HARVEST
FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Preparing for Retirement: The Often Overlooked Decisions that Shape the Future

A practical look at how income, taxes, and timing impact your readiness in retirement.

Get Started →

Introduction

Over decades, we've worked with many people approaching retirement. Most have done a lot right. They've saved consistently, made use of investment opportunities, and kept a long-term perspective. They've worked hard to build a meaningful life for themselves and their families.

And still, as retirement gets closer, something shifts.

Planning for a distant future feels very different than relying on that plan for income. The margin for error narrows. Decisions that once felt manageable start to feel more weighty. Tradeoffs that used to feel theoretical begin to show up in everyday life. New questions come up.

At this stage, life becomes less about building and more about using what you've built.

This guide is designed to help you analyze your own retirement planning decisions, so you can feel confident that you've done everything you can to support the life you envision.

Where Questions Begin to Surface

If everything feels on track, what might I not be seeing yet?

It's common for even disciplined savers, as they inch closer to retirement, to find they have a lot of questions. Decisions that once felt straightforward start to carry more weight. They wonder if their planning will pay off or if an advisor might catch something they are missing.

Many people think they don't need an advisor until they're about to retire, or that their situation is simple. But a lot of the complexity isn't obvious until you really start looking at it.

→ **Paul Burgdorf**, *Chief Operating Officer*

What we often hear at this stage

Common themes, especially among people who have done a lot right:

- "I've saved enough, so I should be fine"
- "I can figure out the rest later"
- "I don't need an advisor until I'm ready to retire"
- "My investments are straightforward"
- "An advisor probably won't add much value"

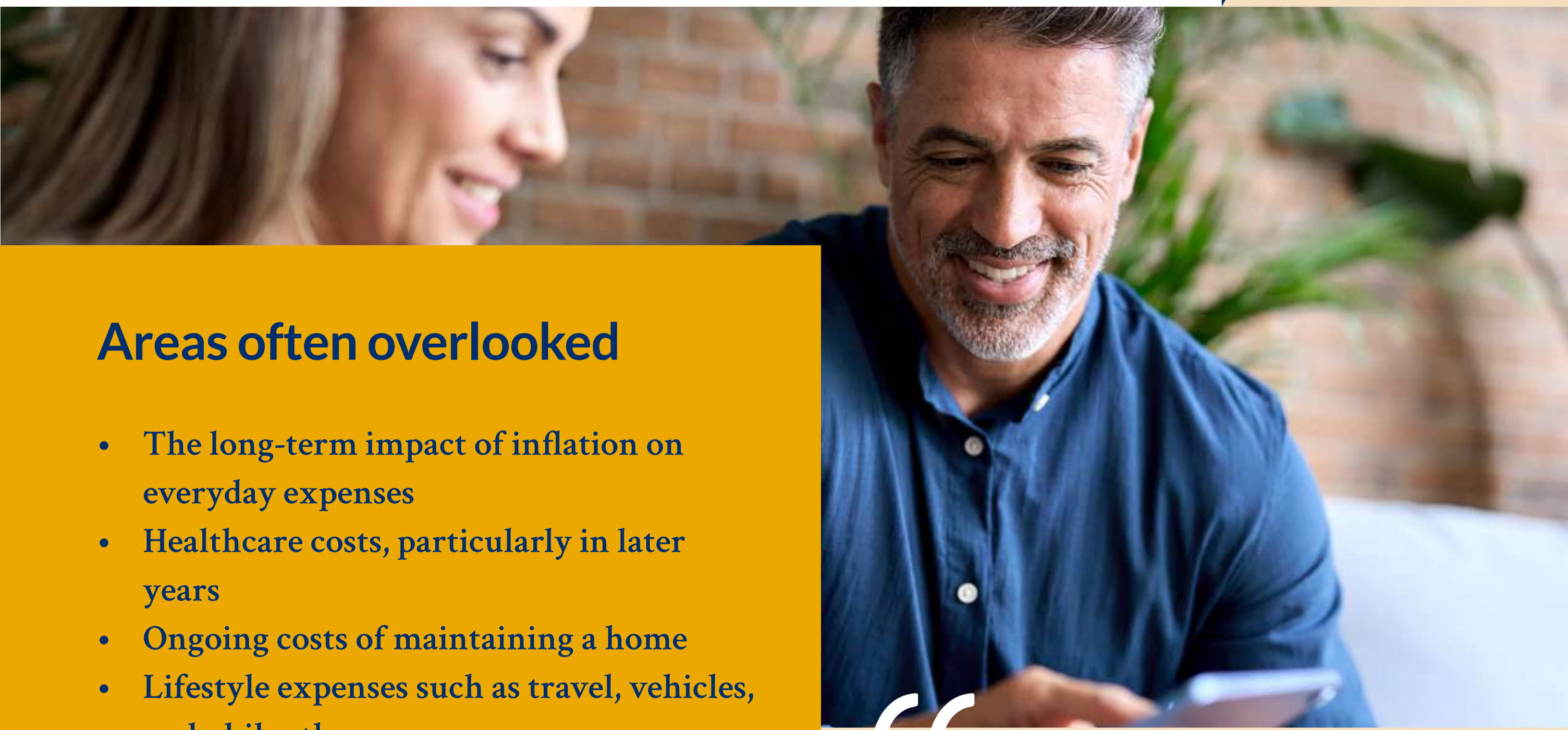
What we often find is that certain areas have not been fully explored yet.

Where Good Planning Can Fall Short

Have I fully accounted for the costs that will emerge over time?

From our work with hundreds of clients, we consistently see a similar pattern: Challenges can arise when certain long-term costs are underestimated or not fully planned for.

Planning for variables over decades (especially on your own) is challenging. Inflation, tax changes, and lifestyle decisions fluctuate over time, and the consequences tend to reveal themselves down the road.



Areas often overlooked

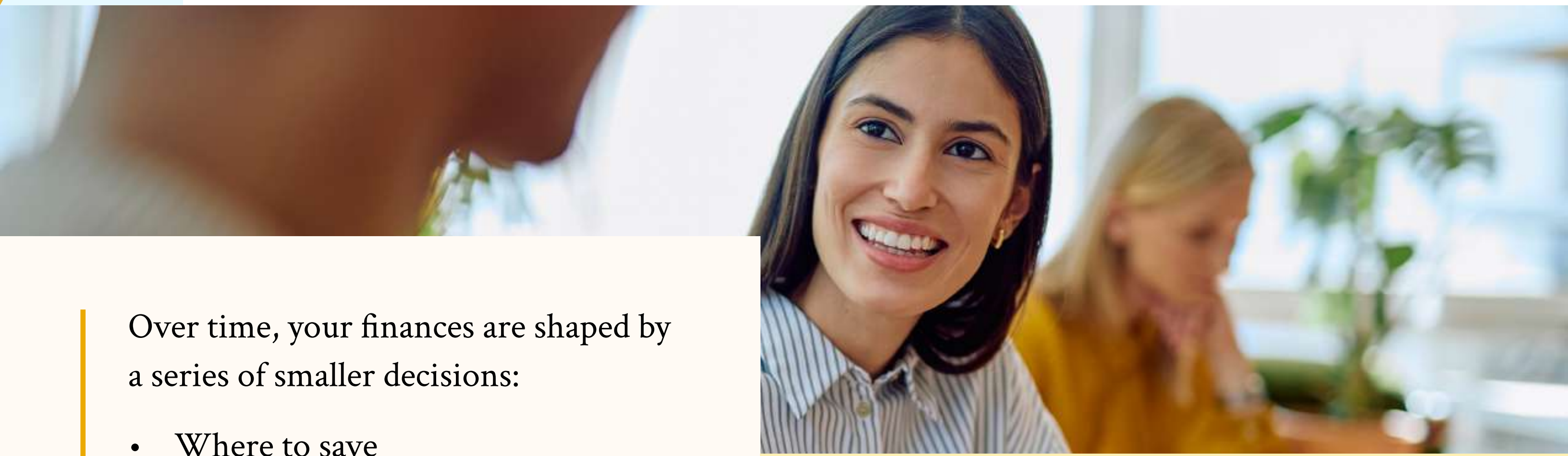
- The long-term impact of inflation on everyday expenses
- Healthcare costs, particularly in later years
- Ongoing costs of maintaining a home
- Lifestyle expenses such as travel, vehicles, and philanthropy
- How Social Security decisions affect total lifetime income
- Intentions for giving and transferring wealth to children and grandchildren
- Regularly reviewing opportunities to strengthen their current retirement

These decisions directly influence how much income is required and how long assets need to last.

> **Many people underestimate things like healthcare and the cost of maintaining their home. And inflation and price increases are often not fully accounted for when they're planning.**
>
> → **Monica Dwyer,** *Senior Vice President, Wealth Advisor*

How Your Financial Decisions are Structured Affects Your Taxes and Income

Are my decisions working together as effectively as they should?



Over time, your finances are shaped by a series of smaller decisions:

- Where to save
- How to invest
- When to withdraw
- How to handle taxes along the way

When these decisions are made as part of a coordinated, long-term plan, they can reduce lifetime tax exposure, create more options for how and when your money is used, and help stabilize income throughout retirement.

> **An advisor can help you understand the total picture of your financial plan - what you are doing and why you are doing it.**
>
> → **Joy Schlie,** *Vice President, Wealth Advisor*

Common gaps in how decisions are structured

- Not taking full advantage of employer-sponsored retirement benefits, such as maximizing a 401(k) match or making additional Roth contributions while still working
- Concentrating assets in one tax category, rather than balancing across taxable, tax-deferred, and tax-free accounts
- Leaving funds in cash longer than intended, often without a clear plan for when they will be invested
- Taking withdrawals from IRAs, 401(k)s, and other accounts without a coordinated strategy, which can increase the overall tax burden
- Filing taxes and realizing that certain deductions or strategies would not work as expected

Why the Order of Financial Decisions Matters

Am I making decisions in a way that strengthens my financial position over time?

As retirement approaches, the timing of decisions begins to matter significantly. Income, taxes, and withdrawals are no longer separate considerations.

Timing and sequencing becomes crucial to avoid limiting your options

- Taking income from one account too soon can increase taxes and reduce flexibility in future years
- Claiming Social Security at one point in time can affect how other income is taxed and how long assets need to last
- Missing the opportunity to shift assets during lower-income years can lead to higher required distributions later
- Giving or legacy decisions need to be timed alongside income needs, otherwise philanthropy can be limited

Research and industry experience have shown that ordering decisions thoughtfully can improve after-tax income, extend how long your assets last, and give you more options later in retirement.

When financial decisions are not timed well, it is common to see:

- Higher taxes paid over time
- Reduced control over income
- Fewer options to adjust later in retirement

A big 'aha' moment is the surety and confidence people feel when they see that there will be an actual, executable plan created.

→ **Marc Henn**, *CEO & Founder*

What Actually Creates Confidence in Retirement

Do I feel confident simply because I have a plan, or because I understand how it works?

Sometimes people enter retirement with confidence that comes from years of saving and a strong financial position. Other times, it comes from a general sense that things will work out.

Lasting confidence is grounded in knowing where things stand today and how a plan performs over time, including under less favorable conditions. It also comes from understanding how much can be spent, and how that aligns with your long-term goals.

It's also possible to feel confident without fully understanding how a plan works. Some people assume their assets will generate a certain level of income without testing that assumption. Others feel comfortable because nothing has gone wrong yet.

What confident retirees have in common

- A clear, structured plan
- Visibility into how their plan performs in different scenarios
- A clear understanding of sustainable spending
- A long-term perspective that reduces the tendency to react to short-term market moves
- A partner to help navigate decisions along the way

> **Sometimes a confident retiree is an unknowledgeable retiree. They feel fine, but they don't fully understand how their money works or how much income it can realistically produce.**
>
> → **Monica Dwyer,** *Senior Vice President, Wealth Advisor*

Confidence comes from understanding the plan, not just having one.

If I've Done the Hard Part, What Comes Next?

If you're reading this, you've likely already saved, planned, and made thoughtful decisions over time, and you should be proud of the discipline that got you here.

What comes next is making sure those decisions work together in a way that supports the life you envision. It also means knowing where opportunities still exist and how to approach them with intention.

> **Working with a non-commissioned advisor who sits on the same side of the table as the client changes how people think about their financial decisions.**
>
> → **Paul Burgdorf,** *Chief Operating Officer*

HARVEST
FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Self-Assessment Check List

Check the boxes below to see if you are prepared for your retirement.

Yes	No	Where Good Planning Can Fall Short
☐	☐	Have I accounted for how costs may change over the next 10 to 20 years?
☐	☐	Do my estimates for how much income I'll need per month factor in inflation?
☐	☐	Have I considered how healthcare costs could change in later years?
☐	☐	Do I have a clear strategy for generating income in retirement?

How Your Financial Decisions Are Structured Affects Your Taxes and Income

Yes	No	
☐	☐	Are my assets intentionally structured across different tax treatments?
☐	☐	Am I revisiting earlier decisions as my financial situation and goals have evolved?
☐	☐	Am I making full use of the employer benefits, savings and investment opportunities available to me?
☐	☐	Do I know how my withdrawals and investments will be taxed?
☐	☐	Do I feel confident that the decisions I'm making today will meaningfully improve my financial situation in the long run?

HARVEST
FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Yes	No	
		Why the Order of Financial Decisions Matters
☐	☐	Do I have a clear plan for when and how income will be taken across different accounts?
☐	☐	Have I considered how the timing of decisions like Social Security or withdrawals will affect future options?
☐	☐	Am I making decisions based on what works today, or what positions me best over time?
☐	☐	Do I understand how one decision may limit or expand my flexibility later?
		What Actually Creates Confidence in Retirement
☐	☐	Could I explain how my plan works to someone else?
☐	☐	Have I seen how my plan performs under different scenarios, including less favorable ones?
☐	☐	Do I know how much I can realistically spend while maintaining long-term stability?
☐	☐	Am I making decisions based on a long-term plan, or reacting to short-term conditions?
☐	☐	Do I feel confident because I understand my plan, or because I haven't had to question it yet?

HARVEST
FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Working with Harvest Advisors

At Harvest, we work with individuals and families who are building a strong foundation and want to make thoughtful, informed decisions about what comes next.

That often means:

Bringing together different parts of one's financial life into one clear plan

Identifying opportunities that may not have been fully explored

Explaining each step in a way that feels straightforward and understandable

If a seasoned perspective would set your mind at ease, we're always available for a conversation.