



## **Adult communities rise in popularity in St. Johns County**

By Stuart Korfhage  
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An older generation's preference for freedom from the rambunctiousness of children and a county's effort of not being drowned by a flood of new students are leading to a growing trend of new adult-only communities here.

Often referred to as age-restricted communities, these developments for those aged 55 and up are opening with great frequency in a county trying hard to stave off the pains of rapid growth.

Just last month, the St. Johns County Planning and Zoning Agency gave a recommendation of approval for a new development of 818 age-restricted homes called Greenbriar Downs located between Longleaf Pine Parkway and Greenbriar Road/County Road 210 West.

As the huge number of new developments in the northern section of the county has choked roads and overburdened schools, developers of age-restricted communities like Greenbriar Downs offer county officials something that is often considered more palatable.

After all, the adult communities do not add any students to the public schools, and the traffic impacts are much less because many of the residents are retired. They're also not driving children around to their after-school activities.

"There is an impact on schools, but it's a positive impact," Greenbriar representative Tony Robbins of Prosser Inc. told the PZA in December. "It's an impact where they're not adding a single student station need for any of these folks.

"Their revenue, their ad valorem taxes, even though they're age-restricted, still go toward capital improvements and operations at the school district."

There are still thousands of homes approved in family-friendly communities all over the northern part of the county, so this is not turning into a sea of gray like The Villages near Florida's west coast.

But because there is a strong market for this kind of product and because approval for new residential projects appears to be getting a little more challenging, adult communities are becoming more common here. Some are whole developments like Greenbriar, and others are just pockets within large master-planned communities.

According to information from the county's Growth Management department, 2018 saw the approval of more than 1,000 additional age-restricted homes in the county. That doesn't count Greenbriar, which is still in the approval process.

Development attorney Ellen Avery-Smith said age-restricted communities are an obvious fit for this market and have the added benefit of having a lower overall impact on the the county overall.

"I think both the county and certainly the school board are looking favorably on these," Avery-Smith said. "There's no doubt that the population of the United States, and particularly Florida, is aging. And developers are trying to target that market for people who just want to live in a little bit quieter community."

The appeal is real, says Debbie da Silva, a broker with Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty who represents Villages of Seloy. In addition to selling the community, da Silva is also a resident.

The community off State Road 16 opened more than four years ago and will eventually include 240 homes. In 2018, da Silva said there were more than 30 homes sold.

She said her fellow residents seem to enjoy the lifestyle afforded by the adults-only living arrangement.

"They always come and say, 'Listen, we love children, but we love this kind of community because we're not going to have the school buses, we're not going to have kids running up and down on the bicycles and the basketball hoop in the backyard,'" she said. "There's not as much traffic in and out.

"They just want peace and quiet."