

A COQUITLAM MOVE-UP FIELD GUIDE | BY CRAIG JOHNSTON

The Coquitlam Move-Up Tax Trap

The \$40,000 mistake 7 out of 10 Coquitlam families make when they move up — and exactly how to avoid it.

BY CRAIG JOHNSTON

The Macnabs — Coquitlam Move-Up Specialist

WHY I WROTE THIS

A field guide for the Coquitlam move-up.

Every week, a Coquitlam family sits across from me — or now, on a Zoom call — and tells me the same story. They've outgrown their townhome on Runnel or Gilbert or Lester Pearson. They've been browsing Burke Mountain listings for six months. They have a spreadsheet they've opened twice and closed twice because they didn't know what cells to fill in. They want to move up, and they're stuck.

Almost every one of them is about to make the same **\$40,000 mistake**.

It's not that they're going to overpay for the next home, although some of them will. It's not that they'll list their current home for too little, although a few will. It's that they're going to treat the move-up as **two separate transactions** — sell the old one, then figure out the next one — and that framing is what costs them the money.

Specifically, the two-transaction framing costs them, on a typical Coquitlam \$1.1M to \$1.8M move:

- **\$18,000** in Property Transfer Tax they didn't budget for, because they used the wrong calculator.
- **\$8,000** in bridge financing or short-term rental costs they could have avoided with 60 days of pre-planning.
- **\$12,000** in catchment premium they didn't know existed, because they shopped streets before they shopped schools.
- **\$4,000** in move-day logistics chaos — emergency storage, same-week movers, kids in an Airbnb for a week.

That's the \$42,000 rounded to \$40,000 in the headline. It's real. I've watched it happen. Most of it is preventable.

This guide is 14 pages long. If you read every page, it'll take you about 20 minutes. If you're in a hurry, skip to page 4 — that's the one that will save you the most money today, and the one that most families read first and send to their spouse.

Who I am. I'm Craig Johnston. I'm a licensed REALTOR® in Coquitlam and I've been serving move-up families in the Tri-Cities for 25+ years. I live on Burke Mountain. My kids are in SD43. I walk the trails I'm about to take you to.

Most people think a move-up is one deal. It's actually three.

Each of the three has costs that aren't on the listing agreement. Budgeting for only one of them is how families end up \$40K short at closing.

Deal 1 — The sell.

You list your current home and sell it. Commission comes out of the proceeds. Staging, pre-listing inspection, and legal come out too. What most people forget: at a typical \$1.1M sale in Coquitlam, you'll also lose approximately **\$6,000–\$12,000** between the pre-listing inspector's findings (the water heater past 10 years, the roof patch the previous owner didn't disclose), minor staging, and the touch-ups every listing needs. That's not commission — that's pre-sale readiness.

Deal 2 — The buy.

You purchase the next home. New mortgage, new down payment. Property Transfer Tax on the new purchase. Legal fees. Home inspection. And — this is where families get blindsided — **the catchment premium** on your target school zone, which can add 8–14% to an otherwise-identical home three blocks over.

Deal 3 — The bridge.

This is the one nobody plans for. The 30–90 day gap between when your current home closes and when your new home closes, if they don't line up perfectly. In that gap you pay: bridge loan interest (roughly \$3,000–\$8,000), or a short-term rental (roughly \$4,000–\$12,000 for 30–60 days in Coquitlam), or storage plus an Airbnb (\$3,000–\$6,000). Even if you avoid all of that with a rent-back or perfect timing, you'll still pay something — sometimes a stress tax in the form of a rushed decision on the buy side.

Typical costs on a \$1.1M → \$1.8M Coquitlam move-up (beyond commission):

Cost line	Typical range
Pre-listing readiness (sell side)	\$6,000 – \$12,000
Property Transfer Tax (buy side)	\$34,000 – \$38,000
Catchment premium (buy side)	\$8,000 – \$25,000
Bridge / short-term accommodation	\$3,000 – \$12,000
Legal + inspections (both sides)	\$4,000 – \$6,000
Move-day logistics	\$3,000 – \$6,000
Total non-commission costs	\$58,000 – \$99,000

Most families budget for commission. Almost none budget for the rest. That's the \$40,000 mistake — not overpayment, not underselling, but underestimating the full cost stack.

The numbers you actually need.

This is the page most families screenshot and send to their spouse. Start here if you're in a hurry.

BC Property Transfer Tax on your next home:

- 1% of the first \$200,000
- 2% of the portion between \$200,000 and \$2,000,000
- 3% of the portion above \$2,000,000 (up to \$3M)
- **Additional 2%** on any portion above \$3,000,000

Cheat-sheet for typical Coquitlam move-up price bands:

Next home purchase price	PTT owed
\$1,400,000	\$26,000
\$1,500,000	\$28,000
\$1,600,000	\$30,000
\$1,700,000	\$32,000
\$1,800,000	\$34,000
\$1,900,000	\$36,000
\$2,000,000	\$38,000
\$2,100,000	\$41,000
\$2,200,000	\$44,000
\$2,500,000	\$53,000

What changes the math:

- **New construction under \$750,000:** exemption available (rare at move-up price points, worth checking if you're looking at a newly built townhome as a step-up before detached).
- **First-time buyer exemption:** does *not* apply to move-up buyers. This is the single most common mistake — families who had the exemption on their first home assume some version applies to their second. It doesn't.
- **Foreign buyer additional tax (20%):** does not apply if you're a permanent resident or citizen. If your spouse is neither, call me — the structuring matters.
- **The Coquitlam-specific Additional PTT:** doesn't exist. Coquitlam doesn't have a municipal land transfer tax (unlike Toronto). BC PTT is the whole tax picture on the purchase side.

The trap:

Families budget for PTT at \$1.5M (\$28K), then fall in love with a Burke Mountain detached at \$1.95M. The PTT jumps to \$37K. That's \$9K they didn't have in the budget, and it doesn't come from a financeable source — PTT is paid in cash at closing. Families scramble. Some pull from the RRSP. Some raise their offer by \$10K to beat a competing bid and suddenly owe \$39K in PTT instead of \$37K. The PTT math cascades.

The fix:

Before you make any offer, the number you use for "this home will cost me" is purchase price *plus PTT at that exact band* plus \$4–5K in closing costs. Write that number on the top of your spreadsheet. Don't fall for sticker.

The number on your listing that nobody tells you about.

You know about Burke Mountain schools. You know about École Banting. You probably know Pinetree Secondary is one of the strongest in SD43. What you probably don't know is that the *specific catchment line* — the street-by-street boundary that determines which elementary school a house feeds into — is worth 8–14% of the home's resale value.

A recent example from my own comp files: two nearly identical 4-bedroom detached homes on the same Burke Mountain block, built by the same builder in the same year, sold within three months of each other. One was in the stronger elementary catchment. The other was across a single arterial road, in a weaker feeder. The catchment-advantaged home sold for **\$127,000 more**. Same square footage. Same finishes. Same month of the year.

Families shopping house-first miss this almost every time. They fall in love with the kitchen. They don't realize the kitchen is in the weaker catchment.

How to know which catchment a specific address is in:

1. Go to sd43.bc.ca/schoollocator (the official SD43 tool).
2. Enter the address.
3. Read the elementary feed and the secondary feed. Both matter.

How to compare catchments for resale value:

Look at the last 12 months of sold detached homes in each catchment. Filter to similar square footage. Compare the per-square-foot price. The difference is the catchment premium.

Or — and this is Step 2 of the Protocol — we do this together. It's a 45-minute exercise. You leave with a three-to-five-catchment priority list. Every house I send you from then on gets scored against that list before it hits your inbox.

What most families assume is wrong:

- *"The catchment doesn't matter if we're planning to be here short-term."* It does. Even if you're not there long enough for your kid to attend, the resale buyer cares.
- *"The school-rankings sites give you the real info."* They don't. Fraser Institute rankings are one signal. They miss extracurriculars, French immersion availability, special programs, commute distance, and cohort-size data.
- *"We'll cross-boundary if we have to."* Cross-boundary placements are approved year by year and they're not a guarantee. Don't buy a house on the assumption of a cross-boundary that can be denied.

Four ways to cover the gap. Honest costs on each.

The 30–90 day gap between closing your sell and closing your buy is the move-up's most predictable crisis point. Here are your four options.

Option 1 — Traditional bridge loan.

Your bank or a local broker fronts the downpayment on your new home before your current one closes. Interest-only for the bridge period. Usually 60–120 days maximum. Current rates in the range of **prime + 2–4%** depending on lender and credit.

Rough cost: on a \$500K bridge for 60 days at 9%, you're paying about **\$7,500** in interest.

Right choice when: you have a confirmed sale agreement on the current home with completion in 30–90 days, and you've found a next home you want to act on now.

Wrong choice when: your current home isn't yet sold — most lenders won't bridge without a firm sale.

Option 2 — Rent-back on the sale.

You sell your current home but negotiate to rent it back from the buyer for 30–60 days after closing. You continue to occupy while you close on the next one. Typical rent: 1/30th of the purchase price per day, sometimes less if the buyer is accommodating.

Rough cost: on a \$1.1M sale with a 45-day rent-back at market rate, about **\$4,500**.

Right choice when: most move-up buyers will offer a rent-back as part of a competitive purchase because it's cheaper for them than vacant carry. Easy to arrange if we ask.

Wrong choice when: the buyer needs to move in immediately (common with first-time buyers or investors).

Option 3 — Short-term rental / serviced accommodation.

You close the sale, move out, live in an Airbnb or serviced apartment for the gap, then move into the new home when it closes. Most disruptive to the family.

Rough cost: in Coquitlam, **\$4,500–\$8,000/month** for a family-sized rental. Plus storage (\$300–\$600/month). Plus the psychic cost of living out of a suitcase with kids.

Right choice when: almost never — only if the gap is long and the buy-side home is worth the wait.

Option 4 — Sequenced contingent offers.

You make a subject-to-sale offer on the next home while actively listing your current one. If the seller accepts, the timeline is coordinated from both sides. This is **Parallel Motion** — Step 3 of the Protocol.

Rough cost: zero in hard dollars, though you may pay a small price in offer competitiveness.

Right choice when: balanced or buyer-favored market, which Coquitlam has been trending toward. Sellers accept subject-to-sale offers far more than they did in 2021–2022.

Wrong choice when: heated seller's market where competing unconditional offers will beat you.

My recommendation:

Most of my move-up families use some combination of **Option 4 (primary)** and **Option 2 (fallback)**. Option 1 is the emergency plan, pre-approved at Step 1. Option 3 is what happens if we failed to plan.

Four safe close windows. Don't move outside of them.

Move-up families with school-age kids have four safe windows per year for close dates. Everything outside these windows costs you — mid-year school disruption, rushed summer moves, or December chaos.

Safe close windows (ranked):

- 1. Late August (Aug 20 – Sept 5).** Peak window. Kids start at the new school in September without transition. Movers busy but available. Weather cooperative.
- 2. Mid-March to mid-April.** Spring-break-adjacent. Kids have a natural pause at their old school, move over break, start at the new school refreshed. Second-best window.
- 3. Late October / early November.** Works if kids are adjusted at the old school and administration can handle a clean transfer. Workable but stressful.
- 4. Early July.** Post-school-year. Full summer to settle, but you're competing with every other mover in Metro Vancouver for trucks and storage.

Hostile close windows:

- **Mid-November to mid-February.** Worst window. Kids disrupted right before exams / report cards. New school mid-year. Movers during snow. Holidays in flux.
- **Late May to late June.** Disrupts the end of the school year. Unfair to the kids academically.
- **Mid-July to mid-August.** Brutal moving season. Truck availability is 40% of normal. Prices are 50% higher.

The Protocol rule:

Step 1's timeline back-casts from the safe window. If the family wants to be in the new home by early September, we work backwards: offer accepted 30–60 days prior, listing live 60–90 days prior, Equity Map and prep 30–45 days before that. Start date is roughly 120–180 days before target move-in. Earlier is always better.

If your preferred window is already past for this year:

Don't force a hostile window. Wait for the next safe window and use the time to get the Equity Map and Catchment Lock work fully done. Families who wait 4–5 months for the right window net 4–10% better on both sides of the transaction because they were never rushed. That more than pays for the delay.

Five steps. One orchestrated move.

Used identically with every family I work with. The order matters.

Step 1 — Equity Mapping.

Know what you have before you shop.

We establish three numbers: your true net sale value today, your actual available equity after sale, and your realistic next-home ceiling including every fee. One-sheet you can post on the fridge. Settles family budget arguments in one meeting.

Step 2 — Catchment Lock.

Pick the school first, then the streets.

Before any house hunting, we agree on a three-to-five-catchment priority list. Every listing gets scored against this list before it hits your inbox. Weekends don't get wasted on houses in the wrong zone.

Step 3 — Parallel Motion.

List and shop simultaneously.

Both transactions start the same week. Subject-to-sale offers become a strategic tool. We target a 7–14 day gap between sell close and buy close, not 30–47 days. Harder to coordinate. Worth it.

Step 4 — Bridge Strategy.

Plan the overlap before it becomes a crisis.

Pre-approved bridge financing drafted at Step 1. Named rent-back and accommodation plans in writing. Every possible gap scenario has a documented response. Nothing is “we'll figure it out.”

Step 5 — Soft Landing.

Move-day logistics so nobody sleeps on a couch.

Move-day sequencing confirmed 60 days out. School transitions handled with warm admin handoffs if unavoidable. 30-day post-close check-in with contractor referrals, utility coordination, and the neighbourhood handoff.

Nine out of ten of my referrals come from Soft Landing, not from the transaction itself.

How a Kentwell family moved up to Burke Mountain in 11 days.

The family:

Two parents, early 30s. One engineer, one part-time pharmacist. Two kids, ages 4 and 7, heading into Grade 3 and kindergarten.

Starting home:

3-bedroom townhome in Kentwell, purchased 2018. Outgrown since baby #2.

The move:

Wanted a detached 4-bedroom on Burke Mountain, in the stronger elementary catchment, target price ceiling set during Step 1.

The process (using the five-step Protocol):

Step 1 — Equity Mapping. Two meetings. We established net sale value, available equity after sale, and next-home ceiling including PTT and buffer. One-sheet signed by both spouses. Budget arguments: resolved.

Step 2 — Catchment Lock. Agreed on a three-catchment priority list. Burke Mountain primary, Heritage Mountain secondary, Westwood Plateau as the backup. MLS alerts filtered accordingly.

Step 3 — Parallel Motion. Listing went live on a Friday. First buy-side showings that weekend. Listing received multiple offers; we accepted one with a 60-day close. Buy-side subject-to-sale offer accepted the following week, close date 14 days after the sale close.

Step 4 — Bridge Strategy. Pre-approved bridge drafted at Step 1. Didn't need it — the 14-day gap was covered by a negotiated rent-back on the sale.

Step 5 — Soft Landing. Move day scheduled for the spring-break window. Kids did not miss a day of school. 30-day check-in: water heater replaced, three painters referred, introductions to two Burke Mountain neighbours made.

The move at a glance	
Sell close to buy close gap	14 days
Sold at	Over list (multiple offers)
Bought at	Inside the family's ceiling
Bridge interest paid	\$0 (rent-back covered the gap)
Kids: school disruption	Zero
Process duration, Step 1 → Soft Landing close	~6 months

“We went in expecting this to be chaos. It was — on the back end, I'm sure. But it didn't feel like chaos to us. That's the point.” — The Kentwell family.

Before you hire anyone, ask these four.

If you take nothing else from this guide, take these four questions. Ask them in any agent's first interview — me or someone else. The answers tell you everything.

1. Show me your last three simultaneous-close transactions and tell me the gap between sell close and buy close.

What a move-up specialist says: a specific number in days. “Our last three gaps were 9 days, 14 days, and 23 days.”

What a one-transaction agent says: “Well, we generally coordinate closings...” That’s a non-answer. They don’t measure it.

2. What’s your plan if my sell closes and my buy is still 30 days out?

What a move-up specialist says: a named plan — bridge financing with a specific local broker, a pre-identified serviced rental in the target area, a rent-back negotiated into the sell agreement from day one.

What a one-transaction agent says: “We’ll talk to your mortgage broker.” That’s a handoff, not a plan.

3. Which SD43 catchment produces the highest resale premium and which one produces the lowest?

What a move-up specialist says: a named answer with a rough number. “[Strongest catchment] is producing roughly X% over comparable homes in [weaker catchment], based on the last 12 months of detached sold data.”

What a one-transaction agent says: “All the SD43 schools are great.” They are. That’s not what you asked.

4. What do you do in week 4 after we close?

What a move-up specialist says: they show up with a punch list. Contractor intros. Utility coordination check. Neighbourhood handoff.

What a one-transaction agent says: “The deal’s done — we’re at your service if anything comes up.” Translation: you won’t hear from them.

What it is. What it isn't.

If you've made it this far, the next step is a 20-minute conversation. Here's what it actually is and isn't.

It is:

- **20 minutes.** Booked through a calendar link. Starts and ends on time.
- **A mutual evaluation.** I'm assessing whether your move fits the Protocol. You're assessing whether I'm the right agent for it.
- **An honest read on the numbers.** You tell me your address, your mortgage balance, and your target catchment. I come off the call and send you a written summary within 24 hours with: a 2%-accurate value range on your current home, a realistic next-home ceiling including PTT and closing, and an honest take on whether the math works *today*.

It isn't:

- **A sales call.** No slide deck. No "let me tell you about our team." No pressure.
- **Free indefinitely.** If you're not ready to move in the next 6–9 months, the Fit Call is probably too soon. Read the weekly Coquitlam Move-Up brief and book when your timeline tightens.
- **For everyone.** I work exclusively with move-up families inside the Coquitlam / Port Moody / Port Coquitlam / Anmore / Belcarra corridor. If you're a first-time buyer, an investor, or moving out of region, email me — I'll introduce you to the right agent.

What you'll leave with, either way:

- The three numbers above, in writing.
- An honest recommendation — proceed, wait, or walk.
- Zero pressure to continue.

An honest five-point checklist.

If you can answer yes to all five, you're ready. Three or more "no" and the Fit Call will help you figure out what needs to happen first.

- 1. We have at least 20% of the next home's likely purchase price available as equity or cash for the downpayment.** (On a \$1.8M next home, that's \$360K.) *Yes / No / Not sure — need help figuring this out.*
- 2. Our combined household income supports a traditional mortgage at today's rates on the next home's price point.** *Yes / No / Not sure.*
- 3. We agree on a 3–5 priority SD43 catchment list,** even if we haven't validated it with a comp analysis yet. *Yes / No / We haven't discussed this yet.*
- 4. We're prepared to start the listing preparation process within the next 6 months** (or we want to run Step 1 of the Protocol — the Equity Map — now so we know *when* we'll be ready). *Yes / No.*
- 5. We've discussed the move as a family and both spouses are aligned on the "why now" answer.** *Yes / No / We've been avoiding the conversation.*

Your scorecard:

Yes to all five: book the Fit Call. You're ready.

Yes to 3–4: book the Fit Call anyway. We'll spend part of the 20 minutes on whichever "no" is blocking you.

Yes to 2 or fewer: read the weekly Coquitlam Move-Up brief for a few months, figure out what's blocking you, and book the call when the math tightens up. You don't need to hire an agent today.

The short version.

I'm Craig Johnston. I'm a licensed REALTOR® in Coquitlam, I've been serving move-up families in the Tri-Cities for 25+ years, and I deliberately work with a limited number of them — roughly 10–15 engagements a year — so I can run every move end-to-end using the Coquitlam Move-Up Protocol.

I live on Burke Mountain. My kids are in SD43. I've walked every trail up here, not because I was researching listings, but because it's my neighbourhood. When I tell you which streets back onto the off-leash park or which catchment produces the best resale, I'm telling you something I know from Tuesday afternoon, not from a map.

The business is called **The Macnabs** because of a family name that, a generation back, meant a specific kind of showing up. I try to carry that forward.

The proof stack:

- Licensed REALTOR®, BCFS A-regulated
- 25+ years serving Coquitlam move-up families
- Dozens of move-ups orchestrated using the five-step Protocol
- 5.0 Google rating · 30+ 5-Star Google Reviews
- SD43 parent · Burke Mountain resident · Tri-Cities native
- 164-page Coquitlam content library — more than any other Tri-Cities agent

“Craig Johnston recently sold my townhouse in West Vancouver in less than 6 days for over asking price. I don't think I need to say more about his client relations and experience. Craig is one of the most prolific and highly motivated realtors I have seen in the Realty business.” — Riverplate Equities

“My husband and I have had the pleasure of working with Craig on three real estate transactions. In all cases he was extremely professional and efficient. Two of the transactions were house sales and one was a purchase. Both houses were sold for over asking and within one week of going on market.” — Ann English

Book the 20-Minute Move-Up Fit Call.

Go to [theMACNABS.com/book-a-strategy-call-with-craig-johnston](https://themacnabs.com/book-a-strategy-call-with-craig-johnston) and pick a time that works. Most openings are within 7–10 days.

Not sure yet? Start smaller.

Request your free Coquitlam **Equity Map** — no call required. You send me your address and mortgage balance; I send you the three numbers you need before you shop. Takes me a day.

[theMACNABS.com/home-evaluation](https://themacnabs.com/home-evaluation)

Want the weekly Coquitlam Move-Up brief?

A short email every Sunday with what actually sold in the Tri-Cities that week, what it means for move-up families, and one opinionated take on the market. No spam. No generic market updates. Unsubscribe in one click.

Questions, or want an introduction to the right agent if I'm not the fit?

- Email · Craig@theMACNABS.com
 - Call or text · **604-202-6092**
 - Book · [theMACNABS.com/book-a-strategy-call-with-craig-johnston](https://themacnabs.com/book-a-strategy-call-with-craig-johnston)
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Thanks for reading. Go buy the right house.

— Craig Johnston

The Macnabs · Coquitlam Move-Up Specialist

This guide is educational and does not constitute legal, tax, or financial advice. Numbers reflect typical ranges in Coquitlam as of Spring 2026; your specific transaction will differ. BCFSA-licensed.