Freeze Your Rent: the free plan

The short version of my rent-vs-buy plan: when buying beats renting, the numbers to check, and how to get into your first home.

PREVIEW EDITION

The idea

A fixed-rate mortgage freezes most of your housing cost on the day you sign, and rent never stops rising. Buying wins when you own long enough to earn back the roughly 9% it costs to buy and sell, at a price and rate that keep owning close to local rent.

The steps

1. Rent on purpose. Save 3 to 6 months of expenses, pay off credit cards, and invest something every month.
2. Run the quick tests on homes you'd really buy: the 5% rule (section 2), and price divided by a year's rent under about 14 at today's rates (section 6).
3. Run your own numbers with the worksheet (section 9).
4. Get ready with the checklist (section 10). Each box you can't tick is your to-do list.
5. Pick your way in (section 7). A duplex, triplex or fourplex you live in, a standard loan, FHA, VA, USDA, a house hack, an assumable loan or state down-payment help.
6. Shop the loan: Loan Estimates from at least three lenders, all within 45 days (section 8).
7. Buy with a fixed rate, keep your cushion, budget 1% of the price a year for repairs, and plan to own it 7 years or more, even if you move out and rent it.

Section numbers refer to the full guide, *Freeze Your Rent*.

The numbers to remember

Rule of thumb	Number
Own at least	7+ years; at 7.28%, a single-family starter needs much longer against a renter who invests everything
Cost to buy and sell	About 9% of the price
Monthly cost of owning (5% rule)	Price Ã— 5% Ã· 12; use 7% at 2026 rates
Price Ã· a year's rent	Under about 14 favors buying, at today's rates
Full housing payment	Under 28% of gross income
All debt payments	Under 36% of gross income
Cash left after closing	3â€“6 months of expenses
Repairs	1% of the price a year

> **The one warning.** At the November 2026 average rate of 7.28%, my starter home takes 22 years to beat a renter who invests every spare dollar. A duplex does it in 8 years and a fourplex in 4. The rate you lock and the building you choose matter as much as anything else in this guide.

First-home readiness checklist

You're ready to buy when you can check every box below. Each one you can't check is your to-do list.

- [ ] I expect to own this home at least 5 years, ideally 7 or more, even if I move and rent it out.
- [ ] I ran the 5% rule, using 7% at today's rates (section 2), on homes I'd buy, or ran them through the online calculator, and owning costs about the same as rent or less.
- [ ] My credit score is at least 620 for a conventional loan, or 580 for FHA with 3.5% down, and I know which loan fits my score.
- [ ] Any credit card balance I carry is small, fits inside the 36% debt limit below, and has a payoff plan, and I won't add new debt before closing.
- [ ] The full payment (principal, interest, tax, insurance, PMI) is under 28% of my gross income.
- [ ] All my monthly debt payments, including the new mortgage, are under 36% of gross income.
- [ ] After the down payment and closing costs, I'll still have 3â€“6 months of expenses saved, or I have a solid plan to have it by closing (living with relatives or in an RV for a few months, selling what I don't need).
- [ ] I've checked my state and county for down-payment assistance.
- [ ] I've talked to at least two lenders and compared their Loan Estimates.
- [ ] I've considered at least one path from the section above (house hacking, an assumable loan, a duplex).
- [ ] I'm buying for what I need now, not my dream home, and I have a plan for when and how I'd upgrade.
- [ ] I've budgeted 1% of the price each year for repairs, starting in year one.

My numbers

Home I'd really buy (address or listing)	
Price	
Rate I'd lock	
Rent for a similar home, per month	
5% rule at 2026 rates: price Ã— 7% Ã· 12	
Price Ã· a year's rent	
Full payment Ã· gross monthly income	
Cash left after closing (months of expenses)	

Run your own numbers

The online calculator fills in the worksheet from the guide with your own price, rate and rent, then runs the same 30-year comparison against a renter who invests none, half or all of the difference: zerotoretired.com/freeze-your-rent/calculator

The full guide: zerotoretired.com/freeze-your-rent

I'm not a financial professional. This plan is for education, not advice. The figures are illustrations built on stated assumptions; your prices, rates, taxes and rents will differ. Mortgage rates are as of November 19, 2026. Â© 2026 Lambert Andrus.