ROBIN SMITH · SURFSIDE BEACH & THE GRAND STRAND, SC

The Grand Strand *Buyer's Guide*

Buying on the South Carolina coast works differently — an attorney runs your closing, the state taxes a primary home at a fraction of what it taxes a second one, and flood and wind coverage are separate conversations with separate rules. This guide walks the whole path, the way I walk it with every buyer.

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Nine short chapters, in the order you'll need them.

Every fact in this guide comes from the fully sourced articles at **www.robinsmithhomes.com/blog** — each chapter names its article, and the appendix lists the primary sources: South Carolina statutes, county offices, and federal regulations.

CHAPTER 1

How buying works here.

Get pre-approved before you fall in love with anything, line up an agent and a closing attorney, and budget the way South Carolina actually calculates taxes and insurance — not the way your home state does.

Financing comes first

Before you look at a single listing, talk to a lender and get a **pre-approval letter** — not just a pre-qualification. It gives you a real number to shop with and makes your offer competitive. If this is your first home, ask specifically about **SC Housing** programs: the SC Housing Homebuyer Program pairs a fixed-rate mortgage with optional forgivable down-payment assistance for eligible buyers, and Palmetto Home Advantage is open to first-time, move-up, and repeat buyers statewide with no sales price cap. Income limits and terms change, so confirm current numbers with a participating lender or at schousing.sc.gov.

South Carolina requires an attorney at your closing

This is the biggest structural difference from most states: closings here must be conducted under the supervision of a licensed attorney — the South Carolina Supreme Court has ruled on it, and the state Bar's ethics guidance treats anything else as the unauthorized practice of law. In practice it's good for buyers: someone with legal authority reviews your title and closing documents. Your attorney typically gets involved shortly after you're under contract to begin the title search, not just at the closing table.

Your agent should be licensed through the **South Carolina Real Estate Commission** — the Commission's public lookup lets you verify any agent's license status.

The shape of the timeline

Most financed purchases close **30–45 days** after a signed contract; cash can move faster. Offers here use South Carolina's standard contract forms with financing, inspection, and appraisal contingencies. In a coastal market, point your inspector at roof condition and age, moisture and humidity damage, HVAC condition, and any sign of prior flood damage — and ask whether a separate wind-mitigation inspection makes sense, since it can also lower your insurance premium.

Full article: **Buying a Home in Myrtle Beach, SC — The Complete Guide** · robinsmithhomes.com/blog/buying-a-home-in-myrtle-beach-complete-guide

Where to look.

"Myrtle Beach" is shorthand for a 60-mile stretch that includes a walkable urban village, a historic barrier island, a fishing village, and a college town. Narrow the area before you tour homes.

COMMUNITY	COUNTY	WHAT IT'S LIKE
Myrtle Beach	Horry	The lively center — boardwalk, high-rise condos, the widest condo and resort-style inventory, close to the airport.
North Myrtle Beach	Horry	Four older beach towns merged in 1968; calmer and more residential, with more single-family homes.
The Market Common	Horry	Walkable, mixed-use village built on the former Air Force base — errands, dinner, and a park without a car.
Grande Dunes	Horry	Gated and master-planned around an 18-hole course, a private ocean club, and an Intracoastal marina; the higher end of the market.
Surfside Beach	Horry	Small and quiet — officially "The Family Beach" — with much of town an easy walk or golf-cart ride from the sand. My office is here on Surfside Drive.
Murrells Inlet	Horry / Georgetown	Fishing-village character on the marsh and creeks, known for the MarshWalk; water views and boat access over oceanfront.
Pawleys Island	Georgetown	Historic barrier island, no high-rises, proudly understated — quiet and history over nightlife and amenities.
Little River	Horry	Fishing-village roots at the Strand's northern tip; more house for the money, boating built around the harbor.
Carolina Forest	Horry	Master-planned neighborhoods off US 501, mostly built since the mid-1990s, with their own schools — newer homes, a short drive to the beach.
Conway	Horry	Historic inland river town with a walkable downtown and Coastal Carolina University; more land and lower prices than the coast.

Questions that sort it fast: do you want to **walk to dinner or drive**? Is golf or boating a **daily** priority or an occasional one? Do you want **quiet, or activity**? And is this a primary home, a part-time second home, or an investment — the answer changes both the areas that fit and, as the next chapter shows, the tax bill.

Full article: **Best Places to Live on the Grand Strand** · robinsmithhomes.com/blog/best-places-to-live-grand-strand-2026 — and town-by-town guides at robinsmithhomes.com/neighborhoods

CHAPTER 3

Property taxes: the 4% vs. 6% split.

South Carolina taxes an owner-occupied primary home very differently from every other kind of property — and the number on the listing sheet is the seller's bill, not yours.

The formula is **fair market value × assessment ratio × millage**. An owner-occupied **legal residence** is assessed at **4%** of fair market value; a second home, rental, or any other real property is assessed at **6%** (S.C. Code § 12-43-220). Qualifying for 4% also strips the **school operating millage** — typically the largest single piece of the levy — off your bill entirely.

Horry County's own worked example shows both effects at once (its published tax-year-2023 millage for the unincorporated county, 216.2 mills — an illustration of the mechanics, not a current quote):

STEP	LEGAL RESIDENCE (4%)	ALL OTHER PROPERTY (6%)
Fair market value	$200,000	$200,000
Assessed value	$8,000	$12,000
× Millage (.2162)	$1,729.60	$2,594.40
− School operating credit	−$944.80	none
Taxes due	**$784.80**	**$2,594.40**

Same house, same value — roughly a 3.3× difference, driven entirely by whether it's your legal residence.

> THE DEADLINE THAT COSTS PEOPLE MONEY
>
> The 4% ratio is **not automatic** — you apply through the Horry County Assessor, before the first penalty date for the tax year you first claim it (in practice, the January 15 following the tax year). The Assessor's own guidance: *"failure to file and become qualified means an automatic 6% assessment."* Buying a second home or rental? You're at 6% — and a separate 25% ATI exemption on 6% property exists, but only if you notify the assessor before January 31.

Budget from your numbers, not the seller's. Your purchase is an "assessable transfer of interest": the value resets to market as of December 31 of the year you buy, and the 15% reassessment cap that may have been protecting the long-time owner does not apply to that reset. Run the Horry County Assessor's online Tax Estimator against the parcel at your price and your ratio.

Also worth asking about: the separate **Homestead Exemption** — the first $50,000 of fair market value exempted for residents who've been in-state a year and are 65+, totally and permanently disabled, or legally blind. It's applied for **in person at the Auditor's office**, not the Assessor — filing legal residence does not enroll you in it. Bills run September 30 – January 15; if your first bill's notice went to the prior owner and you got none, the Treasurer **shall waive** the late penalties — call before paying them.

Full article: **Myrtle Beach Property Taxes — What Homeowners Need to Know** · robinsmithhomes.com/blog/myrtle-beach-property-taxes-homeowners-guide

CHAPTER 4

Flood zones: what the letters do to your loan.

Every property is in a flood zone — the question is which one. The answer decides whether your lender can legally close without a flood policy.

FEMA's "base flood" is the flood with a **1% chance per year** — a probability, not a once-a-century promise. The practical split in the zone letters: **A-something and V-something are inside the Special Flood Hazard Area; X is not.** AE is the most common high-risk zone here (published base flood elevation); VE is the oceanfront wave-action zone with stricter construction standards; X means moderate-to-minimal hazard — not zero.

Inside a Special Flood Hazard Area, federal law (42 U.S.C. § 4012a) bars regulated lenders from making the loan unless flood coverage is in force. Standard homeowners policies do not cover flooding; NFIP building coverage tops out at **$250,000** for a 1–4 family home, with contents coverage (purchased separately) up to $100,000. Your lender must accept qualifying **private** flood insurance too — a painful first NFIP quote isn't the end of the conversation.

> TIMING — THE 30-DAY RULE AND ITS EXCEPTION
>
> A new NFIP policy normally takes effect on the **30th day** after application and payment. Bought in connection with a loan closing, it's effective **at closing** — no queue — as long as the application and premium are presented at or before it. Buying with **cash**? Neither exception applies: start the policy at least 30 days out, not the week of.

Check the specific parcel, never the neighborhood: Horry County publishes the FEMA flood maps online, and the City of Myrtle Beach keeps lot-by-lot maps at Construction Services. Ask whether an **elevation certificate** already exists for the house — in Myrtle Beach, certificates filed for past construction in the floodplain are available for review, which beats paying a surveyor for a new one. Two local rules worth knowing: new residential construction in the city floodplain must sit at least **3 feet above base flood elevation**, and the city's Class 5 Community Rating System standing discounts NFIP premiums for everyone. Renovating something older and non-compliant? The **50% rule** can require bringing the whole building into compliance — price that in before you fall for a fixer.

Full article: **Understanding Flood Zones When Buying in Myrtle Beach** · robinsmithhomes.com/blog/understanding-flood-zones-buying-myrtle-beach

CHAPTER 5

Wind & hail: the line on the map.

On this coast, wind can be carved out of a homeowners policy — but only inside a statutorily defined strip, and the boundary is a road you can drive.

Under S.C. Code § 38-75-1230, an insurer may not exclude wind and hail from a homeowners policy **unless** the property is in the area served by the South Carolina Wind and Hail Underwriting Association. In Horry County that coastal area is everything **east of US 17 or Bypass 17, whichever runs farther west** — which takes in a very large share of Myrtle Beach, North Myrtle Beach, Surfside Beach, and Murrells Inlet housing. So the first insurance question on any coastal property isn't "what will it cost?" — it's **"which side of the line is this address on?"**

If the standard market won't write wind on a house, the **wind pool** (the Association) is the backstop — applications go through a licensed agent. Two things to insist on with any quote: the wind premium **broken out separately** (§ 38-75-1150 entitles you to it), and a plain answer on the **windstorm/hurricane deductible** — coastal policies often carry a second deductible, calculated differently from the all-other-perils one. And know your protections: an insurer may not non-renew a homeowners policy because you filed an act-of-God claim.

> THE STATE PAYS YOU TO STRENGTHEN THE HOUSE
>
> All tied to the same 4% legal-residence classification from Chapter 3: **SC Safe Home** grants for roof retrofits and opening protection (up to $7,500 depending on award type, subject to appropriations and application windows); a state income tax credit of up to **$1,000** for fortification costs; a credit up to **$1,500** for the sales tax on retrofit materials; an excess-premium credit up to **$1,250** when premiums pass 5% of adjusted gross income; and the **Catastrophe Savings Account**, a state-tax-deductible account for storm deductibles. A roof you were going to replace anyway can stack several of these.

Full article: **Wind Insurance in Coastal South Carolina** · robinsmithhomes.com/blog/wind-insurance-coastal-south-carolina

CHAPTER 6

Buying a condo: the building gets underwritten too.

Condos are a huge share of Grand Strand inventory, and three things make them a genuinely different purchase.

Two insurance policies, by law

South Carolina's Horizontal Property Act requires the association to insure the building itself, while you insure your own unit (typically an HO-6 policy covering interior finishes, personal property, and liability). Get the master policy's declarations page and ask specifically whether it includes flood and wind on the building, at a limit that looks sane against rebuild cost — an underinsured building resurfaces later as a special assessment.

Read the reserves before you're attached

A low monthly fee on an underfunded reserve account is how a "good deal" turns expensive. Ask for the current budget, the most recent **reserve study**, recent meeting minutes (has a special assessment been discussed?), any pending litigation, and the share of owners delinquent on dues.

Financing is building-specific

Lenders underwrite the building, not just you. FHA loans need the project on HUD's approved list (or through single-unit approval). Fannie Mae makes buildings "managed and operated as a hotel or motel" — daily rentals, registration desk, daily cleaning — **ineligible for conventional financing** even though the units are individually owned. In a heavily short-term-rental building, confirm financing for the specific building *before* you write the offer. And whatever the city allows, the HOA's own rental rules can be tighter — read the bylaws, not just the master deed.

Full article: **Buying a Condo in Myrtle Beach — HOA Fees, Insurance & Rules** · robinsmithhomes.com/blog/buying-a-condo-in-myrtle-beach-hoa-insurance-rules

CHAPTER 7

Closing day.

Closing here is short, structured, and — if the week before went right — genuinely uneventful. Federal law gives you your closing date: you must receive the Closing Disclosure at least three business days before consummation. Read it against your Loan Estimate, line by line, and use the little-known right to inspect it the business day before closing.

BRING	WHY
Government photo ID, everyone on the loan or deed	The attorney identifies and notarizes; unexpired, names matching the documents.
Certified funds or a completed wire	Ask the attorney's office what they accept and their cutoff — a week out, not the day before.
Proof of homeowners insurance, paid	In force at closing; on this coast, confirm whether wind and hail is included or written separately.
Flood policy, if required	Effective at loan closing when applied and paid at or before it (44 CFR § 61.11).
Your marked-up Closing Disclosure	With your questions written on it.
Outstanding lender conditions	Whatever your approval still lists.
A recorded power of attorney, if someone signs for you	Approved in advance by attorney and lender — a closing-day POA is the most common delay I see.
Your checkbook	For a small last-minute adjustment. Rare, but it saves a trip.

> **THE SCAM AIMED AT THIS EXACT MOMENT**
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> Wire-fraud scammers send spoofed emails posing as your agent, attorney, or lender with false wiring instructions. The defense, per the CFPB: pick two trusted people and confirm instructions with them before wiring; **never use a phone number or link from the email itself** — call the number you already had and read the account details back out loud. If it goes wrong, call your bank immediately, ask for a wire recall, and file at ic3.gov. Speed is the entire game.

Two recording charges apply after you sign, and they're often confused: the **deed recording fee** — South Carolina's transfer tax, $1.85 per $500 of value, by long-standing custom a **seller** expense — and the flat **filing fees** ($15 for a deed, $25 for a mortgage and most other documents). At the table, ask out loud: how is title being held? What did the title search turn up? What does my title insurance cover? How are taxes prorated — and remember from Chapter 3 that the seller's bill isn't yours.

Full article: **What to Bring to Closing in South Carolina** · robinsmithhomes.com/blog/what-to-bring-to-closing-south-carolina

CHAPTER 8

Making the move.

The relocation questions I get most aren't about the house — they're about the move. The deadlines are real, and two of them arrive in your first 45 days.

REQUIREMENT	DEADLINE	NOTES
SC driver's license	45 days from residency	In person at SCDMV, vision test; your old license is surrendered.
Vehicle registration	45 days from residency	County vehicle property tax is paid first; a one-time $250 Infrastructure Maintenance Fee applies to a vehicle first registered from out of state (waived for active-duty military and their spouses/dependents — ask, it isn't automatic).
Voter registration	No waiting period	Register any time; you must be registered 30 days before an election to vote in it.
4% legal residence	See Chapter 3	A separate application with its own deadline — the most expensive one to forget.

Hurricane season runs June 1 – November 30, peaking mid-August through October. It's not a reason to avoid the coast — but movers get tighter in late summer, and insurers commonly pause binding new policies once a storm is being tracked toward the coast, so if you're closing in season, talk timing with your insurance agent early. **Utilities:** water and sewer for most of Horry County runs through Grand Strand Water & Sewer Authority — no same-day activation, at least 24 hours' notice, closed weekends; electricity providers vary by exact address, so confirm yours rather than assuming. **Schools** are assigned by specific address — check a home's attendance zone before you get attached (Horry County Schools serves most of the northern Strand; Georgetown County School District covers Pawleys Island and Murrells Inlet's southern edge). And a detail that surprises retirees in a good way: South Carolina doesn't tax Social Security income, and residents 65+ get an additional state deduction of up to $15,000 per person on other income.

Full article: **Moving to Myrtle Beach — The Relocation Guide** · robinsmithhomes.com/blog/moving-to-myrtle-beach-relocation-guide

CHAPTER 9

The mistakes to skip.

- **Assuming the 4% tax rate applies automatically.** It doesn't — you apply, and until you do (or if it's a second home), you're at 6%.
- **Budgeting from the seller's tax bill.** Your purchase resets the assessment; run the estimator at your price and your ratio.
- **Skipping flood insurance because the home isn't in a mapped high-risk zone.** Maps get redrawn, and many claims come from outside the mapped zones.
- **Not asking the wind question on day one.** Which side of US 17/Bypass 17 the address sits on decides whether a wind exclusion is even possible — deals die at day twelve of due diligence over a question that takes one phone call on day one.
- **Judging a condo by its monthly fee.** A low fee on an underfunded reserve is a special assessment waiting to happen — and the building itself must pass your lender's review.
- **Wiring money to instructions that arrived by email.** Verify by phone, on a number nobody emailed you.
- **Underestimating the season.** Inventory, competition, and pricing pressure shift noticeably between summer and the quieter winter months.

About Robin

Hi, I'm Robin Smith, a Realtor with Weichert Realtors Southern Coast serving the Grand Strand of South Carolina. Originally from the Northeast, I moved to South Carolina to care for my parents, and along the way I fell in love with the area and discovered my true passion in real estate. Whether you're relocating, buying your dream home, or preparing to sell, I'm committed to making the process as smooth, enjoyable, and stress free as possible.

READY WHEN YOU ARE

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Primary sources

Every claim above is drawn from the cited articles at robinsmithhomes.com/blog, which source it to primary authority, including:

- S.C. Code of Laws: § 12-43-220 (assessment ratios), § 12-37-220(B)(47) (school operating exemption), § 12-37-3135/-3140/-3150 (ATI), § 12-37-250 (homestead), § 12-45-70/-180 (due dates, penalties), § 38-75-310/-330/-350/-460/-790/-1150/-1160/-1230 (coastal wind), § 38-75-485 (Safe Home), § 12-6-1620/-3660/-3665/-3670 (credits & accounts), § 8-21-310 (filing fees), Title 27 Ch. 31 (Horizontal Property Act), § 56-3-627 (IMF) — scstatehouse.gov
- Horry County Assessor, Auditor & Treasurer — Guide to Assessment, Tax Estimator, FAQs; Horry County FEMA flood maps; Register of Deeds — horrycountysc.gov
- SC Department of Revenue — deed recording fee; retiree tax tips — dor.sc.gov

- SC Bar Ethics Advisory Opinion 05-16 (attorney closings) — scbar.org; SC Real Estate Commission — llr.sc.gov/re
- Federal: 42 U.S.C. § 4012a & § 4013 (mandatory purchase, NFIP limits); 44 CFR §§ 59.1, 61.11, 64.3, Part 70; 12 CFR § 1026.19 (Closing Disclosure) — ecfr.gov, uscode.house.gov
- CFPB — closing costs; Closing Disclosure explainer; mortgage closing scams — consumerfinance.gov
- City of Myrtle Beach — flood protection program, freeboard, CRS class, population; SC Housing — schousing.sc.gov; HUD condo approval — hud.gov; Fannie Mae Selling Guide B4-2.1-03 — selling-guide.fanniemae.com
- SCDMV — moving to SC; scvotes.gov; SC Department of Education report cards; GSWSA — gswsa.com; SC Department of Insurance — doi.sc.gov; NOAA National Hurricane Center; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (Regional Price Parities)

Please note: This guide is general information for Grand Strand home buyers — not legal, tax, or insurance advice. Real estate law, tax rules, and insurance requirements change over time and depend on your specific situation and property. South Carolina requires a licensed attorney at every real estate closing; consult that attorney, a CPA, or a licensed insurance agent before acting on anything you read here. Robin Smith is a licensed South Carolina real estate agent (License #139760), not an attorney, accountant, or insurance producer. Program terms, deadlines, and figures are as published by the cited sources at the time of writing — confirm current details with the source before relying on them.