging matters less where inventory is so thin that anything sells. With three months of supply out there, that argument is weaker than it was in 2021.

ASK YOURSELF

All seven together usually cost less than one percent of a median King County home. What is your plan for each, and which two happen first?

CHAPTER 5

Think twice before the big remodel

The projects sellers most fear skipping, the full kitchen, the new roof, the furnace, are exactly where the evidence gets mixed. Spend here only with a specific reason.

Full kitchen remodels ran around $50,000 in the stories we read, and only 62 percent called them worth it. Windows were about the same (63 percent, roughly $15,000), and furnaces worse (60 percent, roughly $10,000). The people who regretted big pre-sale remodels told the same three stories: the project delayed the listing, the buyer would have renovated differently anyway, and the money came back at maybe a dollar for a dollar, with weeks of stress on top.

> *"My realtor told me to sell as is and most people would look past them. He was right and I sold 20k over asking."*
>
> A seller on skipping the kitchen remodel, public forum

But wait: Chapter 2 showed updated kitchens and baths earning real premiums. The answer to the puzzle is the difference between a refresh and a remodel. The refresh, painted or refaced cabinets, new hardware, new counters if truly tired, new faucet and lighting, cost people $3,000 to $15,000 and lets the listing honestly say updated. The $50,000 gut job buys the same word. Buyers pay for the word.

So when does the big spend make sense? In the stories where it worked, a few things were true: the house was otherwise strong and one bad room dragged the whole thing down; the neighborhood's buyers expect turnkey and punish anything less; or someone who knew the comps made the case with numbers, not feelings. There are real accounts of $70,000 in improvements moving a sale by far more than $70,000. There are at least as many of the opposite.

The flipper test. Professional investors decide big projects one way: will this specific dollar come back with a margin, in this ZIP, for this buyer pool? If you cannot answer that with comps in hand, you have your answer about the $50,000 kitchen. Do the refresh.

ASK YOURSELF

Is your big project fixing the home's actual weakest link, or the room that bugs you personally?

If the remodel money would not come back with a margin, what is the refresh version of the same fix?

CHAPTER 6

Kill the deal-killers before the buyer's inspector finds them

In the stories where sales fell apart or got expensively renegotiated, the script is always the same: a surprise at inspection, week four, seller now negotiating from weakness. You can delete that whole script for a few hundred dollars.

A pre-listing inspection, typically $400 to $1,100, got a 95 percent worth-it verdict, the highest of anything that involves hiring a pro. It turns unknowns into a to-do list while you still have time, choices, and leverage. In the renegotiation stories we read, buyers who found problems asked for $20,000 to $50,000, usually more than double what fixing the issue in advance would have cost.

> *"I had a home and termite inspection completed and we had all of the items fixed. The home looked great and sold in 4 days. That was worth it."*
>
> A seller, public forum

What actually kills deals here

Ranked by how often they show up in walked-away and renegotiation stories:

- **Smells**, pet and smoke. The number one turnoff. See Chapter 4.
- **Roof problems**, the most cited inspection issue. In this climate, moss counts against you from the street.
- **Little problems in clusters**: the leaky faucet plus the cracked window plus the soft deck board. Each is trivial. Together they tell the buyer "nobody took care of this house."
- **Dated kitchen plus worn floors together**, the combo that moves a home from "needs paint" to "project," and into Chapter 2's discount group.
- **Old systems with no paper trail**: a 25-year-old furnace with no service records invites a renegotiation. The same furnace with an inspection report and service history usually passes without a word.
- **Sewer lines**, the Puget Sound special. Older Seattle-area homes with original side sewers fail at exactly the wrong moment. A $200 to $500 scope before listing is cheap insurance against a five-figure surprise that shows up, by tradition, ten days before closing.

Fix it, credit it, or price it in

For every finding you have three honest options: fix it now, on your schedule and your contractor's price; disclose it and offer a credit, fine for truly optional stuff; or price the home to reflect it, which Chapter 2 suggests is the most expensive choice, because the discount for visible problems runs deeper than the repair usually costs. The option that does not exist is hoping the inspector misses it. They will not. And in Washington, known problems belong on the Form 17 disclosure regardless.

ASK YOURSELF

What would your own inspector find? If you do not know, what is that uncertainty costing you in pricing confidence?

CHAPTER 7

Photos, staging, and what your listing says

Buyers meet your home twice: once on a screen, once in person. The screen decides whether the in-person visit happens at all.

Professional photos got a 92 percent worth-it verdict at a few hundred dollars, and the agents in our collection treat them as non-negotiable. Shoot after the cheap seven, never before. Dusk exteriors, straight lines, bright rooms, no toilet lids up. If your agent's plan is phone photos, that tells you something about the rest of their plan.

Then there is the writing. Chapter 2 showed that the words in a listing track with the price per square foot a home gets. Partly the words describe the house, but the words are also chosen. After you do the work in this guide, make sure the listing honestly earns and uses the words that pay: renovated, updated, move-in ready, new roof, new heat pump, professionally landscaped. And check what your draft leans on. If its proudest claims are fresh paint and new carpet, buyers will read between the lines exactly the way the data says they do.

Two cautions: everything in the listing has to be true, and calling a 1990s kitchen "renovated" insults the only audience that matters. Buyers check the photos against the adjectives in about four seconds.

ASK YOURSELF

Imagine your home's listing. What are its three proudest claims? Are they premium-group words or discount-group words?

CHAPTER 8

Pricing: where all this work pays off, or gets wasted

Everything in this guide turns into money at exactly one moment: the week you set the price. The sales record is blunt about how that goes.

28 percent of recent King and Pierce sellers cut their price at least once. Their homes then took longer to sell and, overall, closed no better relative to their neighborhoods than homes priced right the first time. The data's verdict is simple: the first number was wrong, and everyone could see it.

Preparation and pricing work together in a way sellers often get backwards. A prepared home can be priced confidently at the top of its honest range, because it will show better than its comps. An unprepared home at the same number becomes a price-cut statistic. One of the most repeated regret stories we read goes: listed high to leave room to negotiate, sat, cut, sold below where we started. And the agent line that answers it shows up almost as often: your first price cut costs more than your whole prep budget.

On timing: the best-week-to-list effect in Puget Sound is real but small compared to the condition gap in Chapter 2. The sellers who waited months for the perfect week while the dated kitchen stayed dated got the order backwards. You control condition. You do not control which week the right buyer shows up.

ASK YOURSELF

If you had to defend your asking price to a skeptical buyer's agent using only facts about condition and comps, could you?

Would you rather spend one percent of your price getting ready, or three percent of it on a public price cut?

CHAPTER 9

The 60-day plan, at three budgets

Everything above, in order. Stretch the calendar if you need to; keep the order.

Weeks 1 to 2: know your home

Pre-listing inspection, plus a sewer scope on older homes	$500 to $1,300
Walk the comps with your agent; figure out which condition group your home is in today (Chapter 2 table)	$0
For every inspection finding, decide: fix, credit, or price it in	$0

Weeks 2 to 5: the cheap seven

Declutter and store; deep clean; kill smells at the source	$700 to $4,000
Paint where it counts; swap fixtures and hardware	$1,500 to $8,000
Fix the small stuff from the inspection	$500 to $4,500
Curb appeal: yard, pressure wash, moss, front door	$500 to $3,000

Weeks 5 to 8: package it and go

Stage the four rooms that sell the house	$1,300 to $5,000
Professional photos, after everything above	$300 to $700
Listing copy that honestly earns the words that pay	$0
Price to the prepared home's honest range, not past it	Priceless, roughly

If you only have...

- **$0 and elbow grease:** declutter, clean, mow, prune, scrub the front door, open the blinds. We read plenty of stories of homes that sold noticeably better on labor alone.
- **$2,500:** add the pre-listing inspection, paint in the main rooms, hardware and lighting swaps, and a yard day with hired help.

- **$10,000:** add whole-interior paint, floor triage (refinish or replace the worst surface, not all of them), staging, and the repair list. This budget, in this order, is what typically moves a listing up a full condition group.

BEFORE YOU GO

Ten questions Puget Sound owners should be able to answer

- Which condition group from Chapter 2 would your listing honestly land in today?
- What would a buyer's inspector find in your home this weekend?
- Which two of the cheap seven would change your home's photos the most?
- Is the big project you are considering fixing the home's weakest link, or your pet peeve?
- What is your home's honest price range prepared, versus as it sits?
- What does 46 days on market mean for your carrying costs and your next move?
- Who is your likely buyer, and what does move-in ready mean to them?
- What would you actually walk away with, after everything?
- If you knew you would sell within three years anyway, what would you do to the house now, while you still get to enjoy it?
- And the one that decides all the others: where are you in your real estate journey, still building, or ready to cash in what you have built?

Want the numbers for your specific home? We put together a free Property Brief for Puget Sound owners: what recent sales near you actually did, what your likely range looks like as-is versus prepared, and a prioritized prep list for your exact property. No strings, and it is useful even if you decide to stay put.

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Sources and disclosures. Sales analysis: 16,228 King and Pierce County closings, approximately January through July 2026, compared within ZIP codes; pricing histories reconstructed for 7,456 of them. Housing data from Redfin. County medians and inventory: Northwest MLS monthly report, June 2026. First-hand accounts: 6,277 structured accounts extracted from public online discussion forums, 2021 to 2026; quotes lightly edited for length and spelling, speakers anonymous. All figures describe past sales and public commentary; they are historical observations, not appraisals, predictions, or guarantees of any result for any specific property. This guide is general information, not legal, tax, or investment advice, and does not create an agency relationship. Troy Whitney is a licensed Washington real estate broker with Pellego. If your home is currently listed with another brokerage, this is not a solicitation of that listing.