

## Gated vs. Residential

Gated Community vs. Residential Street &ndash; What&rsquo;s the difference?

Visitors to Florida may notice when driving through various districts that the neighborhoods tend to be laid out in one of 2 ways. You will see roads and cul-de-sacs with homes, usually single family and condominium style, situated on plotted lots. You will also come across gated entrances or landscaped openings that lead into a private planned community bearing a specific community name. Each type of living lifestyle has specific benefits and potential disadvantages which a buyer should be aware of and consider when deciding on their criteria prior to beginning their search.

**Gated/Private Community** A private community may be the way to go if you hanker after a certain lifestyle such as golf. The common characteristics of a private community are the neighborhood will usually be situated behind gates, have a defined encircling boundary (a hedge or fence) and be governed by some sort of Home Owner Association (HOA) rules and bylaws.

A gated community can consist of just one type of home such as single family or a mixture of various types such as single family and condos. It all depends on the size of the community and number of dwellings within as planned by the developer and zoned by local government. A good rule of thumb is the bigger the private community size, the more likely you will find different types of homes to choose from within.

The benefits of living in a gated community are many. As mentioned before, certain communities may cater to a specific lifestyle such as golf or tennis. This is probably the main reason why homeowners decide to locate to a certain private community due to the excellent facilities on offer to residents. The other perceived benefits are primarily derived via the HOA and bylaws. The community is governed by a laid down set of rules that all homeowners must adhere to. Each community has its&rsquo; own specific set of rules drawn up at the time of its&rsquo; construction by the developer and may have been modified over time by the residents. These rules can range from roof color to mail box type to parking rules. What these do is encourage uniformity within the community to the good of the whole neighborhood. For instance, your neighbor has 5 vehicles, and only parking for 4. Parking the extra vehicle on the grass may be the neighbor&rsquo;s preferred option but this could be considered unsightly. The HOA bylaws are very likely to prohibit such activity, which probably most residents would prefer for the common good of the community.

The residents themselves manage gated communities. Once the developer has completed the community, it is turned over to the residents to run using the existing HOA bylaws and rules as their guide. The residents elect a board of directors pooled from existing residents who wish to take on the task. The board then oversees the community and adherence to laws, maybe amend the HOA documents if the need arises, and manage any budget generated by monthly HOA payments made by residents. If a community has facilities or common areas that require maintenance and management, such as a community swimming pool, then the residents will be required to contribute to the running costs via a calendar scheduled payment. A property management company appointed by the board and residents to handle such funds and oversee the contractors hired to carry out the required work collects this payment. These HOA fees vary depending on the quality and amount of facilities within the community. These should be disclosed up front by the seller&rsquo;s agent on the listing information on MLS and something a good buyer&rsquo;s agent should draw the buyer&rsquo;s attention to when finalizing the right property for their needs.

Where the HOA bylaws and rules can be a disadvantage is if a homeowner desires individuality from their property. If

you simply must have a purple house when living in Florida, a gated community is probably going to be too restrictive for you. The other serious consideration when thinking about gated communities is usage. It is very probable that the HOA will have a law pertaining to homeowner usage and rentability that may not be suitable for your planned usage requirement. This is where the services of an expert local buyer's agent are imperative who can ascertain the specific community rules that best match your needs in communities of interest.

**Residential Street** A residential street is basically any regular street or cul-de-sac within a neighborhood of interest. The homes sit on platted lots on the sides of the roads and are usually single family, duplex or condo in style. These homes have either been built by a private individual who has commissioned a builder to build a home for them on their lot or the builder owns the lot and has put their product on it to sell to a suitable buyer.

With regards to benefits there is one main one &ndash; freedom of usage. With the exception of any particular city zoning laws (i.e. commercial trucks must be parked in garage), the homeowner is free to do as they wish with the property. If you wish to tile your roof blue, that's probably okay. If you want to install a manatee shaped mailbox, go ahead! Likewise, if rentability is high on your wish list of what you want from a Florida home, unless the city has an ordinance specifically addressing rental, you are allowed to rent your home as you wish.

Another benefit to consider when reviewing individual properties in neighborhoods of interest is location. Whilst some gated communities are situated in good central locations, normally due to the large land size associated with developing such a gated community, you could find that your desired community is tucked away on the outskirts of the city, which may not be so convenient. Because a residential street has been platted by the city many years ago before larger developments started popping up in the area, the really prime locations, such as waterfront, have probably been snapped up a long time ago by numerous private individuals and are now only purchasable as a single private property.

There is really only one possible risk of purchasing on a residential street &ndash; the one of uniformity. Because you have freedom to do as you wish with your home, so does everyone else in the street. Most cities have certain ordinances that are vigorously enforced to &lsquo;keep up the neighborhood&rsquo; such as cutting of lawns, parking of vehicles on lawns, types of vehicles allowed on drives etc., so please do not think that by going into a residential street you are entering a &lsquo;free for all&rsquo; for homeowners&rsquo; whims. The best way to assess this potential disadvantage is review the neighborhood by driving around it at various times of day during a whole week to see if and how the neighborhood changes at all. You can then make a calculated decision on whether this area is right for you.