

# Time To Downsize

your step-by-step guide  
to downsizing your home  
& upgrading your life





# Welcome To Your Next Chapter

There are a host of reasons for downsizing to a smaller home, You might want to pocket the savings and build upon your nest egg. Maybe you're ready for a new adventure and eager to move to a high-rise condo in the city or a warmer climate. Or finally, the kids have flown the coop, and you don't need the extra bedrooms anymore.

Whatever your motive is for downsizing, an honest evaluation of your expectations is essential to make an informed decision. That's why I think it is wise to ask yourself these questions before you even start looking for smaller homes.

This guide is designed to be your step-by-step roadmap to downsizing your home and upgrading your life. Whether you are looking to simplify your daily responsibilities, strengthen your financial security, or start a new adventure, as a Senior Real Estate Specialist (SRES) with 41 years of experience, I am honored to guide you through this significant transition when you are ready.

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**INTEGRITY  
COMMITMENT  
PASSION**

**CONSUMER  
STRONG**

When Robert W. Starck opened his first office in 1960 his goal was to establish a firm known for its exceptional service and integrity. Today, Berkshire Hathaway Home Services Starck Real Estate is in the top 1% of companies in the U.S. with over 650 sales associates and 21 offices throughout the Chicago area, Rockford, and Northeastern Wisconsin.

At Starck we understand that your home is more than an investment, it is the heart and soul of your family. We take pride in assisting our clients to achieve their homeownership dreams. We built our success one client at a time, making their dreams come true.

**If you're in the market to buy or sell a home, call us today and find out the Starck difference.**



**Heidi Smith**

ABR, Certified Luxury Home Specialist,  
GRI, RENE, SRES

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“ *Berkshire Hathaway wants to be in businesses that are enduring. Real estate brokerages will be around 100 years from now and Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices will be around 100 years from now.* ”  
Warren Buffett, chairman and CEO, Berkshire Hathaway, Inc.



## HEIDI SMITH

A highly respected and active member of the community.

I am a California native with over four decades of experience and a second-generation Realtor. I am licensed in Illinois and California. I have earned a reputation for being a highly knowledgeable, trustworthy, professional who makes the buying and selling process a seamless and successful experience for my clients.

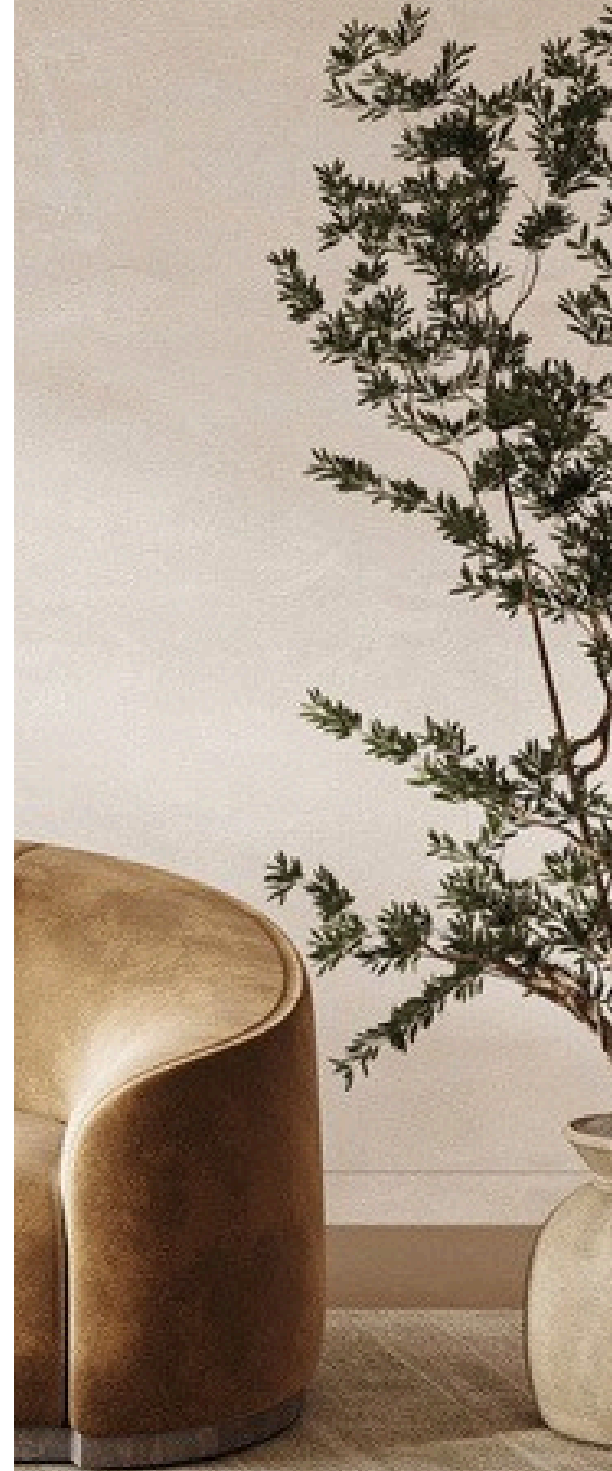
As an expert negotiator and effective problem solver, I love guiding my clients through the complexities of the real estate process and helping them achieve their goals. Whether finding a buyer for the perfect place to call home or utilizing my top-notch marketing strategies to achieve the highest possible price for a home seller. I always advocate for my clients' best interest. There are few things more rewarding to me than completing a transaction knowing that I have exceeded my client's expectations and built a long-lasting professional relationship. I am fortunate to have built a business based heavily on referrals and repeat business over the past four decades. I feel blessed to have a team of agents across Illinois and Wisconsin and a broad global network, so that I can help take care of my clients wherever life may take them.

When I am not working alongside my clients, I love spending time with my family and donating my time to local community events and charities. I also enjoy cooking, baking, playing tennis, skiing, horseback riding, crocheting, worship, hosting events and special time with friends, health spas and travel.

### HEIDI PROVIDES AN EXCEPTIONAL CLIENT EXPERIENCE:

- ✓ Dedicated focused and results driven service.
- ✓ Astute listening skills for sound advice and client advocacy.
- ✓ Tenacious negotiation skills and effective executor.
- ✓ Expert marketer and tailored marketing strategies.
- ✓ Strong network of professional vendors and tradesmen.
- ✓ Knowledgeable about the market and ever-evolving shifts and trends.

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# WHAT MAKES ME DIFFERENT

## I SPECIALIZE IN THIS TRANSITION



Downsizing clients aren't a small part of our business. They're a focus. I have built my practice around helping people navigate this specific life change, which means I've seen every scenario, solved every problem, and built relationships with the professionals who can help.

## I MOVE AT YOUR PACE



Some clients are ready to move in six months. Others need two years to feel prepared. I don't push. I guide. Your timeline is your timeline, and I will support whatever pace makes sense for your situation.

## I COORDINATE THE COMPLEXITY



Selling and buying simultaneously is stressful. I have developed systems to manage the timing, so you're not left scrambling. Bridge financing, rent-back agreements, flexible closing dates. We know the options and we'll find the right solution for you.

## I SEE THE WHOLE PICTURE



This isn't just about square footage and price per square foot. It's about your next ten or twenty years. I help you think through accessibility, proximity to healthcare, community fit, and long-term livability. We ask the questions you might not think to ask yourself.



# SIGNS TO DOWNSIZE

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## SIGN #1

### EMPTY, UNUSED SPACE

Do you have multiple guest rooms collecting dust? A three-car garage holding just one car and an old bicycle? Why spend the time and money to keep unused areas clean and heated when they're far more likely to collect junk than bring joy? Because that space isn't just sitting there, it's actually weighing you down financially and mentally.

## SIGN #2

### THE FLOOR PLAN IS IMPRACTICAL

When you're downsizing, every square inch counts, so an optimal floor plan is critical to maximizing space—and your happiness. Yet you shouldn't bypass a house you deem too small based on square footage alone.



### **SIGN #3**

## **YOU DON'T USE ENTIRE ROOMS**

One of the biggest signs you're ready to downsize is unused rooms in your house. Are there rooms you only enter to clean? If you have a formal dining room, living room, den, or an entire basement that is no longer being used, it's a good time to think about downsizing. Try counting which rooms you use more than twice a week to estimate how much square footage you're using. The next step is to analyze if the rooms you use are being fully utilized.

- Is there extra seating in your family room?
- Do you have a cabinet in your kitchen that is only open for a couple of select dishes?
- Does your back closet have coats and shoes from grown and absent children?
- Do you know what's in your attic?

### **SIGN #4**

## **YOU ARE OVERWHELMED BY YOUR STUFF**

Here's a twist: You should really think about what you want to keep instead of what you want to get rid of.

Do you have a home gym, office setup, a guest room for visitors, or multiple sets of den furniture? Deciding what you really need to keep will help you answer the basic number of bedrooms question. This, in turn, helps as you decide how small the next home can truly be."If you decide to part with your stuff, remember to factor in storage costs.

## REASONS TO DOWNSIZE:

# Money

Choosing a smaller, more affordable home can leave you with more money for other financial goals, such as traveling, saving for retirement, building an emergency fund, paying off debt or paying children's college tuition. Downsizing your home can reduce your cost of living in several ways.



# Ask Yourself:

## HOW WILL DOWNSIZING BENEFIT MY RETIREMENT?

It needs to be asked whether you are retired, heading towards retirement, or just planning in advance.

Retirement usually means living on a fixed income, unexpected home repairs, escalating taxes or other unplanned expenses. All of these are sincere hardships in retirement. I would advise talking to your financial planner about how your real estate fits into your retirement planning. We often assume that downsizing will result in fewer expenses for housing. However, that is not always the case.





# **QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR FINANCIAL ADVISOR**

Before making a final decision, bring these questions to your financial advisor or accountant:

**How does selling my home affect my tax situation?**

**What are the capital gains implications of my home sale?**

**How should I invest or protect the equity I access from this sale?**

**Does downsizing align with my overall retirement income plan?**

**What are the financial risks of staying in my current home long-term?**

**Are there programs or benefits I should be aware of for my situation?**

# What are the financial implications of selling my home?

Living in a smaller space can reduce the mortgage payment and cost less for utilities, property taxes, and maintenance, but downsizing does come with substantial upfront costs.

When you talk to a tax attorney, accountant, or financial planner, are you consistently getting advice that it's time to address your home? While everyone's tax situation is unique, if you are consulting with professionals and learning about the advantages of selling your home and downsizing, then that's a good sign that it's time to consider that move. For most people, their home is the largest investment they'll ever make.



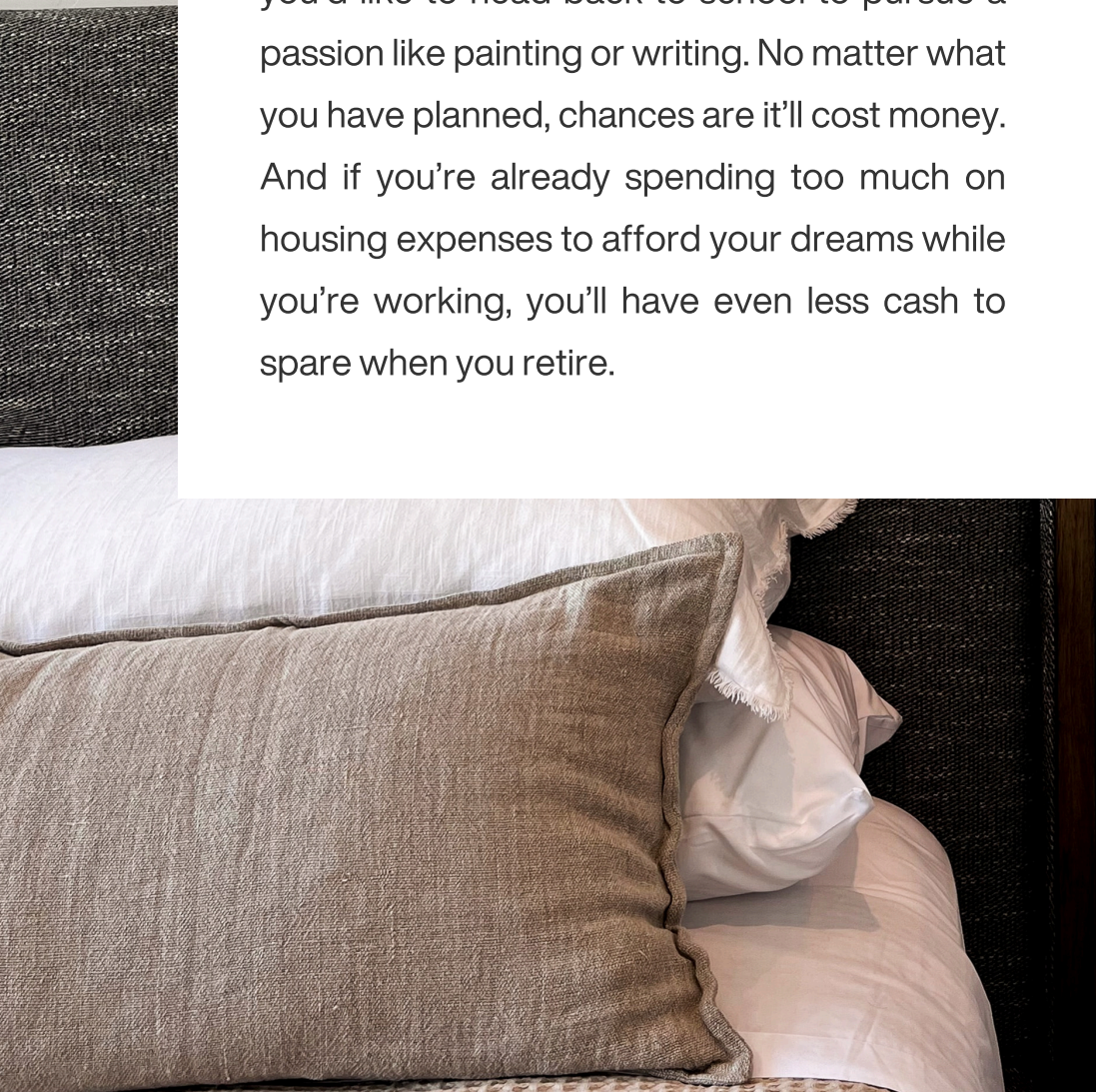
**WHILE DOWNSIZING WILL SAVE YOU MONEY IN THE LONG TERM, YOU DO NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR THE UPFRONT EXPENSES THAT COME WITH MOVING.**

## CONSIDER DOWNSIZING IF...

# Your current monthly budget leaves little leftover cash for saving...or fun.

### *HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SPEND YOUR DAYS ONCE YOU RETIRE?*

Maybe you envision yourself as a globetrotting traveler exploring exotic locales. Or perhaps you'd like to head back to school to pursue a passion like painting or writing. No matter what you have planned, chances are it'll cost money. And if you're already spending too much on housing expenses to afford your dreams while you're working, you'll have even less cash to spare when you retire.





**CONSIDER DOWNSIZING IF...**

## **Monthly Housing Expenses Have Risen Above 30%**

When it comes to how much of your monthly budget should be spent on housing expenses, 30% is the magic number. The U.S. government has been using 30% as the standard for housing affordability since the United States National Housing Act of 1937, and since that time, any household paying above 30% of their income on housing is considered financially burdened.

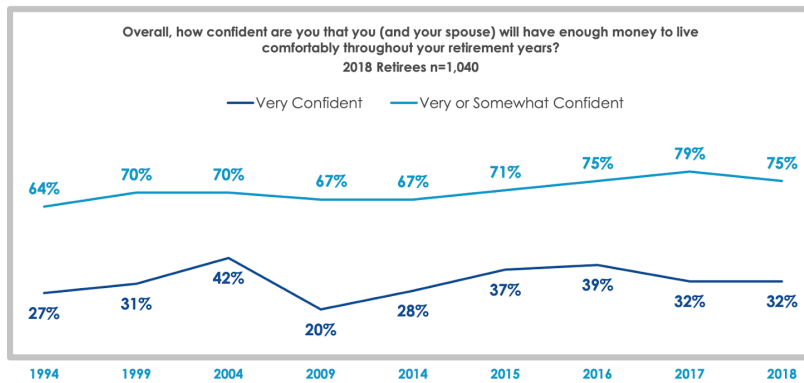
While you're still working, your housing costs may fit comfortably within your budget. But the simple act of retiring can unexpectedly push some retirees into the "burdened" bracket. Housing cost burdens increase with age as expenses continue to rise and income is reduced in retirement.

For those who are just getting by because they haven't figured out how to live on a fixed income, that's a sign to downsize into a smaller place with a more reasonable monthly mortgage payment. Seniors who want to avoid getting a part-time job at a fast-food restaurant just to make ends meet need to calculate how much house they can afford in retirement.

The Merrill Lynch survey found that a whopping 64% of downsizing retirees are making the transition to a smaller home to cut down on their housing expenses.

## CONSIDER DOWNSIZING IF...

# You want to convert your home equity into income



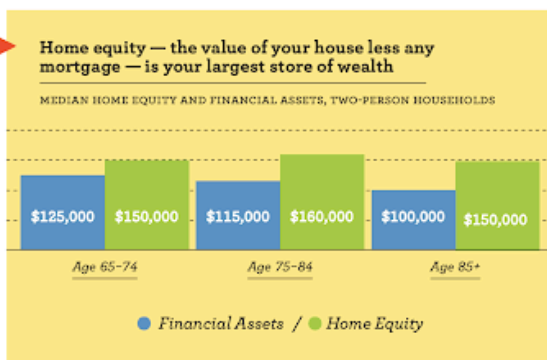
SOURCE: (EBRI.ORG)

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT THAT YOU'VE SAVED ENOUGH TO FUND THE RETIREMENT LIFESTYLE YOU DESIRE?**

A 2018 Retirement Confidence Survey by the Employee Benefit Research Institute found that only 1 in 3 retirees is “very confident” that they have enough money to live comfortably throughout their retirement.

If you're not, you may be counting on your current home equity for retirement income. In fact, covering everyday expenses is the number one reason retirees give for wanting to tap into their equity, according to the Urban Institute's Seniors' Access to Home Equity report. The reason why is no mystery; it's because, for most homeowners, equity is their most valuable asset. Unfortunately, that asset is expensive to maintain.

**If you're like most retirees**



It stands to reason, then, that if you're accessing that income to pay your everyday expenses, like housing costs, it'll eventually be depleted.



**It's also where lots of income goes**

Downsizing your home is one of those things you can do to enhance your lifestyle during retirement. It's all about converting the home equity into a stream of income that will last the remainder of your life.

AUTHORS' CALCULATIONS FROM THE 2010 WAVE OF THE HEALTH AND RETIREMENT STUDY.

SOURCE: (CRR.BC.EDU)

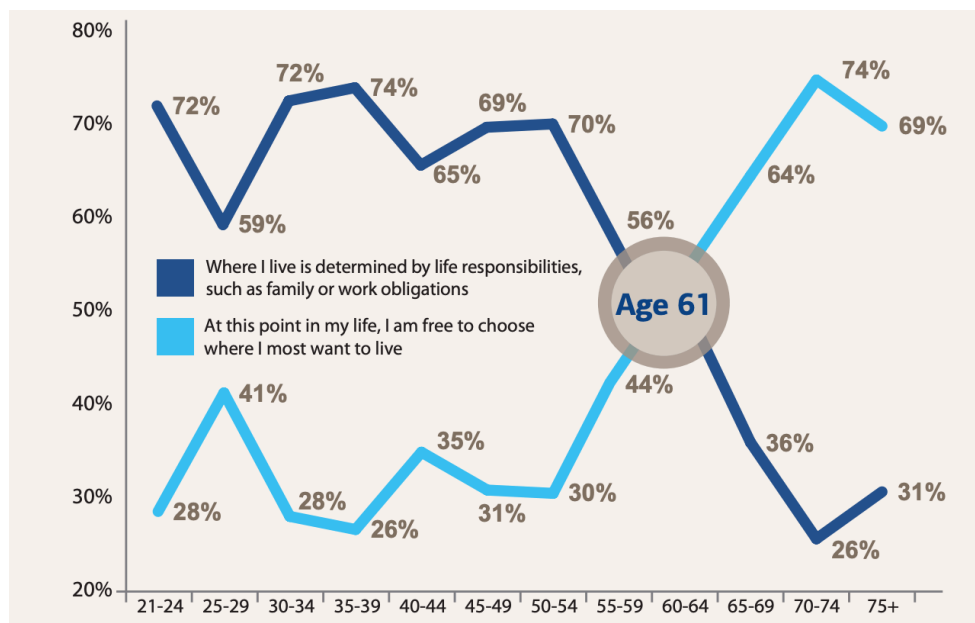
## CONSIDER DOWNSIZING IF...

# Your Career No Longer Ties You To Your Location

Finding that ideal downsized home that's both affordable and accessible may seem like an impossible dream, especially if you're attempting to buy in your existing neighborhood. But the beauty of retirement is that you no longer need to let your career dictate where you live.

The Merrill Lynch survey found that age 61 was the sweet spot for retirees when they were able to take their pick of where to live, and this freedom can be a big help financially. Without a workplace to worry about, you're free to shop around for the states, cities, and neighborhoods with the lowest property taxes, utilities, sales taxes, and more.

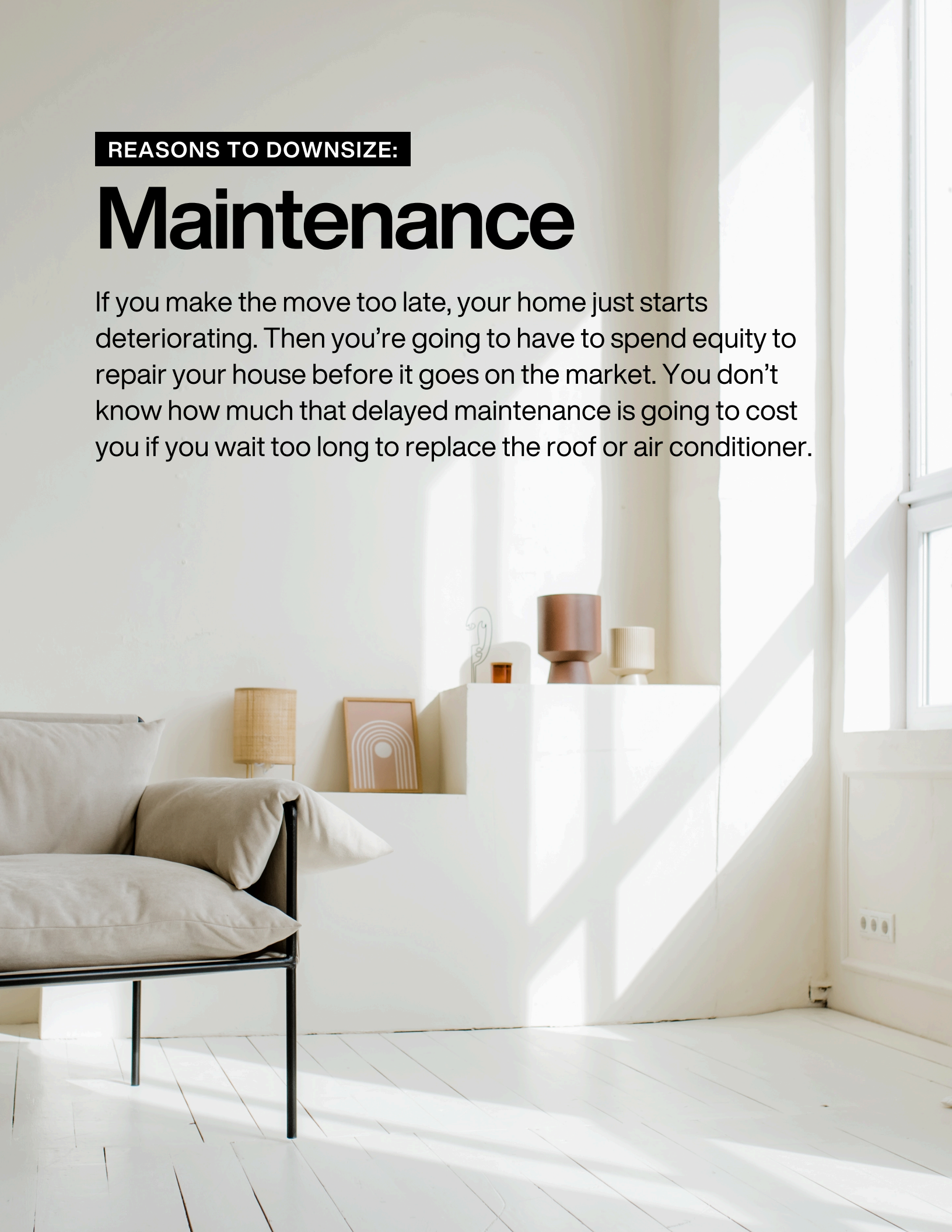
You may even find that you don't need to sacrifice square footage at all if you don't want to, if you choose to move to a less expensive area. While 51% of those retirement-aged homebuyers surveyed by Merrill Lynch downsized, 19% purchased the same-sized home, and 30% purchased a larger home after retiring. This proves that it is possible to upsize your home while still downsizing your actual monthly housing expenses. Choosing to downsize is a difficult decision to make. Choosing the best time to downsize is even trickier. But if you play your cards right, your move into a less expensive home has the potential to save you money, and make you money, too.



**REASONS TO DOWNSIZE:**

# Maintenance

If you make the move too late, your home just starts deteriorating. Then you're going to have to spend equity to repair your house before it goes on the market. You don't know how much that delayed maintenance is going to cost you if you wait too long to replace the roof or air conditioner.





## Maintenance is Overwhelming

If the cost and physical activity it takes to maintain your property have become intimidating, then it's likely time to downsize and find something with less overwhelming maintenance. While every home will occasionally require maintenance that lies outside your physical or financial comfort zone, if you're regularly struggling to perform the chores required to maintain your property and your home has become a source of frustration, it's time to find a solution. Homeownership should be a pleasure, not a source of physical exhaustion or mental anguish.



**remember:**

**IF YOU MAKE THE MOVE  
TOO LATE, YOUR HOME JUST  
STARTS DETERIORATING.**

The garden patio where you learned of the impending arrival of your first grandchild, the wall where you charted the heights of your kids (and grandkids!), and the driveway where your kid spent hours playing basketball.

It's precious memories like these that lead retirees to linger longer in their family home than is wise for their health and their financial stability. If sentiment tempts you to hang on to your home too long, it'll wind up doing more damage to your finances than you'd expect.

## CONSIDER DOWNSIZING IF...

# Your Home Has Features That No Longer Fit Your Lifestyle

Back in the day, when your kids were building blanket forts in all the bedrooms, the bathrooms had to wait for lines, and your teens were tussling over the remote in the TV room, there were times when even your spacious home felt too small to contain the chaos.

These days, though, most of those bedrooms are now rarely-opened storage, there's a strange smell coming from your unused guest bathroom, and the TV room has become a dust-catcher.

Now that you're only using a handful of rooms in your house (the master bath, bedroom, kitchen, and the smaller, cozier den), it hardly makes sense to pay for heating, cooling, and lighting rooms that you don't even use.

Your home may have features that will take a physical toll as you grow older, like stairs, high-maintenance landscaping, or a steep driveway. The weather in your area is also a consideration, as shoveling snow or mowing the lawn becomes more difficult with each passing year.

A survey conducted by Demand Institute found that aging-friendly accessibility was a key factor among baby boomers looking to move, with single-story, low-maintenance, and disability accessibility topping the list of most desired features.



**REASONS TO DOWNSIZE:**

# Space & Stuff

Whether you're traveling for business or pleasure, if you're rarely home then the mortgage interest, taxes, and utility costs to maintain that property is almost money down the drain. If it feels like you're not making the best use of your home, reconsider.



# UPSIDES OF DOWNSIZING



## LOWER PHYSICAL BURDEN

MOVING INTO A SMALLER SPACE MAY REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF YARD OR HOUSEWORK ON YOUR TO-DO LIST.



## A SAFER ENVIRONMENT

MOVING FROM A 2 STORY HOME TO A SINGLE STORY WILL REMOVE A MAJOR FALL HAZARD; STAIRS.



## FEWER DECISIONS

PARING DOWN YOUR PERSONAL BELONGINGS WILL HELP YOU MAKE LESS DECISIONS EACH DAY.



# EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT

We've covered the practical side of downsizing. But there's one more thing to address before we wrap up. The emotional side.

Because this journey isn't just about square footage and spreadsheets. It's about closing one chapter and opening another. And that deserves its own conversation.



## Fears About Aging In Place

We're not talking about maintenance and upkeep (though those points are important) we're talking about whether the baths and showers have grab bars, how often you need to climb the stairs, and whether the doorways are large enough to allow for wheelchair or walker access. The aging-in-place movement helps seniors and disabled members of the community stay in their homes and is perfect for those who'd rather downsize to an accessible home than go into an assisted living facility.

Sadly, for some people, the home they live in is a constant reminder of something they've lost. Empty nesters, widows or widowers, divorcees, and even people who've lost a job may find that it's time to scale down and move on.

Your home is literally the first thing you see when you wake up in the morning. If it causes more heartache than pleasure, take a moment to consider what it would be like to live someplace new. If that thought lifts a weight from your shoulders, then it's likely time for you to downsize.



# A Desire to Simplify Your Life

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**ONE AMAZING FACET OF THE LATE '90S AND EARLY 2000S BOOM IN LARGE HOUSING WAS THAT MANY OF THE PEOPLE WHO SETTLED IN LARGE HOMES ENDED UP WISHING THAT THEY HAD PURCHASED OR BUILT A SMALLER HOME.**

In fact, a 2017 survey showed that a full 60 percent of people who lived in homes 2,000 square feet or larger said they hoped to downsize.

Some of that is certainly due to the financial considerations we discussed already, but some of it may also be driven by a more thoughtful mindset. Typified by the tiny house movement, some people seek to downsize in order to strip away unneeded complications and focus on what matters most.

A woman with blonde, curly hair is laughing heartily, her eyes closed and mouth wide open. She is wearing a light-colored coat and a colorful floral scarf. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with trees and foliage. The image is split vertically, with the woman on the left and a white text box on the right.

# Give Yourself **PERMISSION**

**Permission** to keep something just because you love it, even if it's not practical.

**Permission** to let go of something everyone expects you to keep.

**Permission** to change your mind.

**Permission** to ask for help.

**Permission** to do this imperfectly.

**Permission** to feel whatever you feel without judgment.

You don't need anyone else's approval to make the choices that are right for you.



# A FINAL THOUGHT

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A house is just a structure. Wood and drywall and shingles and glass. But a home is something you create. You created one in the house you're leaving. You'll create another in the place you're going.

The love, the laughter, the life you've built. Those things aren't staying behind. They're coming with you.

# WHY WORK WITH A DOWNSIZING SPECIALIST

## *This Isn't Just Another Real Estate Transaction*

Selling a home you've lived in for decades and buying something smaller is not the same as helping a young family find their first house. The emotional weight, logistics, and stakes are different. A downsizing specialist understands this.

I've walked this path with hundreds of clients. I know that some days you'll feel excited about your next chapter, and other days you'll wonder if you're making a terrible mistake. Both feelings are normal and valid.

I also know that the practical challenges are real. Coordinating the sale of your current home with the purchase of your new one, timing the move so you're not homeless or paying two mortgages, and navigating the emotional minefield of sorting through decades of belongings while making major financial decisions.

You need an agent who gets it—someone who won't rush you, understands that this process takes longer, and requires more patience. Someone who has systems and resources in place to support you through every phase. That's what I offer.



# OUR PROCESS

HERE'S WHAT WORKING WITH ME LOOKS LIKE:

## INITIAL CONSULTATION

We start with a conversation. No pressure, no obligation. We want to understand your situation, your goals, your concerns, and your timeline. We'll answer your questions and help you think through whether now is the right time to move forward.

## HOME EVALUATION

When you're ready, we'll walk through your current home together. We'll discuss its value in today's market, what updates (if any) would increase that value, and what buyers in your area are looking for. You'll leave with a clear picture of your financial starting point.

## PLANNING PHASE

We'll build a customized timeline based on your needs. If you need twelve months to sort and prepare, we'll map that out. If you're ready to move faster, we'll create a plan that supports that pace. Either way, you'll know exactly what to expect and when.

## SELLING YOUR HOME

When it's time to list, we handle everything. Professional photography, staging recommendations, marketing, showings, negotiations. We'll keep you informed without overwhelming you and protect your interests at every step.

## FINDING YOUR NEW HOME

Using the criteria we've developed together, we'll identify properties that fit your life. We'll tour them with you, point out things you might miss, and help you evaluate each option against your needs. When you find the right one, we'll negotiate on your behalf and coordinate the timing with your sale.

## CLOSING AND BEYOND

We'll manage the details through closing and make sure the transition is smooth. And we're here after the move too. Questions about your new home? Need a referral for a service provider? We're a phone call away.

# QUESTIONS CLIENTS ASK ME

## **HOW DO YOU GET PAID?**

In most transactions, the seller pays the real estate commission. As your agent, we represent your interests whether you're selling, buying, or both. We'll explain exactly how compensation works in your specific situation during our initial consultation.

## **CAN YOU HELP ME IF I'M NOT READY TO MOVE FOR A YEAR OR MORE?**

Absolutely. Many of our clients start working with us long before they're ready to list. We can help you plan, prepare, and sort so that when the time comes, you're ready. There's no cost for this guidance.

## **WHAT IF I NEED TO SELL BEFORE I FIND A NEW HOME?**

We have several strategies for this, including rent-back agreements, temporary housing options, and bridge financing. We'll find a solution that keeps you from feeling rushed or homeless.

## **WHAT IF I FIND A NEW HOME BEFORE MY CURRENT HOME SELLS?**

This happens too. We'll discuss options including contingent offers, bridge loans, or delayed closings. Every situation is different, and we'll figure out what works best for yours.

## **DO YOU WORK WITH CLIENTS MOVING OUT OF THE AREA?**

Yes. If you're relocating to a different city or state, we have a network of trusted agents across the country who share our approach. We'll connect you with someone who will take care of you in your new location.



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Heidii mad the home selling process easy and worry-free. I would recommend her professional yet very personable service without any reservations. She remained in contact and kept me updated on any progress in selling my home.

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**YOLANDA**



# *I'm Here to Guide You Every Step of the Way*

Let's take the guess work out of relocating. With my personalized approach and clear, easy to understand insights, I'll guide you to make decisions that truly work with your best interests solely in mind. Let's chat about how we can make the most of your home sale. I'm here to give you the guidance and confidence you need to navigate every step of the process. To schedule a confidential listing consultation, let's connect and we'll get started on making your sale success. I can't wait to work together.