



A 2026 HOMEBUYER GUIDE

WHERE DID ALL THE HOUSES GO?

A clear, fact-grounded look at Southeastern Wisconsin's housing market — and what today's prices, supply, and rates really mean for your monthly payment and your equity.

Southeastern Wisconsin · Greater Milwaukee

A HOMEBUYER GUIDE

WHERE DID ALL THE HOUSES GO?

What's really happening to home prices, supply & your money

Buyers are surprised. Mortgage rates have come down from the 7%-plus levels of 2024–2025 into the 6% range, yet competition hasn't let up. With far too few homes for sale, metro Milwaukee prices reached a record in 2025 — rising even while borrowing costs stayed high. Here's why, and what it means for your monthly payment and your equity.

\$470,702

Record average sale price, metro Milwaukee (4 counties) in 2025 — up 6.1% over 2024

~8,000

Additional homes the metro area needs just to reach a balanced market

All 8

Southeastern Wisconsin counties posted higher average prices in 2025

THE SHORT VERSION

Supply is the story. Sales held roughly flat in 2025, but a shortage of listings kept pushing prices higher. If rates fall further, more buyers tend to enter faster than new homes appear — which supports prices rather than cooling them.

WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS

Why supply is so tight, how values moved across all eight counties, how healthy the market is underneath, and — with real payment and equity math — what buying actually looks like for you.

WHY IS SUPPLY SO TIGHT?

Three forces are keeping listings scarce across the region

GOLDEN HANDCUFFS

A large share of owners hold mortgages well below today's rates. Selling means trading a cheap loan for a costlier one — so many stay put, and inventory stays low.

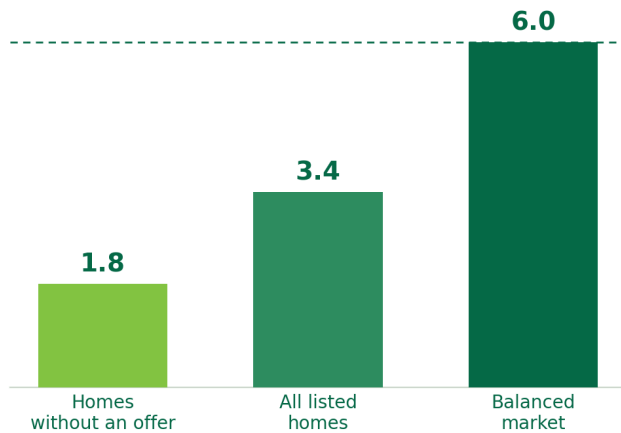
BUILDERS STAY CAUTIOUS

New construction sits far below what the market needs. Only about 2,042 metro homes were built in 2024, and just 807 by mid-2025 — a fraction of normal output.

A DEMOGRAPHIC TAILWIND

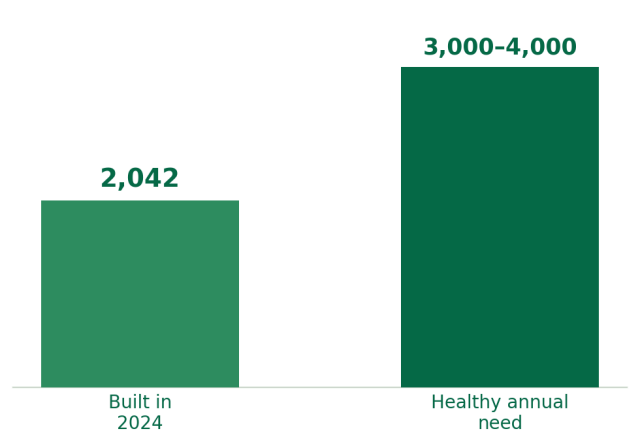
Millennials and Gen Z — the two largest adult generations — are reaching prime buying age just as Baby Boomers age in place, keeping demand high for years.

Months of supply — far below balanced



A balanced market is about 6 months of supply. Once homes already under contract are removed, only ~1.8 months remain available. Source: GMAR, September 2025.

New homes built vs. what the market needs



A healthy market normally adds 3,000-4,000 homes per year; 2024 delivered 2,042. Source: GMAR, citing HUD statistics.

"The current market has no shortage of buyers; instead, buyers are competing for too few available listings." — Greater Milwaukee Association of REALTORS market report

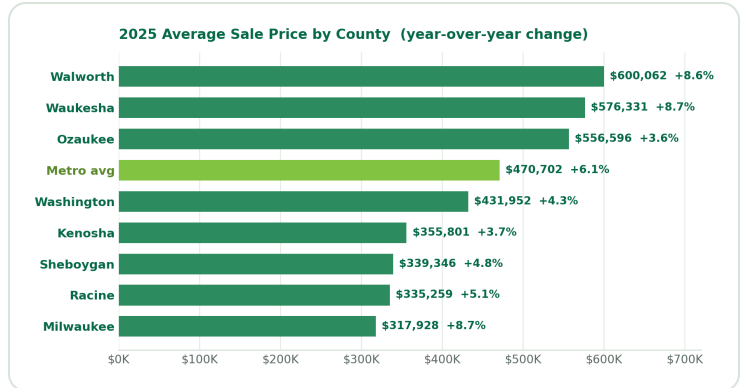
If rates drop, qualified buyers gain purchasing power at today's prices — increasing competition for a limited number of homes. Per GMAR, the only durable fix is building more.

SE WISCONSIN VALUES KEEP RISING

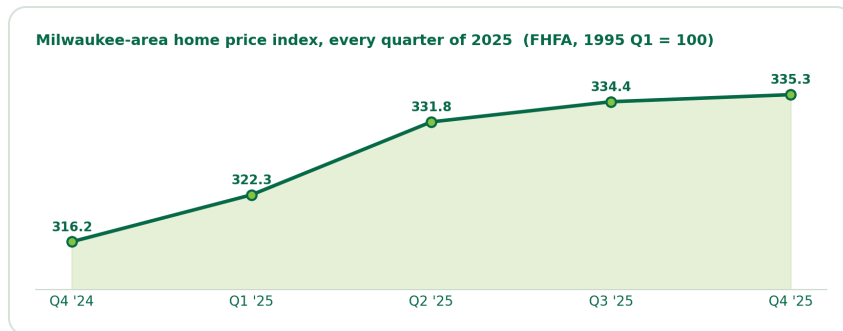
Full-year 2025 results — every county posted gains

Across the eight-county southeastern Wisconsin region there were **23,906 sales** in 2025 at an average price of **\$501,896**. In the four-county metro core, the average reached a record **\$470,702** (+6.1%). Tight supply — not speculation — is driving it.

County	2025 Avg	YoY
Walworth	\$600,062	+8.6%
Waukesha	\$576,331	+8.7%
Ozaukee	\$556,596	+3.6%
Washington	\$431,952	+4.3%
Kenosha	\$355,801	+3.7%
Sheboygan	\$339,346	+4.8%
Racine	\$335,259	+5.1%
Milwaukee	\$317,928	+8.7%
Metro avg	\$470,702	+6.1%
8-county avg	\$501,896	~+6%



Average sale prices, full-year 2025 vs. 2024. Source: GMAR / Metro MLS year-end report.

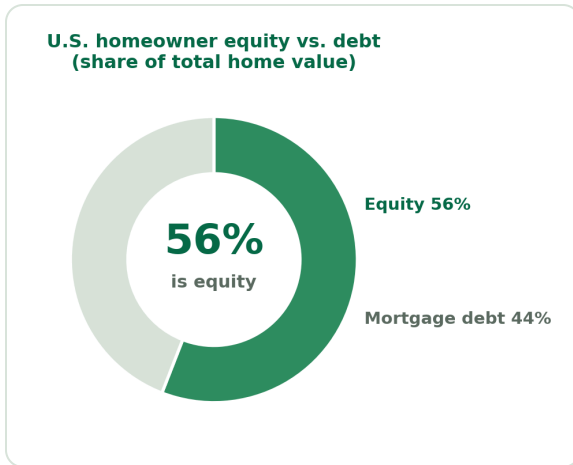


STEADY, NOT SPECULATIVE

The federal home-price index for the Milwaukee area rose every single quarter of 2025. Values here have historically been "sticky," anchored to a genuine shortage of homes rather than to speculation — the opposite of an oversupplied, fragile market.

HOW HEALTHY IS THIS MARKET?

A clear-eyed look beneath the headline prices



OWNERS AREN'T OVER-LEVERAGED

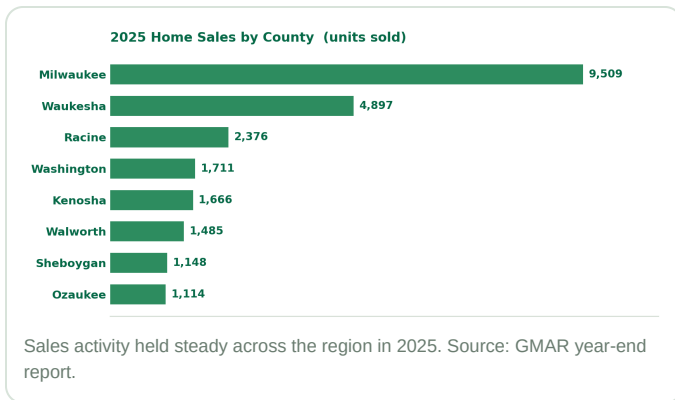
Nationally, mortgage debt equals only about 44% of home values, so roughly 56% is equity. Tappable equity has reached a record near \$11.5 trillion, and fewer than 0.6% of mortgages are underwater. That cushion makes a wave of forced sales unlikely.

<0.6%

Share of U.S. mortgages that are underwater

~44%

Mortgage debt as a share of home value — among the lowest in 20+ years



One signal worth watching: mortgage delinquencies have edged up from their recent lows. Industry data put the delinquency rate near **3.35%** in early 2026, and the Mortgage Bankers Association reported **4.26%** for the fourth quarter of 2025, with foreclosure activity rising. Levels remain moderate by long-run standards — the historical average is above 5% — but the trend is worth keeping an eye on.

The bigger picture: strong equity, steady demand, and a persistent shortage of homes describe a market under **supply pressure** — a very different profile from an oversupplied, over-leveraged one.

WHAT DOES WAITING COST?

Real payment math on an average-priced Milwaukee home

Renters build no equity — each payment is gone. Owners build it two ways: paying down the loan and benefiting from appreciation. Here's how the numbers look on a typical Milwaukee home.

THE SCENARIO

Home price	\$318,000
Down payment (10%)	\$31,800
Loan amount	\$286,200
Rate (illustrative, 30-yr fixed)	6.5%

\$1,809 / mo

ESTIMATED PRINCIPAL & INTEREST

Home price ≈ Milwaukee County's 2025 average sale price (\$317,928, GMAR). Taxes and insurance are additional. Lower-down-payment options exist — ask us.

Now, what waiting a year looks like. If this same home appreciates a modest 3%, here's what changes if you buy 12 months from now instead of today:

If you wait 12 months	Today	+1 year
Home price	\$318,000	\$327,540
Down payment needed	\$31,800	\$32,754
Loan amount	\$286,200	\$294,786
Monthly P&I	\$1,809	\$1,863

+\$54/mo

~\$651 in year one

Higher payment by waiting — and it repeats every year of the loan

~\$1,060/mo

~\$12,700 over 12 months

Wealth you'd build by owning (loan paydown + appreciation) — forfeited by waiting

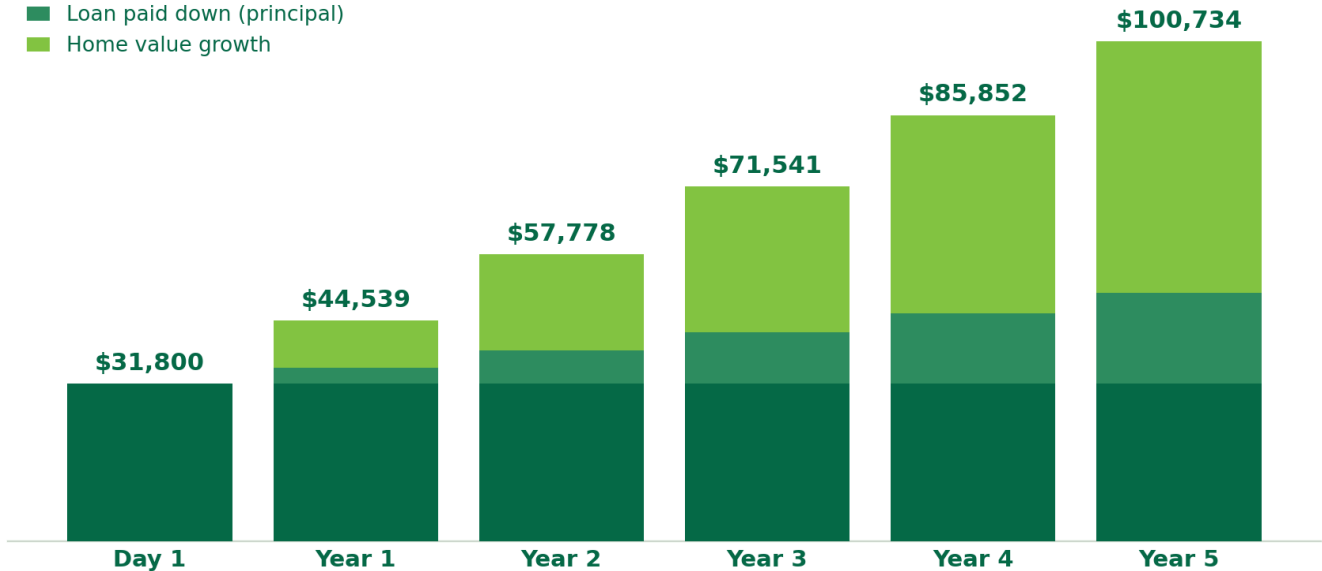
The honest version: waiting only pays off if prices and rates *both* fall enough to offset a year of lost equity. In a market this short on homes, that's far from guaranteed — which is why, for most buyers who can qualify, the cost of waiting is real.

HOW OWNERSHIP BUILDS WEALTH

The same Milwaukee home, five years of equity

Estimated equity built over 5 years on an average Milwaukee home

- Your down payment
- Loan paid down (principal)
- Home value growth

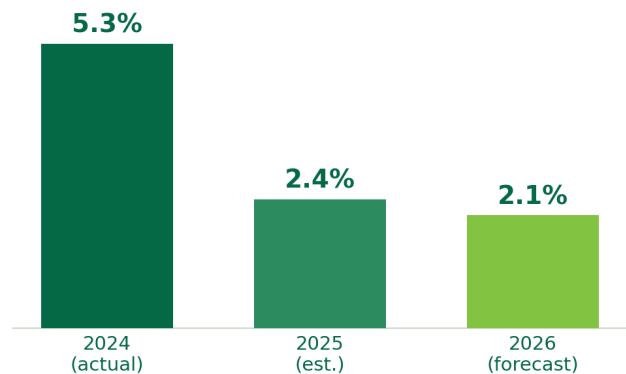


TWO ENGINES, WORKING TOGETHER

Every month, part of your payment pays down the loan (that's equity you keep), while the home itself tends to gain value. On this scenario, an estimated **\$31,800** in starting equity grows to about **\$100,700** in five years — roughly tripling — even at a conservative 3% appreciation rate.

A renter making the same monthly payment for five years builds **\$0** in equity. Same money out the door — very different result.

Expert panel U.S. price-growth outlook (supports a conservative assumption)



Why 3% is conservative: the national expert panel projects roughly 2% annual growth ahead, while metro Milwaukee rose about 6% in 2025. We used 3% to keep the illustration grounded. Source: Fannie Mae / Pulsenomics Home Price Expectations Survey.

How these figures were calculated: Assumes a \$318,000 purchase, 10% down, a 30-year fixed loan at an illustrative 6.5% rate, and 3% annual home-price appreciation. Equity = down payment + cumulative principal paid + estimated appreciation. Figures are rounded estimates for illustration only, exclude taxes, insurance, closing costs, and any mortgage insurance, and are not a guarantee of future home values or an offer to lend.

MEET THE TEAM

The people who'll guide you from pre-approval to the closing table

Buying a home is a team effort. Here's who you'll be working with at Refined Mortgage Group — each focused on a specific part of your loan so nothing falls through the cracks.



Ethan Brooks

**MORTGAGE ADVISOR / BRANCH
MANAGER**

Structures your loan around your income, assets, and credit, and keeps every party in the transaction on the same page from start to finish.



Marty Johnston

SENIOR PRODUCTION PARTNER

Evaluates applications for purchases and refinances, analyzes your financial documents to determine credit worthiness, and walks you through the loan programs available to you.



April Jacobs

BRANCH PROCESSING MANAGER

Sends and explains your loan disclosures, confirms underwriting and investor guidelines, and gathers the documentation needed to keep processing moving.



Jaco Albertyn

PRODUCTION PARTNER

Evaluates purchase and refinance applications, reviews financial documents to assess credit worthiness, and helps educate clients on the loan programs that fit best.



Cory Witek

LOAN MANAGER

Handles disclosures and documentation, prepares and submits your file for underwriting, and stays with you through closing and the servicing handoff afterward.



Dakota O'Donoghue

LOAN MANAGER

Handles disclosures and documentation, prepares and submits your file for underwriting, and stays with you through closing and the servicing handoff afterward.

Already pre-approved? You're a step ahead. Reach out any time with questions about your numbers, your timeline, or a specific home — we're here to help you move with confidence.

SOURCES & DISCLOSURES

Every market figure in this guide, with its source

Metro & county sale prices and sales volume, 2025. Greater Milwaukee Association of REALTORS / Metro MLS year-end report (metro avg \$470,702, +6.1%; 8-county region avg \$501,896; 23,906 sales; per-county prices, year-over-year change, and units sold).

~8,000 additional units needed to balance the market. GMAR year-end 2025 report.

Months of supply: ~1.8 available, ~3.4 total, ~6.0 balanced. GMAR monthly report, September 2025.

New construction: 2,042 metro units in 2024; 807 by mid-2025; 3,000–4,000 normal annual need. GMAR, citing HUD statistics.

Milwaukee-area home price index, quarterly 2025. U.S. Federal Housing Finance Agency All-Transactions House Price Index, Milwaukee-Waukesha

MSA (via FRED).

30-year fixed rates in the 6% range in early 2026, down from 7%+ in 2024–2025. Freddie Mac Primary Mortgage Market Survey.

Expert price-growth outlook: ~2% per year nationally; ~20% five-year cumulative. Fannie Mae Home Price Expectations Survey, produced with Pulsenomics.

Mortgage delinquency ~3.35% (early 2026) and 4.26% (Q4 2025); rising foreclosure activity; long-run average above 5%. ICE First Look and Mortgage Bankers Association National Delinquency Survey.

Homeowner equity: ~44% leverage; ~56% equity; ~\$11.5T record tappable equity; <0.6% underwater. ICE Mortgage Monitor.

Payment and equity figures throughout this guide are illustrations based on the assumptions stated on those pages. They are not an offer or commitment to lend, not a guarantee of any rate, payment, or future home value, and are subject to credit approval, property appraisal, and program eligibility. Actual rate, payment, and terms will vary. This material is for general educational purposes and is not financial, investment, tax, or legal advice. Market data reflects full-year 2025 reporting and other sources noted above.

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