



Tax Sale to Homestead Checklist

What to verify before moving forward on a tax sale property

Based on a real, ongoing tax sale deal — from someone currently in the process

I'm currently going through the tax sale process on a real parcel. This checklist captures what I wish I had before I started — and what I've learned along the way.

1 BEFORE YOU EVEN LOOK

Foundation checks

- Know whether your state sells tax liens, tax deeds, or both**
Lien states allow you to earn interest if redeemed. Deed states may transfer ownership at auction. Very different.
- Identify where your county publishes tax sale listings**
County website, auction platform, newspaper, email notices, or in-person postings.
- Check bidder registration requirements and deadlines**
May include deposits, pre-registration, and ID verification.
- Understand how starting bids are calculated**
Tax owed, interest, penalties, and fees — know the full amount before you evaluate a parcel.
- Decide whether you're purchasing personally or through an entity**
Make this decision before registering or bidding.
- Call the County Treasurer (or equivalent office) to confirm rules**
Do not rely on websites alone — details and timelines can change.
- Understand the redemption period for your target area**
Can range from months to years depending on location.

2 LEGAL & LIEN DUE DILIGENCE

Before you ever evaluate the land

- Check for existing liens — especially federal tax liens**
Some liens may survive the process depending on your state. Verify before bidding.
- Verify legal access, not just visible access**
A visible road does not guarantee legal access — confirm recorded easements or road frontage.
- Confirm parcel details match official records**
Verify acreage, boundaries, and parcel ID using county records — not just listings.
- Check zoning and land use restrictions**
Confirm the property allows your intended use — dwelling, agriculture, etc.

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3 THE DIGITAL STAKEOUT Research before you ever leave home

- Use satellite tools (like Google Earth) to evaluate the property**
Look for access, terrain, surrounding development, and structures.
- Cross-check listing information with county data**
Errors happen — verify everything independently.
- Look for red flags in surrounding properties**
Nearby land use can affect value, access, and livability.

4 THE HOMESTEAD TEST Is this land actually usable?

- Evaluate land conditions**
Check slope, drainage, flood zones, and wetlands. Use FEMA flood maps where available.
- Assess sunlight and exposure**
Southern exposure is ideal for growing; heavy shade or poor orientation can limit use.
- Check for a viable water source**
Consider well feasibility, municipal access, or alternative options.
- Check if septic is allowed and feasible**
Some properties cannot support septic systems.
- Look for utility access — or plan for off-grid**
Nearby utilities can significantly reduce startup costs.
- Do a drive-by if within range — observe only, never enter**
Look for signs of use, dumping, or access issues. Do not trespass during the lien phase.

5 AT THE AUCTION What to know before you bid

- Confirm whether the auction is online or in-person**
Understand the format and platform ahead of time.
- Understand the bidding method used**
Interest rate bid, premium bid, deed sale, or over-the-counter — each works differently.
- Know your maximum bid before participating — and stick to it**
Base this on value, not emotion.
- Expect competition**
You may be bidding against experienced investors or institutional buyers.
- Confirm payment terms, deadlines, and accepted methods**
Some require same-day payment or specific forms such as certified funds.

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6 THE WAITING PERIOD Managing your position

- Track your redemption deadline carefully**
Write it down, set reminders, and don't rely on memory.
- Understand how your return is calculated if redeemed**
Interest, penalties, or premiums vary depending on location.
- Watch for subsequent tax bills**
In some areas, paying them may protect or strengthen your position.
- Understand required notices before foreclosure**
Many areas require strict notification procedures to the owner.
- Keep detailed records**
Save copies of payments, notices, and all communications.
- Have a backup plan if the owner redeems**
Know where your funds will go next.

■ This is where a qualified real estate Foreclosure attorney is strongly recommended.

7 IF IT GOES UNCONTESTED When the owner does not redeem

- Understand the foreclosure or deed process in advance**
Procedures vary widely depending on location.
- Know the earliest date you can take the next legal step**
Timing matters — delays can complicate your position.
- Be prepared for additional legal steps**
Clear ownership may require processes such as quiet title.
- Understand that ownership does not always mean immediate possession**
There may be occupants or access issues to resolve.
- Have a qualified real estate Foreclosure attorney ready before you need one**
This stage is not where you want to improvise.

But what happens next?
 This checklist is just the beginning — it covers what to look for, but not how to navigate each step.
 No theory. No guesswork. Just the real steps from someone who has documented every stage of the process as it happens.
 Get the step-by-step walkthrough: "[Tax Sale to Homestead Journey](#)"