

HANDYMAN JACKS

Wasatch Front Handyman · Pre-Listing Specialists

The Utah Home Seller's Pre-Listing Guide

What to fix before you list, what to skip, and what every Utah buyer's inspector flags.

A practical 25-page playbook for Wasatch Front sellers who want a faster sale at a stronger price — without overspending on repairs that don't move the needle.

Built for: anyone listing a home in Holladay, Sandy, Cottonwood Heights, Draper, Salt Lake City, Millcreek, Murray, South Jordan, West Jordan, Lehi, or anywhere across the Wasatch Front.

Table of Contents

1	The 12 highest-ROI pre-listing updates	3
2	Wasatch Front-specific issues every seller should check	7
3	FHA & VA inspection items that kill deals	10
4	Cosmetic vs. structural — where to spend, where to skip	13
5	Staging vs. repair — what actually moves price	15
6	The 30 / 60 / 90-day pre-listing timeline	17
7	Pricing realities — what the buyer's inspector will quote vs. what it actually costs	19
8	How GoMarketReady works (if you want help)	22

How to use this guide: Skim section 1 to see what's worth doing. Skim section 6 to plan when to do it. Read sections 2, 3, and 7 carefully — those are the parts that catch most sellers off guard. Section 8 only matters if you want help executing.

The 12 Highest-ROI Pre-Listing Updates

Most sellers overspend on the wrong things and underspend on the right things. Based on the 2026 Cost vs. Value Report, NAR remodeling impact data, and what actually moves Wasatch Front listings, here are the twelve updates that consistently return more than you spend.

1. Garage door replacement

Steel two-car door installed: typical cost \$1,800–\$3,500. Cost vs. Value Report puts this at the top of every list for the last five years — adds ~\$5,000–\$8,000 in perceived value. Best-performing exterior project nationally.

Cost: \$1,800–\$3,500 ROI: 200–260%

2. Front door + entry refresh

New steel entry door, fresh paint (black doors actually do test higher in studies), polished hardware, and a clean stoop. The whole entry is the first 8 seconds of a buyer's opinion.

Cost: \$600–\$1,800 ROI: 180–210%

3. Interior paint touch-ups + 1–3 full rooms

The single highest-leverage cosmetic update. Patch every ding, touch up every scuff, and repaint 1–3 high-impact rooms in neutral colors. Photos pop, showings feel cared-for.

Cost: \$400–\$2,500 ROI: 150–200%

4. Light fixture swap (3–5 fixtures)

Entry, dining, kitchen, primary bath, and one statement fixture. Dated brass or boob lights dated the whole house; modern fixtures make a home read 5–10 years newer in photos.

Cost: \$300–\$1,200 (installed) ROI: 140–180%

5. Faucet swap (bathroom + kitchen)

Chrome single-handle bathroom faucets and a kitchen pull-down. Dated chrome reads "tired"; modern fixtures read "updated." Bathroom faucet swap installed runs \$245; kitchen \$295.

Cost: \$300–\$700 (installed) ROI: 130–170%

6. Cabinet hardware swap

Knobs and pulls in kitchen and primary bath. Maybe \$200 in hardware, \$200–\$400 in install labor, and a kitchen suddenly looks 10 years newer.

Cost: \$400–\$800 (installed) ROI: 200–250%

7. Pressure wash exterior

Driveway, walkway, siding (soft-wash), deck (prep for stain). Strips the winter grime and gives every listing photo more contrast. Spring closer-out-the-door priority.

Cost: \$345–\$700 ROI: 100–150%

8. Deck refresh — sand + stain

Back-of-house listing photos live or die by the deck. A \$400–\$1,500 sand + stain (or replace 5–10 worn boards) transforms how the backyard reads.

Cost: \$400–\$1,500 ROI: 130–180%

9. Carpet cleaning (or selective replacement)

Professional carpet cleaning is \$200–\$400 and refreshes the smell + look of the whole home. Replace only the worst rooms if cleaning won't bring them back.

Cost: \$200–\$1,500 ROI: 100–140%

10. Drywall repair (patch every flaw)

Nail pops, door knob holes, accident damage, settling cracks. Every visible drywall flaw becomes a buyer talking point. Patch and texture-match before paint.

Cost: \$195–\$800 ROI: 120–180%

11. Caulking + grout refresh

Re-caulk every tub, shower, kitchen counter, and major trim seam. Re-grout if grout is stained. Cheap labor, big perceived freshness gain.

Cost: \$200–\$500 ROI: 110–160%

12. Curb appeal landscaping touch-up

Fresh mulch, trimmed shrubs, edged lawn, one statement planter at the front door. Doesn't require a landscape rebuild; just clean and intentional.

Cost: \$200–\$800 ROI: 130–200%

What's NOT on this list — and why. Major kitchen remodels (60–70% ROI), full bathroom remodels (60–74%), and luxury fixture upgrades all return less than they cost. If you're listing in the next 60–90 days, skip them. The 12 above are where every dollar earns at least a dollar back.

Wasatch Front-Specific Issues Every Seller Should Check

Utah's climate, geology, and housing stock create a specific list of issues you won't see in generic seller guides. These are the items that consistently show up in Wasatch Front inspection reports — knowing them lets you fix them before they become buyer leverage.

Snow & ice issues (east bench especially)

Holladay, Cottonwood Heights, Millcreek, and the east-bench neighborhoods see heavy snow load that sits against decks and siding for months. The most common deal-killer here is **ledger-board rot** — the board that attaches the deck to the house slowly rots from prolonged snow contact, eventually pulling away. A \$895 ledger repair before listing is a \$5,000+ inspection-finding negotiation after.

Also common: gutter clogs and ice-dam damage to fascia, soffit rot under heavy ice areas, and missing or damaged downspout extensions that pour water against the foundation.

Drainage & slope grading

Many Wasatch Front lots are graded for runoff toward the foothills. When previous owners added decks, patios, or hardscapes, drainage often got blocked. Inspectors look for: water staining on foundation walls, efflorescence (white mineral deposits) in basements, and pooling near the foundation after irrigation cycles. Fix grading and downspout extensions before listing.

Swamp coolers in older homes

If your home still has a swamp cooler (common in Murray, Millcreek, central Salt Lake), expect a buyer to flag it. Modern buyers want central A/C. Options: (1) keep it operational and disclose, (2) replace with A/C before listing (coordinated through a licensed HVAC contractor — Utah requires S350/S354), or (3) price the home accordingly.

Slab leaks & galvanized plumbing (older homes)

Homes built before 1980 sometimes still have galvanized water lines that corrode internally. Tell-tale signs: rust-colored water on first morning use, low water pressure, and small slab leaks. A pre-listing repipe (coordinated through a licensed plumbing contractor) prevents a six-figure inspection finding.

Stucco issues (Sandy, Draper, newer construction)

Stucco cracks, efflorescence, and improper flashing around windows are common findings on 1990s–2000s Sandy and Draper homes. Hairline cracks are usually cosmetic, but deeper cracks at corners or around windows can indicate moisture intrusion. Have a stucco specialist look before you list if you see anything suspicious.

Settling cracks (everywhere)

Utah's clay soils expand and contract dramatically with seasonal moisture. Almost every home develops settling cracks — at the corners of door frames, ceiling-to-wall joints, basement walls. **Most are cosmetic.** Patch and paint before listing. Disclose any cracks wider than 1/4-inch or that have grown over time.

Roof age (especially east bench)

Wasatch Front roofs typically last 15–20 years (asphalt shingle). If your roof is 18+ years old, get an inspection BEFORE listing — buyers will demand one anyway, and you want to negotiate from a position of knowledge. Roof issues that fail FHA/VA: missing shingles, exposed underlayment, granule loss, and less than 2–3 years of remaining life.

Sprinkler systems & backflow preventer

Most municipalities require an annual backflow preventer test. Buyers often ask for the most recent test report. Also: visible sprinkler heads should pop up and spray properly during a showing if the system is on. Broken heads, exposed pipes, or muddy patches signal deferred maintenance.

FHA & VA Inspection Items That Kill Deals

FHA and VA buyers represent a significant share of Utah purchases. Their loans require an appraisal that's explicitly looking for safety, soundness, and habitability issues — and the lender will require the seller to fix them BEFORE closing. Fix these before listing and you remove the most common renegotiation triggers.

Safety hazards (most common)

- **Missing or non-working smoke and CO detectors** — required in every bedroom, hallway, and on every level. 10-year sealed-battery units are cheapest and most reliable.
- **Missing GFCI outlets** in baths, kitchens, laundry, and exterior. Required by FHA/VA in all locations near water.
- **Loose or missing handrails** — interior stairs and any deck/porch with 3+ steps or a 12-inch drop.
- **Exposed or frayed wiring** anywhere visible — basement, garage, attic, behind washers.
- **Missing electrical cover plates** — every outlet and switch must have an intact cover.

Lead-based paint (pre-1978 homes)

If your home was built before 1978 and has **any peeling, chipping, or flaking paint** — interior or exterior — FHA and VA treat it as a lead-based paint hazard. You'll be required to repaint or scrape and seal before closing. Scrape and prime any flaking paint as part of pre-listing prep, and document with photos.

Roof condition

Appraisers will note missing shingles, exposed underlayment, severe granule loss, and any sign that the roof has less than 2–3 years of remaining life. If your roof is borderline, get it inspected pre-listing and have a written estimate ready for buyer negotiations. Replacement is performed by a licensed Utah roofing contractor (S217).

Water heater + furnace operational

Both must be present, properly installed, and operational at appraisal. Common issues: gas line corrosion, missing expansion tank, improper venting, no T&P; valve discharge pipe. If yours is over 12 years old, expect appraiser questions.

Windows & screens

Cracked or broken windows must be replaced. Torn or missing window screens (FHA specifically) must be repaired or replaced. Window screen install/repair is straightforward and inexpensive but easy to overlook.

Plumbing leaks

Any visible leak under sinks, around toilet bases, at supply-line connections, or anywhere in the plumbing system must be repaired. Toilet wax-ring leaks (rocking toilets) are a frequent find — easy fix before listing, harder to negotiate after.

Pest & rodent issues

Active termite, wood-destroying insect, or rodent infestations all halt FHA/VA loans. If you see any sign — sawdust trails, droppings, damaged wood — get a pest inspection before listing and document remediation.

Why this matters: the cost difference is dramatic. Replacing a missing GFCI before listing costs \$95. Discovering it on day 14 of escrow — and re-negotiating with a frustrated buyer who feels the home was misrepresented — can cost hundreds in concessions, weeks of delay, or the sale entirely.

Cosmetic vs. Structural — Where to Spend, Where to Skip

The single biggest mistake we see sellers make: spending \$20,000 on a kitchen remodel right before listing and recovering \$14,000 of it at sale. The math doesn't work. Here's a clearer framework.

The decision rule

Before spending money on any pre-listing improvement, ask three questions:

1. Is this fixing something a buyer would call a problem (safety, function, visible damage)?
2. Will the fix return at least 100% of its cost in either price or speed-of-sale?
3. Is it possible to do this in 30–60 days without overwhelming you during showings?

If all three are yes, do it. If any one is no, skip it.

Where to spend

- **Cosmetic repairs** — drywall, paint, caulk, hardware, fixtures, pressure wash. High ROI, fast turnaround, makes photos and showings pop.
- **Safety items** — GFCIs, smoke/CO detectors, handrails, exposed wiring. Cheap fixes that prevent inspection deal-killers.
- **Curb appeal** — entry refresh, garage door, landscaping, exterior touch-ups. First 8 seconds of every buyer's opinion.
- **Functional minor repairs** — leaky faucets, rocking toilets, sticky doors, dead bulbs. Easy buyer complaints to neutralize.

Where to skip

- **Full kitchen or bath remodels** — 60–74% ROI on average; if your kitchen looks tired, swap hardware and fixtures, repaint cabinets, and call it done.
- **Luxury finishes** — quartz, custom built-ins, designer lighting. Buyers don't pay extra for what they didn't pick.
- **Whole-home repipes (unless required)** — only do this if you have galvanized plumbing AND visible water-quality issues.
- **Roof replacement (unless required)** — if roof has 5+ years of life, leave it. If it's failing, replace or credit the buyer.
- **Window replacement** — windows rarely return their cost. Fix broken panes; don't replace the whole house.

The gray-area question — what about that one room that's awful?

Sometimes a single room is so dated or damaged that it'll be the photo buyers screenshot to their spouse with a ■. In that case, the math may justify a targeted refresh: full repaint, new fixture, hardware swap, maybe a refresh of the floor or vanity. Spend \$1,500–\$3,000 on the one worst room rather than \$20,000 across the whole house.

Staging vs. Repair — What Actually Moves Price

Sellers often think of staging and repair as alternatives. They're not. They solve different problems.

What staging does (and doesn't do)

Staging helps buyers see how a space could be used. It dresses the home for the camera. Good staging can make a small room feel bigger, a dated layout feel intentional, and an empty house feel like a home. It typically returns 5–15% on the staging investment in speed-of-sale and offer strength.

What staging does NOT do: hide damage, mask safety issues, or solve inspection findings. A staged home with cracked drywall behind the throw pillows still has cracked drywall — and the buyer will see it on a second walkthrough or the inspection.

What repair does (and doesn't do)

Repair fixes the underlying issue. It removes buyer complaints. It prevents inspection-finding renegotiation. It typically returns 100–250% on the repair investment in either price or speed-of-sale, because it changes the actual condition of the asset rather than just its presentation.

What repair does NOT do: make a home photograph well. A repaired but cluttered house with bad lighting and outdated décor still looks bad in listing photos. You need both — repair first, then staging on top.

Sequence: repair before stage

Always repair first, then stage. Reverse order and the stager will work around damage, drywall flaws, and dated fixtures — and the buyer will see all of it. Cosmetic and safety repairs make a home photograph and show better; staging amplifies that. Together, they typically produce a faster sale and a stronger offer.

Budget split for a \$400,000 Utah home

A reasonable pre-listing budget runs 1–3% of expected sale price. On a \$400,000 home, that's \$4,000–\$12,000 total. Typical breakdown:

Item	Budget	Notes
Cosmetic repairs (paint, drywall, fixtures, hardware)	\$1,500–\$3,500	Highest priority
Safety items (GFCIs, detectors, handrails)	\$300–\$800	Required for FHA/VA buyers
Exterior pressure wash + curb appeal	\$500–\$1,500	Photo and first-impression boost
Carpet cleaning or selective replacement	\$300–\$1,500	Per condition
Professional staging (3–4 weeks)	\$1,000–\$3,500	Optional but typically worth it
Pre-listing inspection (optional)	\$400–\$700	Strong signal of transparency

The 30 / 60 / 90-Day Pre-Listing Timeline

When sellers come to us in a panic 7 days before they list, we end up cutting corners that cost them at sale. When sellers come 60–90 days out, we sequence properly and the home shows like new. Here's the ideal cadence.

90 days out — strategy + plan

- Walk the home with your agent and make a written punch list of every visible flaw and dated element.
- Decide on your repair budget (1–3% of expected price is the typical range).
- Get a pre-listing inspection if you want to remove surprises (optional but powerful).
- Get bids on the bigger items (deck refresh, full-room repaint, HVAC service, roof inspection if borderline).
- Schedule any specialty trades that have lead time (HVAC partner, electrician, roofing contractor).
- If you're using staging, book the stager now — top stagers book out 4–6 weeks.

60 days out — execute big items

- Complete any specialty trade work (HVAC repair, roof patch, electrical upgrade).
- Complete deck refresh (sand + stain takes 3–5 days plus drying).
- Complete any full-room paint jobs (kitchen, primary, baths).
- Start exterior pressure wash, gutter cleaning, and landscaping touch-ups.
- Order any specialty fixtures or hardware (lights, knobs, faucets) so they're on hand.

30 days out — cosmetic sweep

- Drywall patches + touch-up paint throughout.
- Install ordered fixtures, hardware, and faucets.
- Replace cabinet hardware in kitchen and primary bath.
- Re-caulk every tub, shower, and counter.
- Install missing GFCIs, smoke/CO detectors.
- Test and fix any rocking toilets, loose handles, sticky doors.
- Replace burnt-out bulbs everywhere.
- Deep clean (professional carpet, windows, oven).

14 days out — staging + final polish

- Stage the home (3–4 weeks of staging is typical pricing).
- Professional listing photography (after staging, before any showings).
- Drone exterior photos if your lot, view, or landscaping warrants.
- Final walkthrough with your agent — anything you missed?
- MLS goes live.

If you only have 14 days. Focus only on: drywall patches, paint touch-ups, GFCIs + detectors, caulking refresh, fixture swap on 3 highest-impact lights, hardware swap on kitchen, deep clean, and pressure wash the exterior. Skip everything that requires specialty trades or material lead time.

Pricing Realities — What the Buyer's Inspector Will Quote vs. What It Actually Costs

When a buyer's inspection finds an issue, the buyer's agent often comes back with a renegotiation request based on retail repair estimates from the highest-priced contractors in town. Sellers feel pressured to accept the credit or do the repair to keep the deal alive. The numbers are almost always inflated.

Here's what common pre-listing repairs ACTUALLY cost when scheduled in advance — vs. what they typically cost as panicked escrow repairs.

Item	Pre-listing cost	Escrow renegotiation cost
GFCI outlet install	\$95	\$200–\$400 + concession
Smoke + CO detector install	\$75–\$115 each	\$150–\$250 + concession
Handrail install / repair	\$85–\$245	\$300–\$600 + concession
Drywall patch + paint	\$195–\$395	\$400–\$900 + concession
Faucet replacement	\$145–\$295 (installed)	\$350–\$700 + concession
Toilet seal / wax ring + reset	\$195	\$400–\$800 + concession
Deck board replacement (5 boards)	\$395	\$900–\$1,800 + concession
Gutter cleaning	\$145–\$195	\$300–\$500 (assumed damage)
Roof patch (minor)	\$195–\$595	\$1,500–\$4,000 (assumed full repair)
Whole-home interior paint	\$2,500–\$5,000	\$5,000–\$10,000 credit

The escrow-renegotiation numbers above include the typical inflation from the buyer's agent ("we need a credit AND it should be done") plus the friction of doing the work under deadline. **Sellers regularly leave thousands on the table** in renegotiations that pre-listing repair would have eliminated for a fraction of the cost.

The single best argument for pre-listing repair: the cost difference. You pay \$95 for the GFCI; the buyer's renegotiation request is \$400 plus seller concession. Multiply that across 5–10 inspection items, and you're looking at \$3,000–\$10,000 in avoided giveaways for \$500–\$2,000 of upfront repair.

How GoMarketReady Works (If You Want Help)

If you'd rather not coordinate all this yourself, that's the gap GoMarketReady was built to fill. We're the execution arm of Handyman Jacks — a Utah B100 licensed contractor — focused specifically on pre-listing repair for Wasatch Front sellers.

How it works

- 1. Walkthrough.** We come out, walk the home with you (and your agent if you have one), and write a punch list. Walkthroughs are free for sellers actively listing.
- 2. Bid.** We bid the punch list, sequence by impact, and flag anything that needs a licensed trade partner (HVAC, electrical panel, plumbing repipe, roofing).
- 3. Execute.** One project manager, one schedule, one accountable party. We coordinate any licensed trade partners — you still get one bid and one bill.
- 4. Pay at settlement.** Subject to project review and title company participation, you can defer payment until settlement — no out-of-pocket while you're moving.

Time-based packages for quick projects

If you have a short punch list and don't need a full project, our three flat-rate packages cover most situations:

Package	Time	Investment	What fits
Showing-Ready Punch	90 min	\$195	Visible-in-90-seconds touch-ups, safety items, sticking doors
Room Refresh	4 hrs	\$395	One tired space — primary bath, kitchen, or main bedroom
Whole-Home Walk-Through	7 hrs	\$695	12–15 punch items across the whole house

Packages buy you time, not a fixed deliverable list. We walk through your specific list with you, sequence the highest-impact items first, and tell you up front if anything won't fit the time.

Fast Refresh Kit — common upgrades installed same visit

We've picked the fixtures most sellers use and we install them the same visit — no shopping trip, no research. Each price includes the part, installation, basic supply lines, fasteners, haul-away of the old unit, and our 1-year labor warranty.

Item	Installed
Toilet — round-bowl, white	\$395
Bathroom faucet — chrome single-handle	\$245
Kitchen faucet — chrome pull-down	\$295
Garbage disposal — 1/2 HP	\$345
GFCI outlet	\$95
Smoke detector (10-year sealed battery)	\$75
Combo smoke + CO detector	\$115
Interior door lever — brushed nickel	\$85

Want a free walkthrough?

Call **(801) 895-2084** or visit handymanjacks.com/market-ready

Walkthroughs are free for sellers actively listing.

Handyman Jacks — Licensed Utah General Building Contractor B100 #14195166-5501 · Business License #13840882-0160 · Fully insured · 1-year labor warranty · Serving the Wasatch Front

Trade-specialty work is performed by our licensed Utah trade contractor partners (HVAC S350/S354, electrical E200, plumbing P200, roofing S217). You still get one bid, one project manager, one accountable party.