

Phase 1: Purpose & Financial Audit

- [] **Define your "Why":** Specify your core objective (e.g., eliminating mortgage debt, moving closer to grandkids, reducing maintenance, freeing up retirement equity).
- [] **Calculate net home equity:** Estimate total proceeds by subtracting your remaining mortgage balance and closing/selling costs (typically 6–10% in total commission and fees) from expected sale price.
- [] **Run capital gains tax numbers:** Verify if capital gains exceed the tax-free exclusion limit (\$250,000 for single filers, \$500,000 for married filing jointly) based on your adjusted basis, not just the sale price.
- [] **Consult unbiased experts:** Review tax obligations and equity distribution with a fee-only financial planner and a CPA rather than a commission-based product selling financial planner.
- [] **Compare ongoing housing overhead:** Compare property taxes, utilities, and potential HOA fees between staying put versus buying a smaller home or condo (watch out for high monthly HOA fees that negate savings).
- [] **Evaluate stay-and-renovate costs:** Estimate what \$30,000–\$80,000 in accessibility modifications (e.g., ramp, walk-in shower, main-floor laundry) would cost compared to moving expenses.

Phase 2: Physical Layout & Future-Proofing (20–30 Year Horizon)

- [] **Prioritize main-level living:** Choose a single-story home or a layout where primary living spaces (bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, laundry) are on the main floor without steps.
- [] **Audit physical entry points:** Avoid split-level steps, steep driveways, or sloped front entryways that become severe fall hazards during rain or ice.
- [] **Inspect essential accessibility features:** Confirm doorways accommodate potential mobility aids, showers are walk-in (avoid deep tub steps), and flooring transition thresholds are low.
- [] **Plan for driving limitations:** Assess how daily routines would adapt if driving at night—or driving altogether—becomes unsafe.

Phase 3: Location, Medical, & Social Fit

- [] **Map daily essentials:** Ensure groceries, pharmacy, banks, and essential services are within a 5–10 minute drive (or manageable walking distance).
- [] **Verify healthcare proximity:** Confirm the location is within short driving distance of major hospital networks, primary care, and specialists.
- [] **Evaluate local terrain:** Check neighborhood topography; steep hills or heavy inclines hinder mobility as joint pain increases.
- [] **Audit social and lifestyle needs:** Verify proximity to personal non-negotiables (e.g., tennis clubs, space for music/hobbies, safe walking trails).
- [] **Account for climate and ties:** Weigh the impact of moving away from established social networks or moving to extreme weather climates that limit outdoor activity.

Phase 4: Actionable Timeline & Preparation Steps

- [] **Test-drive unfamiliar markets (1–2 years out):** Rent in a prospective neighborhood, city, or state for 3–12 months before committing to buy.
- [] **Declutter systematically (6–24 months out):** Liquidate large furniture, old equipment, and children's leftover belongings slowly via garage sales or online marketplaces to capture fair market value.
- [] **Practice small-space living (3–6 months out):** Block off unused bedrooms in your current home for 90 days to live within your target square footage and identify missing or excessive items.
- [] **Allow a 6-to-36 month window:** Map out the transaction timeline without rushing to avoid panic selling or overpaying for scarce one-level inventory.



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