

HIGH RIVER HOME BUYER'S GUIDE

Everything you need to know about buying a home in High River, Alberta — from a broker who lives here and knows every neighbourhood.

**YOUR LOCAL
BROKER**

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1. Why High River?

High River is one of Southern Alberta's best-kept secrets for home buyers. Here's what makes it stand out:

- **Affordability** — Your dollar goes further here than in Calgary or even Okotoks. You'll find detached homes at price points that barely get you a condo in the city.
- **Small-town feel, big-town access** — 20 minutes to Okotoks, 45 minutes to downtown Calgary, 90 minutes to Banff. You're not isolated — you're strategically located.
- **The Highwood River** — Walking paths along the river, parks, and green spaces that most cities would envy.
- **Community** — People here know their neighbours. Local businesses thrive. Community events actually feel like community.
- **New development** — High River is growing smartly. New neighbourhoods like Montrose and Vista Mirage offer modern homes with small-town pricing.
- **No city tax premium** — Property taxes are competitive, and you avoid Calgary's urban sprawl headaches.

***Local Tip:** I moved to High River in 2025 after 21 years in Okotoks. I chose it for the same reasons you're considering it — value, community, and quality of life. I shop at the same Sobeys, grab coffee at the same Tim Hortons, and walk the same Highwood River trails as my clients.*

2. High River Neighbourhoods — A Quick Guide

Downtown / Heritage Area

Character homes, walkable to shops and restaurants along Centre Street. Established lots, mature trees. Mix of original homes and tasteful renovations. Ideal if you want charm and walkability.

Montrose

High River's newest neighbourhood. Modern designs, wider lots, family-friendly layout with parks and pathways. Popular with young families building new. Prices start lower than comparable new builds in Okotoks.

Vista Mirage

Another newer development on the west side. Mountain views, modern floor plans, close to the river pathway system. Growing quickly.

Highwood Village / West Side

Established neighbourhood with a mix of housing styles. Close to schools and the hospital. Solid entry-level pricing for first-time buyers.

North High River

Quieter, more rural feel while still being in town. Larger lots available. Good option if you want space without going full acreage.

Southeast / Industrial Adjacent

Most affordable area. Great for investors or buyers who want to get into the market at the lowest entry point.

3. What Can You Afford in High River?

High River offers significantly more home per dollar than Calgary. Here's a rough guide based on household income (5% down, 25-year amortisation):

Household Income	Approximate Max Price	What That Gets You in High River
\$60,000	\$260,000–\$300,000	Starter home, older neighbourhood, or townhouse
\$80,000	\$340,000–\$400,000	Solid 3-bed detached in established area
\$100,000	\$430,000–\$490,000	Newer build in Montrose or Vista Mirage, 4-bed
\$130,000	\$550,000–\$630,000	Premium lot, upgraded finishes, double garage

These are estimates. Your actual qualification depends on debts, credit score, rate, and the stress test. I can give you a precise number in 15 minutes.

Local Tip: Compare these prices to Okotoks (typically 10–20% higher) or South Calgary (20–40% higher). In High River, the same income buys you more space, a bigger yard, and a quieter street.

4. High River — Costs to Know

- **Property taxes** — The Town of High River sets annual property tax rates. Budget roughly 0.7–0.9% of your home's assessed value per year. A \$400,000 home is approximately \$3,000–\$3,600/year.
- **Utilities** — Water, sewer, and waste collection are billed by the Town. Electricity and gas are through ATCO/ENMAX. Budget \$300–\$450/month total for a typical home.
- **Internet** — Shaw (now Rogers), Telus, and Xplore are the main providers. Fibre is available in newer areas.
- **No land transfer tax** — Alberta has no land transfer tax. On a \$400,000 home, you save roughly \$4,000–\$6,000 compared to buying in Ontario or BC.
- **Flood insurance** — See the dedicated flood section below. Insurance is a critical factor when buying in High River and must be arranged before your lender will close.

5. The 2013 Flood — What Buyers Need to Know

High River has a long history with the Highwood River — floods were recorded in 1884, 1886, 1908, 1912, 1923, 1929, 1932, 1942, 1995, 2005, and 2006. But the **June 2013 flood** was catastrophic. Over 325 mm of rain fell in 48 hours on already saturated ground. The Highwood River reached flow rates ten times the seasonal average. Three people lost their lives, nearly 1,000 were rescued by air or boat, and the entire town was evacuated. It remains one of the costliest natural disasters in Canadian history.

What's Been Done Since:

With support from the Government of Alberta, High River has become **one of the most flood-protected communities in North America**. The Town's own website states it is now one of the safest communities in Canada. Mitigation projects include:

- **Permanent dike systems** — Engineered berms and flood walls along the Highwood River
- **River channel improvements** — Scraping, widening, and clearing to increase flow capacity
- **Diversion infrastructure** — Channels and retention areas to manage peak flows
- **Upgraded storm drainage** — Town-wide improvements to handle extreme rainfall
- **Floodway relocation program** — The highest-risk properties were bought out and removed by the province
- **Updated flood mapping** — Provincial flood maps have been updated to reflect current conditions

***Local Tip:** The Town of High River publishes a flood mitigation system map and annual river monitoring updates at highriver.ca. If you're considering a specific property, check where it sits relative to the mitigation infrastructure. I can help you read the maps.*

Impact on Mortgage Financing:

Here's the honest truth about how the flood history affects your ability to get a mortgage in High River:

- **Most properties finance normally** — The majority of homes in High River, especially in newer developments like Montrose and Vista Mirage, qualify for standard mortgage products with no flood-related restrictions.
- **Lenders require proof of insurance before closing** — This is standard everywhere, but in mapped flood zones, some lenders specifically verify that your policy includes overland flood coverage. No insurance = no mortgage closing.
- **Some properties in former floodway zones may face challenges** — Properties that were in the highest-risk areas before mitigation may still carry that designation on older flood maps. This can affect lender appetite and insurance availability. Most of these were bought out by the province, but some remain.
- **Insurance premiums vary by location within town** — Properties closer to the river or in historically affected areas may pay higher premiums. Properties in newer developments on higher ground pay standard rates. Get insurance quotes **before** you make an offer, not after.
- **Not all insurers offer overland flood coverage** — Some do, some don't, and some charge significantly more. An insurance broker (not just one company) will find you the best options.

What to Do:

- **Get insurance quotes early** — Before you make an offer, get quotes from an insurance broker for the specific property. This tells you if coverage is available and what it costs.
- **Ask about flood history** — Your realtor should disclose any known flood damage to the property. Ask specifically about the 2013 event.
- **Check the flood mitigation map** — Available at highriver.ca. Know where the dikes and mitigation infrastructure protect your property.
- **Ask about sewer backup coverage** — Separate from overland flood insurance. Relatively inexpensive and worth having.
- **Talk to me about lender options** — I know which of my 20+ lenders are comfortable with High River properties and which ones might flag flood history. This saves you time and credit hits.

Local Tip: Don't let the 2013 flood scare you away from High River. The mitigation investment has been massive. The Town describes itself as one of the most flood-protected communities in North America. Many buyers find excellent value precisely because some people are still afraid of a risk that's been substantially engineered away. Know the facts, get the right insurance, and make an informed decision.

6. Your High River Home Buying Checklist

Before You Start Looking:

- Get **pre-approved** — know your budget before you fall in love with a home
- Check your **credit score** free through Borrowell
- Decide on **must-haves vs. nice-to-haves** (garage? yard size? neighbourhood?)
- Calculate your **total monthly costs** (mortgage + tax + utilities + insurance)
- Understand the **stress test** — you qualify at a higher rate than you'll actually pay

When House Hunting:

- Work with a **local realtor** who knows High River's neighbourhoods
- **Drive the neighbourhoods** at different times of day (morning, evening, weekend)
- Check **proximity to schools** — Highwood High, Senator Riley, Holy Spirit Academy
- Look at the **lot, not just the house** — lot size and orientation matter for resale
- Ask about **flood history** on the specific property — was it affected in 2013?
- Check the **flood mitigation map** at highriver.ca for protection near the property
- Get **insurance quotes before making an offer** — confirm overland flood coverage availability and cost
- Check **walkability** — proximity to the Highwood River paths, parks, downtown

Making an Offer:

- Include conditions for **financing and home inspection**
- Budget **1.5–4% of purchase price** for closing costs on top of your down payment
- Get a **home inspection** (\$400–\$600) — don't skip this
- Arrange **home insurance with overland flood coverage** — confirm availability and cost before removing conditions
- Confirm your **lender is comfortable** with the specific property's flood zone status
- Meet with your **real estate lawyer** to handle title transfer

After You Move In:

- **Change the locks**
- **Transfer utilities** to your name (Town of High River for water/sewer)
- **Update your address** — driver's licence, vehicle registration, CRA, bank
- Set up **Canada Post mail forwarding**
- **Meet your neighbours** — this is High River, people actually do that here
- Explore — **walk the Highwood River trails**, check out the shops on Centre Street

7. Local Resources

- **Town of High River** — highriver.ca — Tax info, utility setup, community info
- **Flood Preparedness & Protection** — highriver.ca/flood-preparedness-protection — Mitigation maps, river monitoring, emergency alerts
- **Alberta Emergency Alert** — Sign up for personalised emergency notifications at emergencyalert.alberta.ca
- **High River Library** — Programs, events, newcomer resources
- **Highwood River Pathway** — Multi-use trails along the river — great for families
- **High River Hospital** — Emergency and outpatient services
- **Schools** — Christ the Redeemer (Catholic) and Foothills School Division (Public)
- **Centre Street shops** — Local businesses, restaurants, George Lane Memorial Park

Buying in High River? Let's Talk.

I live here. I work here. I know the neighbourhoods, the builders, and the market. A 15-minute conversation will give you a clear picture of what you can afford and how to get there.

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