What to watch for: one checklist for every loan type

Spot any of these? Flag it early so it can be fixed before the appraisal, or call me to talk through options.

Roof and outside

- [ ] Roof leaks, missing or curling shingles, or exposed wood
- [ ] Peeling paint or bare wood on siding, trim or fascia
- [ ] Ground sloping toward the house, or gutters and downspouts missing
- [ ] Broken windows, or exterior doors that don't lock

Inside

- [ ] Water stains on ceilings or walls
- [ ] Exposed subfloor: plywood or particleboard showing where carpet, vinyl, tile or wood is missing
- [ ] Exposed insulation or open studs: missing drywall in living areas, or paper-faced insulation left uncovered in a basement, garage or attic (a fire hazard)
- [ ] Other unfinished work: missing cabinets, counters, fixtures or trim
- [ ] Big cracks, bowed walls or sloping floors (hairline cracks are fine)
- [ ] Water, dampness or standing water in the basement or crawl space

Systems

- [ ] No permanent heat (space heaters and fireplaces don't count)
- [ ] Air conditioning that's installed but doesn't work
- [ ] Sinks, toilets, tubs or showers that don't work, or leaks under sinks
- [ ] Exposed wiring, missing outlet or switch covers, or a missing panel cover
- [ ] Water heater without two straps or a relief valve and drain pipe

Safety

- [ ] Missing smoke or carbon monoxide alarms (required by law in Washington)
- [ ] Stairs with 4 or more steps and no handrail
- [ ] Loose or broken steps, or other trip hazards
- [ ] Bedroom burglar bars without a quick-release
- [ ] Pool or spa not fenced

Hazards left on the property

- [ ] Piles of trash, junk, yard waste or construction debris, inside or out
- [ ] Open paint, fuel, solvent or chemical containers; loose propane tanks or gas cans
- [ ] Abandoned vehicles, appliances or furniture (an old fridge or freezer with the door on is a classic call)
- [ ] Open holes, uncovered wells or septic lids, exposed nails, broken glass
- [ ] Rotted decks, sheds or outbuildings that could collapse

Homes built before 1978

- [ ] Any chipping or peeling paint, inside or out, including fences, sheds and detached garages. This is the #1 FHA and VA repair

Red flags to ask about

- [ ] Signs of termites or wood rot
- [ ] Additions, ADUs or garage conversions without permits
- [ ] Well, septic, shared driveway or private road (ask for tests and agreements)
- [ ] Utilities off on a vacant or bank-owned home (they must be on for the appraisal)
- [ ] Heating oil tank, buried or above ground (common in older Washington homes): ask for decommissioning paperwork

Manufactured homes

- [ ] Built before June 15, 1976 (pre-HUD "mobile home"): no FHA, VA, USDA or conventional financing. Plan on cash or a portfolio lender
- [ ] Red HUD label on the outside of each section, and the data plate inside. Labels are often painted over: carefully remove the paint so the number reads before the appraisal or inspection
- [ ] Foundation certification on file, or order one early (required for FHA)
- [ ] Skirting complete, piers and tie-downs solid, hitch, wheels and axles removed
- [ ] Decks, porches, carports and additions on their own footings; anything resting on or tied into the home needs an L&I permit
- [ ] Titled with the land as real property (vehicle title eliminated)

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Manufactured homes: foundation certification and attachments

Manufactured homes fall apart at underwriting over three things: the foundation certification, the HUD labels and title, and anything built onto the home. Check these at the listing or first showing, not after the appraisal.

Eligible to finance at all

- [ ] Built on or after June 15, 1976, under the federal HUD code. Pre-HUD homes (built earlier, with no HUD label) are ineligible for FHA, VA, USDA, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Financing means cash, a portfolio lender (some local banks and credit unions), or seller financing, and the appraisal may give the home little value over the land
- [ ] Red metal HUD certification label on the outside of each section, and the paper data plate inside (often a kitchen cabinet, bedroom closet or panel door)
- [ ] Labels are often painted over. Remove the paint before the appraisal or engineer's visit with a gentle paint remover, not a scraper or grinder; the label number is stamped into the plate and must stay readable
- [ ] Sold with the land and titled as real property. In Washington, the vehicle title must be eliminated (RCW 65.20) so it's taxed with the land
- [ ] At least 400 sq ft of living area (conventional also requires 12 ft wide)
- [ ] Never moved from its first site (conventional rule; most lenders apply it to every loan type)
- [ ] Towing hitch, wheels and axles removed (conventional rule; most engineers and FHA and VA lenders expect it too)

Foundation certification

- [ ] FHA requires one on every file: a Washington-licensed engineer or architect certifies the foundation meets HUD's Permanent Foundations Guide (signed, sealed, license number). VA and many conventional lenders order one too
- [ ] A prior FHA certification can be reused only if nothing was altered or added and the foundation shows no damage since. Ask the seller for it; otherwise order a new one early

Under the home (what the engineer checks)

- [ ] Piers on solid footings, not dirt, loose stacked blocks or missing shims
- [ ] Tie-downs and straps present, tight and not rusted through
- [ ] Skirting continuous with no gaps. FHA: lightweight vinyl or metal skirting must be attached to solid backing (concrete, masonry, treated wood or equal)
- [ ] Crawl space access, vents, a ground vapor barrier, and no standing water or debris
- [ ] No signs of settling: doors that stick, sagging floors or a separating marriage line between sections

Anything attached: decks, porches, carports, garages, additions, roof-overs

- [ ] Washington rule: attached structures must stand on their own posts and footings unless the data plate says the home was built to carry them. A self-supporting one can be flashed to the home and needs only a local permit
- [ ] Supported by the home, tied into its wiring, plumbing or heat, or cut into its walls or roof: needs an L&I alteration permit and inspection
- [ ] FHA: the foundation certification must address every addition. Conventional: an addition or structural change must be inspected by the state agency or a state-regulated third party
- [ ] Red flags: a deck ledger bolted to the home, a carport or roof-over resting on the home's roof, a garage or room cut into the side wall, an enclosed porch counted as living space, wiring run from the home's panel to an addition or shop

If something's missing

- **Missing HUD label or data plate.** Check first that it isn't just painted over. If it's truly missing, order a label verification letter from IBTS, HUD's label contractor. Allow a few weeks. A pre-HUD home has no label to verify, so no letter will fix it.
- **Unpermitted attachment.** Get an engineer letter that it's self-supporting and pull a local permit after the fact, or an L&I alteration permit if it relies on the home. Otherwise remove it or exclude it from value before the appraisal.
- **Titled as personal property.** Title elimination through the county and Department of Licensing must be done before closing; start it at listing.
- **No prior certification, or something was added.** Order a new engineer's certification that covers the foundation and every attached structure.
- **Skirting, tie-downs or piers.** Usually a quick installer fix. Have it done before the engineer's visit so the certification comes back clean.

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