RETIREMENT INCOME & TAX PLANNING

The Two Decisions That Quietly Shape Your Entire Retirement

Why lowering taxes and raising income deserve your attention now, not later.

Most people spend decades accumulating savings and only weeks deciding how to turn that savings into income. Yet the decisions you make in the years surrounding retirement carry more weight than almost anything that came before. Some of them cannot be undone.

> *"Social Security timing and any pension election are largely one-time, hard-to-reverse decisions. They set the floor the rest of your income builds on, so they come first."*

Why the clock matters

Retirement income planning is built in a specific order. Social Security timing and pension elections come first because they are largely permanent and they set the floor every other income source builds on. Once a pension survivor election is locked in, or a Social Security claim is filed past the point of withdrawal, the choice is generally final. Build the rest of the plan on the wrong floor and every layer above it inherits the mistake.

Taxes work on a clock too. The years between leaving work and the start of required minimum distributions are often the lowest-tax window of your life. That window is finite. Each year it goes unused is a year of planning opportunity that does not come back.

The two levers you still control

Lower lifetime taxes

It is not the tax you pay this April that matters most, it is the tax you pay across every remaining year. Coordinating withdrawals, Roth conversions, and the timing of income can shift your total tax bill meaningfully, but only while the low-tax window is open.

Raise reliable income

More income from the same savings comes from sequencing, not luck. The order you draw from accounts, how you time Social Security, and how you elect a pension all change how much spendable income your assets actually produce.

The cost of waiting

Delay rarely announces itself. There is no penalty notice for a missed Roth conversion year or a Social Security claim filed at the wrong time. The cost shows up quietly, as higher taxes in later years, as larger required distributions, and as income that could have been smoother and larger. By the time the effect is visible, the most valuable planning years have usually passed.

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What a Tax-Smart, Income-First Plan Addresses

A coordinated plan looks at these decisions together. A few worth answering before, not after, you commit:

- ✓ **Social Security timing.** When should you claim, and how does spousal or survivor coverage change the math?
- ✓ **Pension election.** Which survivor option fits your situation, knowing the choice is generally locked once made?
- ✓ **Withdrawal sequencing.** Which accounts should you draw from first to keep more income and pay less tax?
- ✓ **The low-tax window.** Are you using the years before required distributions for Roth conversions or income?
- ✓ **Required distributions.** Will future mandatory withdrawals push you into a higher bracket you could soften today?
- ✓ **Tax coordination.** Are your income sources timed to work together instead of stacking up against you?

Why work with a fiduciary planner

As a Registered Investment Adviser, our firm has a fiduciary duty to put your interests first. These decisions are interconnected, and the value is in seeing the whole picture and acting while the most important choices are still open to you.

YOUR ADVISOR

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Ruth founded Mainstreet Financial Group more than fifteen years ago and serves as a fiduciary registered in Georgia. She coordinates retirement income, tax, estate, and risk strategies for retirees, business owners, and federal employees.

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Thank you for registering to attend the upcoming Retirement Income and Tax Planning Workshop.

We look forward to seeing you there. We'll walk through Social Security and pension timing, the low-tax planning window, and the decisions that shape your retirement income. If you have questions beforehand, reach us using the contact details above.