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# 25 Questions to Ask Before Buying in a 55 Plus Community

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The complete due diligence checklist for Ontario downsizers. Bring this guide on every community tour and get every answer in writing before you sign.

## Inside This Checklist:

Financial and Fee Questions (Q1 to Q5)

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Resale and Exit Questions (Q22 to Q25)

Red Flags That Should Make You Walk Away

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## How to Use This Checklist

Buying into a 55 plus community is not like buying an ordinary house. You are buying into a legal and financial structure that controls your monthly costs, your lifestyle, and your exit options for years to come. Ontario communities come in four main ownership models (freehold, condominium, land lease, and life lease) and each one changes which questions matter most. Print this checklist, bring it on every tour, check off each question as you ask it, and write the answer in the notes line. If a community will not put an answer in writing, treat that as an answer in itself.

### Kevin's Tip: Visit Twice

Tour every shortlisted community at least twice: once on a weekday and once on a weekend. Talk to two or three residents unprompted, check the bulletin board in the clubhouse, and drive through at night. You will learn more in twenty minutes of casual conversation than in two hours with a sales representative.

## 1. Financial and Fee Questions

Your retirement budget is often fixed, so the single most important thing to understand is exactly what you will pay each month and how fast that number can grow.

### [ ] Q1. What exactly is included in the monthly fee?

Ask for an itemized list in writing. Does the fee cover water, garbage collection, snow removal to your door or just the main roads, lawn care, and clubhouse access?

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

### [ ] Q2. What is the history of fee increases over the past 5 years?

The best predictor of future costs. Land lease increases in Ontario generally follow the Residential Tenancies Act guideline; condo fees follow the board's budget with no cap.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

### [ ] Q3. Are there any one-time entrance, transfer, or move-in fees?

Some communities charge a capital contribution or administration fee at purchase that can add thousands to your closing costs.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

### [ ] Q4. How are property taxes handled?

Freehold and condo owners pay the municipality directly. In a land lease, the land tax portion is usually rolled into the lot fee and you are taxed separately on the structure.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

### [ ] Q5. For condos: what is the health of the reserve fund?

An underfunded reserve means special assessments are likely. Your lawyer must review the status certificate before you go firm.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Legal and Ownership Questions

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The ownership model determines your rights, your financing options, and what happens to the home when you leave or pass away.

**[ ] Q6. What is the exact ownership model?**

Freehold, common-element condominium, land lease, or life lease? Each has profoundly different legal implications for financing, fees, and resale.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q7. How many years are left on the land lease, and what are the renewal terms?**

A lease with only 15 years remaining can be very difficult to finance. Ask exactly what happens at the end of the term and get the renewal terms in writing.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q8. Can I get a conventional mortgage on this property?**

Many major banks will not issue standard mortgages on land lease or life lease properties. You may need a chattel mortgage, a line of credit, or cash from your home sale.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q9. Who owns and maintains the roads, water, and septic systems?**

In many private communities the infrastructure is privately owned. Ask who pays when the private road needs repaving or the water system fails.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q10. Are there any pending lawsuits against the community or operator?**

Litigation drains community funds and can trigger sudden fee increases or special assessments. The status certificate discloses this for condos; ask directly for land lease and life lease.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. Rules and Restrictions Questions

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Community bylaws keep the neighbourhood peaceful, but they can also restrict things you assumed were normal. Never assume; always verify in the written rules.

**[ ] Q11. What are the exact age restrictions?**

Does every resident need to be 55, or just one? Can a 50-year-old spouse live there? Ontario age rules are set by each community's declarations and lease terms, so verify in writing.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q12. What is the pet policy?**

Are pets allowed at all? Is there a limit on the number of pets, or restrictions on specific breeds and weight limits?

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q13. How long can grandchildren and younger guests stay?**

Visitors are welcome everywhere, but most communities cap consecutive stays for underage guests, often at two to four weeks per year.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q14. Can I rent or sublet my home?**

If you plan to spend winters away, can you rent the home out? Many condo and land lease communities strictly prohibit rentals or subletting.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q15. What are the parking restrictions?**

Can you park an RV, boat, or second vehicle in the driveway? Is there enough visitor parking for family gatherings?

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q16. Can I modify the exterior of my home?**

Decks, gardens, paint colours, and even satellite dishes usually require written management or board approval. Ask for the modification policy.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Lifestyle and Amenities Questions

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You are moving for the lifestyle, so confirm the community actually delivers what the brochure promises.

**[ ] Q17. Which amenities are currently built and fully operational?**

Never buy based on a rendering of a future clubhouse. Evaluate what exists and works today, and ask when promised amenities are contractually due.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q18. Is there a full-time lifestyle or activities director?**

Communities with dedicated staff run far more organized and consistent social calendars than volunteer-run ones.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q19. What clubs and activities are currently active?**

Ask to see this month's actual activity calendar. Look for the things you love: pickleball, cards, woodworking, travel clubs, fitness classes.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q20. What is the average age and activity level of residents?**

Some communities lean toward active 60-year-olds who still work part-time; others average in the late 70s. Choose the fit that matches your stage of life.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q21. How far are the hospital, pharmacy, and grocery store?**

Check real driving distances to essential services, and ask whether any shuttle or transportation options exist for residents who stop driving.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Resale and Exit Questions

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Every purchase should be made with the exit in mind. Understand how easy it will be to sell, and what happens if your health or plans change.

**[ ] Q22. Does the operator have the right of first refusal when I sell?**

Some agreements require you to offer the home to the operator first before listing on the open market. Ask if this clause exists and how the price is set.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q23. Must the operator approve my buyer?**

In land lease communities the buyer must be approved by park management to take over the lease before the sale can close. Ask how long approval takes.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q24. For life lease: what is the redemption process and fee?**

The sponsor typically sells the unit and returns market value minus an administration fee, often 5% to 10%. Ask exactly how it is calculated and how long redemption takes.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ ] Q25. Can I leave the home to my children?**

Heirs inherit the asset, but if they are under the age limit they cannot live in it and must sell, paying all monthly fees until the sale closes.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## Red Flags That Should Make You Walk Away

If you encounter any of the following during your due diligence, slow down and dig deeper before committing your retirement savings.

! **Evasive answers on fees**

If management refuses to provide a written five-year history of fee increases, assume the history is not flattering.

! **Poorly maintained amenities**

A dated clubhouse, a pool closed for repairs all summer, or potholed private roads point to weak management or underfunded reserves.

! **High resale inventory**

An unusual number of homes for sale, or resales sitting unsold for months, can signal resident dissatisfaction or difficult operator resale terms.

! **Vague lease renewal terms**

A land lease nearing expiry with no clear written renewal terms puts both your financing and your resale value at risk.

! **Pressure to sign quickly**

Never sign a lease, condo agreement, or offer without your own real estate lawyer reviewing it first. Pressure to secure the lot today is a sales tactic, not a deadline.

! **Rules that keep changing**

Talk to residents about whether management changes rules arbitrarily. Frequent surprise rule changes signal governance problems.

### Get Every Answer in Writing

Verbal reassurances from a sales office are not enforceable. Whatever you are told about fees, rules, renewals, or future amenities, ask for it in writing and have your lawyer confirm it appears in the actual lease, declaration, or agreement.

## Tour Day Quick Sheet

Use this quick sheet to record the basics for each community you visit, then compare them side by side at home.

Community name and location: \_\_\_\_\_

Ownership model (freehold / condo / land lease / life lease): \_\_\_\_\_

Asking price of home toured: \_\_\_\_\_

Monthly fee quoted: \_\_\_\_\_

What the fee includes: \_\_\_\_\_

Fee increase history provided in writing? (yes / no): \_\_\_\_\_

Age rules and younger spouse policy: \_\_\_\_\_

Pet policy: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest stay limits: \_\_\_\_\_

Rental / sublet policy: \_\_\_\_\_

Amenities operational today: \_\_\_\_\_

Average resident age and activity level: \_\_\_\_\_

Distance to hospital and grocery: \_\_\_\_\_

Resale approval or right of first refusal terms: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall impression (1-10): \_\_\_\_\_

## Selling Your Current Home First?

For most downsizers, the move to a 55 plus community is funded by the equity in the family home, which makes that sale the most important financial event of the entire transition. Kevin Flaherty has been selling homes across south-central Ontario since 1988, with over \$500M sold. His Video Narrated VR Animated Online Showings present your home and its surrounding area to buyers across the province before they ever book a visit, so the showings you host are with serious, prepared buyers.

### Free Home Evaluation

Before you tour a single community, find out exactly how much buying power your current home gives you. Call or text Kevin direct at 226-270-6433, toll-free at 1-877-352-4378, or visit [flaherty.ca/homeeval](http://flaherty.ca/homeeval) to start your free, no-obligation home evaluation.

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