SUNLIT PATH
RETIREMENT PARTNERS

Retirement Village Decision Checklist

Evaluating the Costs, Trade-offs, and Lifestyle Fit

Moving into a Sunshine Coast retirement village is a major lifestyle and financial choice. It is not standard real estate: you are explicitly trading property ownership and capital growth for convenience and community.

Use this checklist to work out whether a retirement village is the right move for you, or if a standard downsize is a safer choice for your financial future.

> **Please note:** This checklist applies to traditional retirement villages under the Retirement Villages Act 1999. Land-lease and over-50s "lifestyle" communities operate under a different Act, with a different fee structure and different rules around capital gains, so don't apply these questions directly to that style of park.

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1. PLACE: SANCTUARY VS. PROPERTY TITLE

PLACE

Assess how you feel about giving up home ownership in exchange for zero maintenance:

- ☐ **Leasehold understanding:** I accept that I am buying a right to reside (leasehold / licence), not the title to the land.
  Trade-off: You avoid big maintenance bills, but you don't own a traditional asset.
- ☐ **Lock-and-leave lifestyle:** My priority is travelling or enjoying weekends without worrying about lawns, roofs or gutters.
  Local fit: Perfect for caravan owners or frequent travellers wanting a secure Sunshine Coast base.
- ☐ **By-laws and rules:** I am comfortable asking management for approval to make minor alterations, keep pets, or host extended guests.
  Reality check: If you dislike living under body-corporate-style rules, village living will frustrate you.

> **Place test:** "I am willing to trade property ownership for a lock-and-leave home because my priority is ____________________."

2. PLENTY: FINANCIAL REALITIES & FEE STRUCTURE

PLENTY

Face the raw numbers directly before committing your retirement capital:

- ☐ **Exit fee (DMF) acceptance:** I understand that up to 25–35% of my purchase or resale price will be kept by the operator when I leave.
  Key distinction: This is a cost paid for today's lifestyle amenities, not a growing investment.
- ☐ **Forfeiting capital growth:** I am comfortable knowing that property appreciation during my stay generally goes to the operator, not my estate.

- [ ] **Ongoing monthly fees (GSC):** I have factored the General Service Charge into my budget and know it will rise over time with CPI.
- [ ] **Refurbishment & exit costs:** I have accounted for potential reinstatement fees required to paint and recarpet when the unit is eventually resold.

> **Estate check:** If your top priority is leaving a maximum inheritance to your children, **do not** buy into a retirement village. Consider a standard duplex or townhouse instead.

3. PEOPLE: COMMUNITY & SOCIAL CONNECTION

PEOPLE

- [ ] **Built-in social network:** I want instant access to neighbours, organised coffee mornings, and active social calendars.
  Health benefit: Eliminates social isolation, which is a major health risk as we age.
- [ ] **Community alignment:** I have visited the village during regular operating hours and feel comfortable with the social dynamic.
- [ ] **Family transparency:** I have openly discussed the contract terms and exit fees with my children or beneficiaries so there are no surprises later.

4. PLAY: ACTIVE LIVING & LONG-TERM ACCESS

PLAY

- [ ] **Active amenities:** I will realistically use the on-site gym, heated pool, lawn bowls, or workshop.
  Note: If you won't use these, you are paying high exit fees for amenities you don't need.
- [ ] **Ageing-in-place design:** The village offers single-level living, wider doorways, and level walking paths suited to future mobility changes.
- [ ] **Health precinct access:** The location is within easy reach of my preferred GPs and major Sunshine Coast hospitals (e.g. SCUH or Nambour).

5. PRACTICALITIES: CONTRACT DUE DILIGENCE

PRACTICAL

- [ ] **Five-year-plus horizon:** I plan to live here for at least five years to offset the steep early exit fees.
- [ ] **Specialised legal advice:** I will have a specialised Queensland retirement living lawyer review the Village Comparison Document (VCD).
- [ ] **Pension impact:** I have checked how unlocking cash from my family home will affect my Centrelink Age Pension assets test.

FAST-TRACK DECISION MATRIX

Use this matrix to clarify which retirement housing pathway fits your financial goals:

IF YOUR PRIMARY GOAL IS...	AND YOUR FINANCIAL PRIORITY IS...	AND YOUR TIMELINE IS...	START HERE
Low maintenance & community	Trading equity for lifestyle today	Long-term (5+ years)	**Retirement village (leasehold)**
Capital growth & inheritance	Maximising estate value for kids	Any duration	**Downsize to standard townhouse / duplex**
Low entry cost + land ownership	Keeping site fees predictable (using Rent Assistance)	Medium-to-long term	**Land lease / over-50s community** (different Act, see note above)
Familiarity & independence	Protecting existing home equity	Short-to-medium term	**Home modifications + My Aged Care support**

Next Step: The 3-Step Due Diligence Process

1. **Request the Village Comparison Document (VCD)** from any village you are considering.
2. **Get an objective financial calculation** showing exact dollar payouts based on a 5-year, 10-year and 15-year stay.
3. **Speak to current residents** without management present to get the unvarnished truth about monthly fee increases and community spirit.

Deciding between a retirement village, a land lease resort, or simply downsizing to a normal unit comes down to balancing your cash flow, estate plans and lifestyle goals.

Book a free consultation: call 07 5327 3495 or visit sunlitpath.com.au