



# Commission on Disability AGENDA

## Regular Meeting

**North Berkeley Senior Center  
Workshop B  
1901 Hearst Ave. (at MLK)  
Berkeley, CA 94709**

**Wednesday  
May 18, 2016  
6:30 PM**

The Commission may take a break at approximately 8:00 pm.

### **A. PRELIMINARY BUSINESS**

- 1) Call to Order by Chair Singer
- 2) Roll Call by Secretary
- 3) Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda
- 4) Approval the Draft Action Minutes of April 20, 2016\*.
- 5) Approval and Order of Agenda
- 6) Update by Administration/Staff\*\*
- 7) Announcements

### **B. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS**

- \* Written material included in packet
- \*\* Written material to be delivered at meeting
- \*\*\* Written material previously mailed

The public may speak at the beginning of any item.

#### **1. Universal Design:**

- a. Speaker: Erick Mikiten, Architect
- b. Review/approve informational communications to Council Members.\*

#### **2. Establish New Subcommittees**

Commissioner Singer

#### **3. Impacts of Bicyclists and Bicycle Traffic on Vulnerable Pedestrian Populations**

Report by Commissioner Graham

#### **4. City Center Garage Construction Parking Mitigation Plan; Pending Council Item**

**Speaker (Invited): Danette Perry, Parking Services Manager, City of Berkeley**  
Commissioners Walsh, Leeder and Weiss\*

#### **5. Service Animals Welcome :**

- a. Distribution of Service Animals Welcome Signs
- b. Possible Recommendation to Council for ADA - Training on Service Animals for public accommodations, public conveyances, city departments/staff

Commissioner Weiss

### **C. INFORMATION ITEMS AND SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

*Information items can be moved to Discussion or Action by majority vote.*

- 1) Berkeley Research Collaborative. Status Update.  
Commissioner Weiss
- 2) Legislative Update  
Commissioner Leeder
- 3) Education Access  
Commissioner Singer
- 4) **Subcommittee Reports:**  
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),  
Accessible Transportation, Parking, Sidewalks and Pedestrian Safety  
Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee.
- 5) Draft Council Communication item from April 20, Action item B3a, concerning  
Universal Design.\*

### **D. COMMUNICATIONS**

1. 5/7/2016 e-mail from Vice-Chair Hazel Weiss concerning President Obama's intent to appointment Shelley Siegel to the U.S. Access Board\*.
2. 5/9/2016 e-mail from Chair Person Martha Singer concerning American Architectural Foundation, Sustainable, Visitable, and Universal by Design\*.

<http://www.archfoundation.org/2013/06/sustainable-visitible-and-universal-by-design/>

### **E. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS (from adopted work plan, referrals, etc)**

1. Accessible Website, Digital Media and Information Technology
2. US Census Access

### **F. ADJOURNMENT**

Agenda Posted: Wednesday May 11, 2016

**A complete agenda packet is available for public review on the web at [http://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/Commissions/Commissions\\_Commission\\_on\\_Disability\\_Homepage.aspx](http://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/Commissions/Commissions_Commission_on_Disability_Homepage.aspx), and at the Public Works/Engineering Division front desk, 1947 Center Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.**

**ADA Disclaimer**



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## Commission on Disability DRAFT ACTION MINUTES

### Regular Meeting

April 20, 2016

North Berkeley Senior Center  
1901 Hearst Avenue (at MLK)  
Berkeley, CA

#### A. PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

##### 1. Call to Order

Chair Martha Singer called the meeting to order at approximately 6:37 PM

##### 2. Roll Call:

Commissioners Present: Leeder, Singer, Walsh, Upadhyay (Arr. 6:40),  
Weiss (Arr. 6:45). Absent: Graham (L/A) and Murray (L/A)

Staff Present: Carmella Rejwan, Office of Access Services  
Guest: 0

##### 3. Public Comment (on items not on the Agenda): Speakers: 2

##### 4. Approval of Draft Action Minutes:

Action: It was moved, seconded, carried (Singer/Leeder) Unanimous to approve the Minutes of January 20, 2016.

Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes:0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0.  
Motion passed (5-0-0-0.)

Action: It was moved, seconded, carried (Singer/Walsh) Unanimous to approve the minutes of February 17, 2016 as amended.

Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes:0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0.  
Motion passed (5-0-0-0.)

##### 5. Approval and Order of Agenda:

Action: It was moved, seconded, carried (Weiss/Walsh) Unanimous to remove item B1.

Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes:0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0  
Motion passed (5-0-0-0.)

Action: It was moved, seconded and carried (Weiss/Walsh) to move item B7 ahead of item B6.

Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes:0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0  
Motion passed (5-0-0-0.)

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6. Update by Administration/Staff: None

7. Announcements:

## B. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

### 1. Election of Chairperson.

Item removed.

### 2. Paratransit information Report

Action: No Action Taken

### 3. Universal Design:

a. Action: It was moved, seconded, carried (Weiss/Walsh) to approve the cover letter, as written and transmit to City Council with the article called "What is Universal Design" by Polly Welsh, publisher Adaptive Environments Center, item B3b. The cover letter to be in an accessible format with a Sans Serif font minimum 18 points. Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes:0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0 Motion passed (5-0-0-0.)

b. Action: It was moved seconded, carried (Weiss/Leeder) to recommend to City Council to increase the number of accessible parking spaces at the Center Street Garage Replacement Project from sixteen to twenty one. Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes:0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0 Motion passed (5-0-0-0)

c. Action: It was moved, seconded, carried (Weiss/Walsh) to send a letter from the Commission on Disability to City Council as soon as possible advising Council of the forthcoming Council item regarding increasing accessible parking at the Center Street Garage Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes:0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0 Motion passed (5-0-0-0)

d. Action: It was moved, seconded, carried (Walsh/Leeder) that the Commission on Disability authorizes commissioners Leeder and Walsh to represent the COD at the Transportation Commission Meeting of April 21, 2016 regarding accessible parking at the Center Street Garage Replacement. Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes:0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0 Motion passed (5-0-0-0)

### 4. Establish New Subcommittees

No Action Taken.

### 5. Impacts of Bicyclists and Bicycle Traffic on Vulnerable Pedestrian Populations.

No Action Taken.

**6. Annual Work Plan:**

Action: It was moved, seconded, carried (Weiss/Walsh) Unanimous to adopt the Work Plan as amended by Commissioner Weiss:

1. Accessible parking, transportation, sidewalks, and pedestrian safety.  
Identify access challenges, develop recommendations in coordination with Public Works Commission, track and advise Council on relevant state level or other legislative activities.
2. Universal Design (UD)  
Gather Berkeley-specific data on current status and develop recommendations for inclusion and application of UD and Visitability principles and standards in all relevant and applicable City policy, operations, programs and activities.
3. Service Animals Welcome in Berkeley  
Educate, advocate and advise Council/staff on full implementation including Business Improvement District (BID) training, production and distribution of *Service Animals Welcome* signs and annual distribution of informational materials to all Business License holders.
4. Accessible website and digital media  
Review current status and develop recommendations regarding the City website as an accessible, user friendly source of information, and tool for communication and implementation of City programs and services.
5. Emergency/Disaster Preparedness  
Receive information and updates ongoing, participate and make recommendations as appropriate about Berkeley's BEACON and CERT programs.
6. Peace and Justice Commission (PJ&C) Subcommittee Committee on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons with Disabilities (CRDP)  
Coordinate with PJ&C to develop recommendations for Berkeley-specific activities to further the goals of the CRPD.
7. Annual Community Input Process  
Develop outreach and identify processes and activities to ensure community input regarding the work of the COD.
8. Easy Does It (EDI)  
Receive updates on EDI services. Respond to City staff requests for COD input and recommendations to support the provision of vital emergency and supportive services for people with disabilities.
9. Accessible and Affordable Housing and Services
10. Education, Employment and Other Access Issues for Persons with Disabilities  
Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent:0 Motion passed (5-0-0-0)

**7. Service Animals Welcome:**

a. Provision of Educational Material per Resolution 65,751 N.S.

1. Preparation of signs for distribution

Action: It was moved, seconded, carried (Leeder/ Upadhyay) to have staff instruct printing of two thousand 5.5x7.25 decals per Commissioner Weiss description, item B7a1.1 and per Commissioner Walsh design.

Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent:0 Motion passed (5-0-0-0)

2. City of Berkeley Web site. The City Web Site has been updated to accommodate Commissioner Weiss paragraph.

Wednesday, April 20, 2016

**b. Training for Public Accommodations in Berkeley**

No Action Taken.

**C. INFORMATION ITEMS AND SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

*Information items can be moved to Discussion or Action by majority vote.*

- 1) Impacts of Bicyclists and Bicycle Traffic on Vulnerable Pedestrian Populations Status Update. Commissioner Graham gave update on her meeting with the Transportation Commission.
- 2) Berkeley Research Collaborative. Status Update.  
No update.
- 3) Legislative Update  
No update
- 4) Subcommittee Reports:
  1. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
  2. Accessible Transportation, Parking, Sidewalks and Pedestrian Safety
  3. Emergency Preparedness Subcommittees

**D. COMMUNICATIONS**

**E. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

1. Establish new subcommittees
2. Universal Design-Erick Mikiten.
3. Educational issues- Michai Freeman.
3. Easy Does It Emergency Services, Quarterly Report (Nikki Brown-Booker).
4. Pacific ADA Center-Jan Garrett

**F. ADJOURNMENT**

Moved, Seconded, Carried (Leeder/Walsh) to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 PM.  
Ayes: Leeder, Singer, Upadhyay, Walsh, and Weiss. Noes:0 Abstain: 0 Absent:0  
Motion passed (5-0-0-0)

Public Present: 3      Total Speakers: 2

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Minutes on the web:

[http://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/Commissions/Commissions\\_Commission\\_on\\_Disability\\_Homepage.aspx](http://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/Commissions/Commissions_Commission_on_Disability_Homepage.aspx)

# QUICKNOTES

## Universal Design

Universal Design (UD) can be defined as the process of creating buildings, products, and environments that are usable by people of all ages and physical capabilities, making it possible for all to have access to and fully enjoy their homes, neighborhoods, work places, and other community destinations. Universal design is based on the recognition that all people, regardless of ability, should be valued equally. UD is highly relevant to planning officials, planning directors, and planners seeking to improve the quality of life in their communities by providing residents with better choices of where to work, live, and play.

The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University offers seven principles of universal design:

- Equitable use
- Flexible use
- Intuitive use
- Perceptible information
- Tolerance for error
- Low physical effort
- Size and space for approach and use

The terms universal design and visitability, or accessible design, are often used interchangeably. Visitability focuses on addressing mobility limitations through building code standards, while universal design is an overarching concept targeting people of all ages and abilities, and may go far beyond these codes to ensure the built environment is usable by all.

### WHY UNIVERSAL DESIGN IS IMPORTANT

Three recent trends have pushed universal design to the forefront of contemporary planning: the changing demographics of seniors and people with disabilities, the lifestyle preferences of the aging baby boomer generation, and a shift in Medicaid funding that has encouraged home and community-based care over institutions.

The number of older adults in communities across the U.S. continues to grow as the baby boomer generation ages. Unlike prior generations, baby boomers expect to stay in their own homes and communities, and they demand designs and features to support them as they age. The planning community must be aware of how this “silver tsunami” will transform how homes are built and how neighborhoods are designed, and local leaders must rethink priorities and embrace UD principles in order to meet the changing needs of their communities.

### INTEGRATING UD WITH NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY DESIGN

Universal design is becoming broader and more inclusive of neighborhood, community, and urban design. Three major issues arise within a broader look at UD. Car-centricity dominates communities, making the automobile the primary mode of transportation; neighborhoods lack safe pathways for people to walk or maneuver wheelchairs or strollers; and most homes are not accessible to and visitable by all people due to stairs, narrow doorways, and other barriers to those with impaired mobility. These issues can increase isolation among a community’s most vulnerable populations.

Planners have become increasingly aware of the problem of car-centric communities and poor design that disadvantages pedestrians. Current planning trends support the diversification of transportation forms, from bicycles and public transit to golf carts and personal electric vehicles. Many communities across the country are seeing the benefits of features such as multiple transportation choices, transit-oriented development, and accessible pedestrian wayfinding, as they provide mobility options for all users, including the very young, the very old, and people with disabilities.



The issue of inaccessibility in housing, a critical element in universal design, has not received the same amount of attention as car-centric communities and neighborhood pathways. Bringing universal design to housing has traditionally not been the planner's role. To provide a truly comprehensive approach to neighborhood, community, and urban design, and to ensure that all people have access to and can remain in their homes as they age or lose mobility, planners must promote UD concepts in housing and the built environment.

## POTENTIAL CHALLENGES OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Detractors of universal design say implementing UD standards is too expensive, and some developers think consumers find UD features unsightly. However, the cost of adding UD features to new construction is minimal, especially if such features are built into the design from the beginning. And the best practices of universal design make universal elements—wider doorways, reinforced bathroom walls (should grab bars need to be added at a later date), no-step entrances, open floor plans—seamless and unnoticeable. These barrier-free features open the door, physically and figuratively, to all people; such homes have lasting value as structures that accommodate all stages and circumstances of life, including childhood, injury, illness, and aging.

Some states have passed universal design legislation requiring housing (sometimes specifically affordable housing) to be built to UD standards, but these requirements do not always find their way into local zoning codes. Promoting universal design requires education and outreach so that all concerned will fully appreciate its advantages and minimal burdens. Local aging plans may help to identify the needs of older adults, thereby strengthening the argument for universal design. Transferring that information to the development community and consumers can be challenging. Planners and planning officials can take leadership roles in making all these changes happen.

## OPTIONS FOR PROMOTING UD

Several mechanisms exist for promoting universal design, including tying accessibility standards to affordable housing programs or federal aid. In 2007, the Arkansas Development Finance Authority (ADFA) adopted universal design standards for its HOME program and the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program; now, seven percent of ADFA-funded multifamily units must meet usability standards. Arkansas has also created a manual that codifies inclusive design, making the process understandable and streamlined for the development community.

Planners can also work to codify UD standards within their communities. The City of Sacramento adopted a Universal Design Ordinance in February 2010 to help provide more housing options in the city that suit the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. Builders of single-family residential developments over 20 units must provide UD features as options to buyers. The ordinance also calls for model homes to include UD features such as no-step entries, wider doorways, lever handles, rocker light switches, and general accessibility options for bedrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms, so people may see how they work prior to buying.

Several cities provide financial incentives to developers to include UD and visitability elements within their projects. The City of Pittsburgh provides tax credits for builders who incorporate six types of universal design features into new or renovated housing, and the City of San Diego's 2010 Voluntary Accessibility Program provides certain development incentives in exchange for incorporating UD features in new dwelling units.

In addition to promoting UD legislation at the state and local levels, planners and planning officials may consider creating funding sources like the Home Accessibility Modification Program of King County, Washington, or the City of Alexandria, Virginia's Rental Access Modification Program, which offer grants to help low-income tenants make accessibility modifications to their units.

The need for homes, buildings, and neighborhoods accessible to all is growing. As our population continues to age and as more and more people with disabilities and older adults seek to remain in their homes, universal design will be an important planning tool to create communities of lasting value and choice for all residents, regardless of age or ability.

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## REFERENCES

### 1. Published by American Planning Association

Evans-Cowley, Jennifer, AICP. 2006. "Zoning for Universal Design and Visitability." *Zoning Practice*, April.

Merriam, Dwight, FAICP. 2008. "The Americans with Disabilities Act: Six Key Points for Planning Officials." *The Commissioner*, Spring, p.3.

"Resource Finder: Universal Design and the ADA." *The Commissioner*, Spring 2008, p. 10.

### 2. Other Resources

The Center for Universal Design. *Universal Design in Housing*. 2006. North Carolina State University. Available at [www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/index.htm](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/index.htm).

Vanderheiden, Greg. 1996. "Universal Design . . . What it is and What it isn't." University of Wisconsin-Madison, Trace R & D Center. Available at [http://trace.wisc.edu/docs/whats\\_ud/whats\\_ud.htm](http://trace.wisc.edu/docs/whats_ud/whats_ud.htm).

**Zoning for Universal Design and Visitability**

Jennifer S. Evans-Cowley, PhD, AICP

Jennifer S. Evans-Cowley, PhD, AICP is an Assistant Professor of City and Regional Planning at The Ohio State University. This research has been funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts Universal Design Leadership Project.

According to the US Census, 20 percent of the American population reported some type of disability in 2000, and 28 percent of those over the age of 65 had physical disabilities (US Census, 2000). As the baby boomers age, these figures will increase. The idea of constructing homes so that people can age in place to accommodate these baby boomers is growing in popularity. While planners like the idea of aging in place, only a handful of cities are actively using their development codes to mandate universal design and visitability.

**What is Universal Design and Visitability**

The concepts of universal design and visitability are unfamiliar terms to many planners. Universal design is the design and production of buildings and products that promote equal opportunity for use by individuals with and without disabilities. There are seven principles of universal design according to the Center for Universal Design<sup>1</sup>:

1. Equitable use
2. Flexibility in use
3. Simple and intuitive
4. Perceptible information
5. Tolerance for error
6. Low physical effort
7. Size and space for approach and use

Visitability, a term associated with universal design, is a movement to change construction standards so that new housing is designed to allow people with mobility impairments to live in and visit it. The key features of visitability include wide doorways, at least one half baths on main floors, accessible placement of electrical controls, and at least one zero-step entrance to buildings. Visitability does not ensure complete access in a home, but it ensures that public spaces, such as entrances, hallways, and bathrooms, are accessible to someone in a wheelchair. This minimal level of accessibility allows a person with a disability to access a home even if that person does not live there, and it allows a non-disabled person to continue residing in a home should they develop a disability.

The Americans with Disability Act requires that buildings be accessible to those with disabilities. Planners have incorporated these requirements into the zoning code, such as the number of parking spaces required to be reserved for those with disabilities. However, this has typically meant that ramps have been added on the sides of buildings or elevators have been tucked into corners. These zoning requirements have not been extended to apply to single family homes. Universal design promotes the idea of creating places that are designed to be accessible to everyone, rather than being retrofitted for

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<sup>1</sup> The Center for Universal Design <http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/>

accessibility. Some examples of how places can be designed using universal design principles include providing smooth ground surfaces at entryways, providing wide interior doors and hallways, including bright lighting, using handles with levers rather than twisting knobs, and using light controls operated with large panels rather than toggle switches.

### **Why is Universal Design Important?**

The number of people with disabilities is growing in the United States. This is due in part to the improvements in health care that allow people with disabilities to live longer lives. It is also due to the growth of the population over the age of 65, since this age group is more likely to have disabilities.

For those with physical disabilities, buildings can serve as a major obstacle to mobility. Providing for accessibility makes it easier for the disabled to be mobile, but even if a disabled person lives in an accessible building it will still be difficult for him or her to access the homes of the non-disabled. This inaccessibility makes it difficult for those with disabilities to visit friends and family.

Homes accessible to people with disabilities are just as convenient for the non-disabled. A wide, level entrance to a home makes it easier to move furniture into and out of a building. Everyone has likely experienced a situation where an object had to be disassembled in order to move it through a doorway.

Seniors and many people with disabilities often want to age in place rather than move to an assisted living facility or nursing home. It is also more expensive to retrofit a non-accessible house than it is to have the house made accessible to begin with.

If we know that the demographics of our communities are changing, planners should be actively seeking ways to help people age in place rather than move into assisted living facilities or nursing homes.

### **Building Codes, Universal Design, and Visitability**

Across the nation, citizen groups advocating for the disabled have been effective in getting state and local legislation passed that incorporates visitability. Altogether, **fourteen states have passed visitability legislation** (University of Buffalo, 2004). Georgia passed the first visitability legislation in 1992, creating the EasyLiving Home certification program for private homes. This is a **voluntary certification program** that requires new homes to have **zero-step entries and wide interior passage doors, full bathrooms with maneuvering space, and bedrooms on the main floor.**

Texas and Kansas passed legislation requiring visitability for homes **receiving public funding**, Florida passed legislation requiring **all new homes to have a bathroom on the ground level**, and Vermont passed a law in 2000 requiring all homes built on a **speculative basis** to include visitability standards.

States are not alone—at least 24 individual cities and counties have **passed visitability legislation that modifies the building code**, including:

- Atlanta, Georgia (1992)
- Freehold Borough, NJ (1997)
- Austin, Texas (1998)
- Irvine, California (1999)
- Urbana, Illinois (2000)

- Fort Worth, Texas (2000)
- Visalia, California (2001)
- San Mateo County, California (2001)
- Albuquerque, New Mexico (2002)
- San Antonio, Texas (2002)
- Onondaga County, New York (2002)
- Southampton, New York (2002)
- Naperville, Illinois (2002)
- Pima County, Arizona (2002)
- Long Beach, California (2002)
- Iowa City, Iowa (2002)
- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2002)
- Syracuse, New York (2003)
- Bolingbrook, Illinois (2003)
- Escanaba, Michigan (2003)
- Chicago, Illinois (2003)
- Houston, Texas (2004)
- St. Petersburg, Florida (2004)
- Arvada, Colorado (2005)
- Auburn, New York (2005)
- Scranton, Pennsylvania (2005)
- Toledo, Ohio (2005)

Most of the ordinances are restricted to housing projects that are publicly funded.

However, the legislation in Pima County and Bolingbrook requires all new houses to be constructed with visitability standards. Bolingbrook worked with the development community to sell the ordinance to local homebuilders. **The City found that the average price increase per home would be no more than 1.5 percent, and this reduced their fears (Claar and Boan, 2005).**

Arvada, Colorado, which adopted a visitability ordinance in 2005, recognized a changing demographic in its community. Vicki Reier, Assistant City Manager, states that “people like to live in Arvada, and we want to build so people can age in place and not have to move for accommodations.” **The ordinance applies to all single-family and duplex homes built in a group of seven or more units, and it requires step-free entrances, wider interior doors on the ground floor level, wider hallways, and accessible first-floor bathrooms for a minimum of 15 percent of the units built. An additional 15 percent of the homes constructed must provide step-free entrances, maximum slopes of 1:12, and entrance doors at least 32 inches wide. The City has also developed a fee-in-lieu of visitability. Developers must pay \$2,500 for each unbuilt visitable home and \$10,000 for each unbuilt non-visitable home. The funds will be used to provide financial assistance to help people make existing housing stock visitable.** Arvada’s goal is to have 30 percent of all new homes built to incorporate visitability principles (City of Arvada, 2005).

For the most part, builders have accepted these new regulations. However, Pima County was sued twice by the National Association of Home Builders and the Pima County Home Builders Association, once on the local level and once on the federal level.

The city's ordinance was upheld in both cases. For more information on universal design in building codes see the October 2002 issue of *Zoning Practice*, "Visitability Issues Drive Building Code Changes."

### **Zoning for Universal Design in Howard County, Maryland**

There have been many changes to the building code in the last decade. However, the zoning code can also play a role. Howard County, Maryland requires universal design features to be incorporated in age-restricted adult housing units through its zoning ordinance.

The County's General Plan 2000 identified that over the next 25 years the County's population over the age of 55 would increase from 19 percent to 31 percent, to 46,000 people. This will result in significant changes in the County's housing needs as "more residents age in place or decide to 'downsize' to reduce their homeownership burdens and as more older adults move into the County to be closer to their families." (Howard County, 2004a). A county-wide survey found that 70 percent of older residents want to remain in their homes or nearby. The County General Plan identified three goals related to senior housing:

- Provide housing for older adults within stable and attractive communities through maintenance, renovation, and modification of existing homes;
- produce new housing that meets the needs of older adults while not detracting from the existing neighborhoods; and
- provide affordable and diverse housing to meet the needs of low and moderate income seniors.

In an effort to meet these goals, the County Council directed the Department of Planning and Zoning to work with the Departments of Housing and Community Development, Inspections, Licenses and Permits, Citizen Services, and the Commission on Aging to develop a Senior Housing Master Plan. The Master Plan was completed in December 2004.

The County Planning Department created a committee to decide what universal design features should be required. The County wanted to balance affordability and adaptability. It recognized that its housing costs were already high, and it wanted to determine which universal design features have the highest cost/benefit.

The County created the R-SI (Residential: Senior-Institutional) District. This district allows age-restricted adult housing and other uses, such as health care facilities, nursing homes, religious uses, day treatment facilities, and government uses. The district requires at least 10 percent of the dwelling units to be for moderate income persons. Additionally, the County created a PSC (Planned Senior Community) District that allows age-restricted housing, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes. This district allows a density of 8 units per acre on sites that can accommodate at least 50 units.

As part of the R-SI zoning district requirements, developments "must incorporate universal design features from the department of planning and zoning guidelines which identify required, recommended, and optional features. Plan submittals must include descriptions of the design features of the proposed dwellings to demonstrate their appropriateness for the age-restricted population." (Howard County, 2004b).

Howard County chose to require features that are critical and relatively inexpensive when they are part of initial construction, but that would be costly to retrofit.

Features that are relatively expensive to retrofit in the future are classified as desirable or optional.

**Table 1. Universal Design Features for SR-I District in Howard County, Maryland**

<b>Required</b>	<b>Desired</b>	<b>Optional</b>
Accessible path between parking and the dwelling units for apartments	Visual smoke detectors	Security system and visual identification of visitors
All common areas must meet ADA standards for apartments	Smooth vertical transitions between rooms	Handrails on both sides of all stairs
No-step entrance to community buildings and all dwellings	Maneuvering space at entrance, between main living areas, and in front of appliances	Grab bars in bathrooms
Front door must be 36 inches wide with exterior lighting of the entrance	Low maintenance exterior materials	Curbless shower
All interior doorways at least 32 inches in width	Covered main entry	Multi-level or adjustable kitchen counters
Hallways at least 36 inches in width	Lever handles and anti-scald devices on all plumbing fixtures	Pull out shelves in kitchen base cabinets
Complete first floor living area with master bedroom and bath (or elevator if multistory apartment)	Slip resistant flooring	Hand-held showerhead
Lever handles on interior and exterior doors	Five foot turning radius or T-turn in kitchen and bath	Task lighting in kitchen, bath, and other work areas
Structural blocking for grab bars in walls in bathroom near toilet and shower	Switches, doorbells, thermostats, breaker boxes no more than 48 inches above the floor	Lighting in closets and pantries
	Electrical receptacles at least 15 inches above the floor	Adjustable closet rods and shelving

Senior housing developers found the universal design guidelines helpful in creating new housing projects. The County plans to strengthen the universal design guidelines as the market demands more features. It recognizes both that new construction will be relatively limited compared to the 97,000 existing housing units and that there is still a need to retrofit and renovate older homes.

As a step in working towards more housing with universal design features the county is educating residents, real estate agents, and remodelers about using universal design

features to renovate existing homes. They are also educating residents and homebuilders about the value of visitability in all new residential construction.

The County is also working to educate residents about universal design features and the likelihood of future disability. It recognized that many adults over 55 don't perceive themselves as seniors that need universal design features or that their needs will change over time. Education will be critical in helping to ensure that adults demand features that will allow them to age in place.

Howard County was able to successfully implement the County's General Plan through the creation of a Senior Housing Master Plan and amendments to the zoning ordinance. The result is that new housing specifically designed for seniors will incorporate universal design and visitability principles. Seniors in Howard County will be able to more easily age in place.

### **Zoning for Universal Design in Other Locations**

Andreas Duany's SmartCode incorporates visitability standards. The SmartCode requires zero-step entrances from accessible paths at the front, side, or rear of each building; interior doors at least 32 inches in width; and that bathrooms be provided on the main floor of each building (SmartCode, 2005). Sarasota, Florida is just one example of a city that adopted the SmartCode.

### **Zoning versus Building Code**

Before passing a zoning ordinance that requires modifications to the building code, it is necessary to review state legislation related to the building code. If a state has a uniform dwelling code, it may prevent municipalities from creating and enforcing stricter standards for buildings except in certain situations. Some states prohibit any changes to building codes at the local level, while others prohibit reducing code requirements below those set by the state. For example, New York, California, and Wisconsin all have uniformity clauses in their building code requirements which prohibit cities from making any changes to the building code. In California, disability advocates are working to create state-level enabling legislation that would allow local governments to enact visitability laws. For more information on state-level building codes visit <http://www.firstsourceonl.com>.

One key points in designing a visitability ordinance is whether it is a planning ordinances or building ordinance. One could reasonably argue that visitability ordinances are planning ordinances, not building codes. Planning ordinances routinely deal with the interior of homes, including height, materials, number of bedrooms, and house size. If the code requirements are placed in the zoning ordinance, as in the case of Howard County, then it is clearly a planning ordinance. If a visitability ordinance is viewed as a planning ordinance, then the state level building codes are not relevant as long as the visitability requirements exceed the state building code requirements.

Planners have a variety of other options to incorporate visitability into the zoning code. The zoning code could include density or other development bonuses to developers who incorporate visitability principles. Another option is to require an impact fee for accessibility similar to that required by Howard County.

## Conclusion

While a number of communities have passed legislation pertaining to visitability, planners are still largely unaware of its concepts. Planners need to increase their knowledge of disability issues. If visitability and other forms of access legislation are to be effective, planners and other design professionals must be aware of the problems that people with disabilities face in accessing the built environment (Casselman, 2004).

Concrete Change, an international association that promotes visitability for the disabled, is actively mobilizing support for basic accessibility to dwelling units. Their website (<http://www.concretechange.org>) provides useful information on the principles of universal design and example ordinances from across the United States.

There are a variety of ways planners can become engaged in promoting universal design and visitability principles. Baltimore County, Maryland developed a brochure titled "Your New or Remodeled Home Becomes Visitable When You Choose These Top Ten Options." The City of Irvine, California developed a webpage that provides information about universal design and links to area builders that integrate universal design into housing construction (City of Irvine, 2005).

Before drafting an amendment to the building or zoning code, planners should include housing for seniors as one of the housing elements of their comprehensive plan. This should then translate to requirements in the zoning ordinance. Howard County, Maryland illustrates how goals related to seniors housing can be translated successfully into the zoning ordinance.

If your community has passed a visitability ordinance or is considering one, please e-mail Jennifer Evans-Cowley at [Cowley.11@osu.edu](mailto:Cowley.11@osu.edu). A copy of the Howard County, Maryland Ordinance can be viewed at <http://www.co.ho.md.us/DPZ/DPZDocs/ZoningReg100205.pdf>

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## B4

This message transmits comments by advocate Helen Walsh during public comment on the City Center Garage Construction Parking Mitigation Plan after the parking mitigation plan power point was given at April 21, 2016 Transportation Commission meeting. Link to City site that provides info about the new Center Street Garage and the parking mitigation plan for while they construct the new garage is:  
<http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/CenterStreetGarage/>

"The parking mitigation plan does not provide safe or adequate parking for persons with disabilities. Here in Berkeley the city still has not provided adequate disability street side parking. I am concerned for our community with the Center Street Parking Mitigation Plan. The plan did not have adequate accommodations for persons with disabilities and our seniors."

Remarks to Berkeley Commission on Transportation Regarding Accessible Parking Center Street Replacement Parking structure:

"Berkeley has larger percentage of persons with disabilities than most cities.

2010 US census reported population of Berkeley was 112,580 a number that doesn't include generally UC Berkeley students.

2013 US Census American Community Survey or ACS indicated estimate of 12.6% of US population counting all ages have one or more disabilities.

The 2013 survey indicates 7.1% have an ambulatory disability. Given Berkeley's population and demographics, we can assume possibly 10% have ambulatory disabilities and might use placard parking that would account for over 11,000 potential users of vehicles (10% of 112,580).

When coupled with visitors to Berkeley we can assume a greater need for designated placard parking than might be provided by a building code.

New parking garage increases parking from 420 to 720 but only provided minimum required accessible parking places of 16. This number is inadequate given the local demographics. Replacement garage should allocate more space for these users and increase designated spaces by a minimum of 5 for a total of 21 accessible spaces."

FYI and for purposes of identification, this matter was discussed at the April 20, 2016 Berkeley Commission on Disability (COD) meeting; Helen Walsh and I are appointed members of the COD.

Hazel Weiss



Office of the City Manager

C5

INFORMATION CALENDAR  
May 31, 2016

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
From: Commission on Disability  
Submitted by: Martha Singer, Chairperson, Commission on Disability  
Subject: Incorporating Principles of Universal Design

INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Disability has had several meetings including most recently the February 17, 2016 meeting regarding Universal Design (UD). Universal Design involves the process of creating buildings, products and environments that are usable by people of all ages and physical capacities. The objective being further to provide access to and use of housing, workplaces, transportation as well as neighborhoods and other community destinations advancing the further principle that all individuals, regardless of ability, should be valued equally.

The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University developed 7 principles of design:

Equitable use  
Flexible use  
Intuitive use  
Perceptible information

Tolerance for error  
Low physical effort and  
Size and space for approach and use.

The UD principles should be relevant considerations to the development of ordinances and codes as well as serve as guideposts for planners.

Enclosed is additional information regarding UD (article called "What is Universal Design" by Polly Welsh). The Commission will continue to actively solicit input from experts and the community on UD and will provide this material to Council. The Commission hopes that Council will find this information useful and incorporate such principles whenever possible.

#### CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Berkeley has a special history in planning for accessibility. Universal design is a larger concept than strictly meeting the minimal legal requirements, and takes the spirit of inclusivity further by consideration of all users and visitors of a structure, young and old, aging in place, and visitability. The commission on disability wants to keep the council informed as we explore ways to make Berkeley more inclusive in future plans for civic structures, transportation, and housing.

#### BACKGROUND

The attached article has some additional history of universal design

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Planning now for structures that inclusively meet the needs of Berkeley residents over their lifespan is more sustainable than later modifications of existing structures.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Unknown

CONTACT PERSON

Carmella Rejwan, Secretary of the Commission on Disability, Public Works,  
981-6341

Attachments:

1: Article called "What is Universal Design" by Polly Welch.



Universal Design Education

[Home](#)[About](#)[Questions](#)[Resources](#)[Submit](#)

Attachment 1

## content

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### What is Universal Design?

An Excerpt Reprinted with permission from the publisher, Adaptive Environments Center ©.

Polly Welch, Associate Professor  
University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA

This document is the first chapter in the book, *Strategies for Teaching Universal Design*, Welch, P. Editor, (Adaptive Environments Center and MIG Communications, 1995) . It discusses what universal design is and is not and why the term was needed at all.

What is universal design? It is, simply, "an approach to creating environments and products that are usable by all people to the greatest extent possible." (1) The ambiguity of the term universal design, according to James Mueller, is its virtue because it provokes discussion. The implication that universal design applies to everyone is another virtue of the term. As Elizabeth Church points out, "universal design implies that 'it' could happen to me" as opposed to "special needs" that are always someone else's. (2) Ralph Caplan adds that "in a rational world you wouldn't have to use it, because that's what design itself would be." (3)

Although a recently coined term, the concept of universal design is not new. Architect Michael Bednar in 1977 noted that the functional capability of all people is usually enhanced when environmental barriers are removed and suggested that a new concept is needed that is "much broader and more universal" and "involves the environmental needs of all users." (4) The term accessible design was used in the early 1980s to describe the value of

universal design—design for all people. (5) Over time, however, accessible and accessibility have become synonymous with making environments usable primarily by people with disabilities, losing the more inclusive connotation of making environments understandable to and usable by all people. An accessible building implies that a person using a wheelchair can get into the building, but the notion that the building is convenient to public transportation, has an easily located front door, and provides good directories for wayfinding is usually not part of the image of accessibility that comes to mind for designers. Those features, however, are the essence of a universal design approach.

Universal design is not a euphemism for accessibility. It is not a catchy phrase to make more palatable the requirements of the ADA Standards for Accessible Design. It is a term that re-establishes an important goal of good design—that it shall meet the needs of as many users as possible. Universal indicates a unanimity of practice and applicability to all cases without significant exception. (6) Universal design suggests solutions that are capable of being adjusted or modified to meet varied requirements. It is the inclusivity of universal design that makes it cost effective; universal design increases the number of people whose needs are being addressed and it encourages an integrative approach rather than multiple separate solutions.

The need for the concept of universal design emerged through two separate but related movements: the struggle by the disability community to erase the "we—they" dichotomy that allowed designers to marginalize the needs of people with disabilities and the pressure from groups within the design professions for democratization of values through a more pluralistic definition of good design.

Early advocacy and legal efforts by the disability community in the sixties and seventies to make existing public places physically accessible to people with disabilities resulted in the development of numerous architectural features to promote "handicap accessibility"—the ramp, the lift, the larger toilet stall, and the international symbol with its wheelchair user. These devices have provided much needed access and provided potent symbols of separateness as well. Lusher and Mace point out that the hard-won laws to increase educational, employment, housing, and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities "were inadequate as educational media and they reinforced the outdated, narrow view of human

environmental needs by requiring a few special features for what was perceived as a few people." (7)

The term universal design was invented in response to a conceptual dilemma that has plagued advocates of barrier-free environments since the passage of the first ANSI standards. How do you overcome pervasive attitudinal barriers when physical barriers can be neatly addressed with a few code-compliance measures? The circular dilemma confounded the disability community's effort to win broad access. The codes, balancing cost and change, established minimum standards, which provided the most basic access, but did little to encourage designers and building owners to consider the benefits of making buildings more accessible to a broad array of users. Some building owners even wondered why they should make their buildings accessible if people with disabilities never used their buildings, overlooking the paradoxical nature of their question.

The second movement, with roots in the same decades, is the loose association of designers and scientists interested in how the built environment meets the needs of its users. Early efforts focused on the functional fit of environments and products to people, resulting in anthropocentric and human-factors research. Unfortunately, much of the data that reached designers was based on the average, young, able-bodied male. Other groups pressed for users to have a greater voice in the design of buildings and open space through greater participation in decision-making and through better representation of the diversity of users. (8) Designers and researchers who subscribe to these values have sometimes inadvertently perpetuated the segregation of users by giving specific constituencies, like the elderly, special attention. The study of "special populations" has generated important information for designers on how the environment can meet specific needs, but special has become another word for separate. (9)

The inherent limitations of design standards, in general, have produced yet another reason for the concept of universal design. Designers, manufacturers, and building officials have pressed for clear, simple specification of solutions for achieving accessibility. People with disabilities found that the reduction of complex variables to single solutions excluded many whose disabilities fell outside the norm. Although extensive empirical research (10) has examined more closely the specifics of how a

representative range of people with disabilities access and interact with the environment, an alternative to the prevailing paradigms of minimum standard and exceptions to the norm has not emerged. Designers have historically tended to interpret minimum standards as maximums, particularly when solutions beyond the minimum might result in higher costs. The codes have also reinforced the notion that design for people with disabilities can be achieved by modification to the norm. Not only does this result in design that segregates, it is also a costly solution. (11)

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 heralded the opportunity for a paradigm shift. Extending the design discussion beyond the realm of building codes and into the realm of civil rights took the design and building industries by surprise. By framing the issue of access as part of the American promise for equal opportunity, the focus was shifted from the purely pragmatic decision of where to place the wheelchair lift to who uses the built environment and how to provide them with greater opportunities to access places and programs. The broadened perspective created a sense of uncertainty for design decision-makers. Reassurance came in the form of standards that had some resemblance to the earlier code requirements but the new requirements also provided an opportunity for greater creativity and a challenge for designers to think beyond the minimum requirements by introducing the concept of equivalent facilitation. To achieve an appropriate equivalent design solution through alternate means requires that designers and building owners must understand the needs of users well enough to make informed judgments and to effectively use the input of users with disabilities.

The positive outcome of the Americans with Disabilities Act is increased consciousness among designers, building owners, and manufacturers about the rights of people with a range of disabilities and more accessible public and private places. The new level of consciousness establishes a teachable moment. By heightening the awareness of designers to a previously marginalized group of users, inclusive design values are more likely to be included in design discourse. The disappointment to some veterans of barrier-free design efforts is the recodification of user needs. People are disabled by situations and attitudes: a designer can meet the letter of the law, follow the details of the standards, and still not create an enabling environment. The possibilities for replacing standards with another paradigm for responsible design may lie in the elaboration of universal design values.

Universal design is also lifespan design. All of us benefit from accessible places and products at many stages in the passage from childhood to old age. The case for universal design is frequently made by citing national census data and projections. In 1990, 48.9 million Americans had some type of disability and 31 million, one in every eight Americans, were 65 or older; by 2030 it is predicted that one in five Americans will be over 65. While statistics by themselves can be informative, Lusher and Mace contend that arguing the numbers game misses the point. Leon Pastalan concurs, pointing out that by focusing instead on the "context of normal expectations of the human condition, trying to justify the importance of each vulnerable population group becomes unnecessary." (12) Michel Philibert, French philosopher and gerontologist, has proposed that we are at the dawn of a new understanding where aging is defined as a pattern of change throughout the entire lifespan. (13) So designing for children, older people and people with disabilities is not thinking about separate groups of users but a spectrum of human-environment interaction.

## Notes

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## **additional information**

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### **Teach**



### **Learn**



Dear Carmella,  
Please forward to COD.

Licensed Interior Designer Recognized for Universal Design Vision

Washington, D.C. (PRWEB) May 06, 2016

On May 5, 2016, President Obama announced his intent to appoint Shelley Siegel, FASID, CAPS, founder and CEO of the Universal Design & Education Network, to the U.S. Access Board. The Board, created in 1973 to ensure access to federally funded facilities, expanded its mission the regulation and implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when the law passed in 1990. As such, they provide design criteria, technical assistance, and training, as well as issuing accessibility standards for the built environment. Overall it is a leading source of information on accessible design and a strong advocate for people with disabilities.

<http://www.benzinga.com/pressreleases/16/05/p7946515/asid-celebrates-as-president-obama-announces-intent-to-appoint-shelley->

Note this was posted today on Helen Walsh's ADA 25 & Beyond google plus and twitter.

Thank you,  
Hazel Weiss

## ASID Celebrates as President Obama Announces Intent to Appoint Shelley Siegel, FASID, CAPS to U.S. Access Board

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*Licensed Interior Designer Recognized for Universal Design Vision*

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On May 5, 2016, President Obama announced his intent to appoint Shelley Siegel, FASID, CAPS, founder and CEO of the Universal Design & Education Network, to the U.S. Access Board. The Board, created in 1973 to ensure access to federally funded facilities, expanded its mission to the regulation and implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when the law passed in 1990. As such, they provide design criteria, technical assistance, and training, as well as issuing accessibility standards for the built environment. Overall it is a leading source of information on accessible design and a strong advocate for people with disabilities.

Shelley Siegel is uniquely suited for this appointment. Her 44 years as a principal of the Siegel Design Group and 35 years as founder and CEO of the Universal Design & Education Network, have been dedicated to bringing aesthetically pleasing universal design concepts to the home, workplace, hospitality, and healthcare environments.

Siegel holds a degree in Interior Design, a Master's Degree in Gerontology, is a licensed interior designer in the State of Florida, is NCIDQ certified, and is a member of the College of Fellows of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). She has served on numerous boards and committees to share her expertise on ADA and universal design matters, and has authored countless articles on barrier-free and universal design. In 2010, Siegel was inducted into the ASID Florida Chapter Hall of Fame.

"We applaud President Obama's decision to appoint a Licensed Interior Designer to the U.S. Access Board," said ASID CEO Randy Fiser. "Shelley is a pioneer and testament to the fact that interior designers are experts on designing for and meeting accessibility standards in the built environment. It has always been a priority for ASID and our members to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to places where they live, work, play and heal."

Fiser concluded, "Shelley is an inspiration to us all. I am confident she will bring a tremendous wealth of knowledge and understanding to the U.S. Access Board."

### About ASID

The American Society of Interior Designers believes that design transforms lives. ASID serves the full range of the interior design profession and practice through the Society's programs, networks, and advocacy. We thrive on the strength of cross-functional and interdisciplinary relationships among designers of all specialties, including workplace, healthcare, retail and hospitality, education, institutional, and residential. We lead interior designers in shared conversations around topics that matter: from evidence-based and humancentric design to social responsibility, well-being, and sustainability. We showcase the impact of design on the human experience and the value interior designers provide.

ASID was founded over 40 years ago when two organizations became one, but its legacy dates back to the early 1930s. As we celebrate nearly 85 years of industry leadership, we are leading the future of interior design, continuing to integrate the advantages of local connections with national reach, of small firms with big, and of the places we live with the places we work, play, and heal. Learn more at <http://www.asid.org> (<http://www.asid.org>).

#### About US Access Board

The Access Board is an independent federal agency that promotes equality for people with disabilities through leadership in accessible design and the development of accessibility guidelines and standards. Created in 1973 to ensure access to federally funded facilities, the Board expanded its mission to the regulation and implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when the law passed in 1990. It is now a leading source of information on accessible design. The Board develops and maintains design criteria for the built environment, transit vehicles, telecommunications equipment, medical diagnostic equipment, and information technology. It also provides technical assistance and training on accessible design and continues to be a strong advocate for people with disabilities.

For the original version on PRWeb visit: <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2016/05/prweb13399187.htm>  
(<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2016/05/prweb13399187.htm>)

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## SUSTAINABLE, VISITABLE, AND UNIVERSAL BY DESIGN

By Kathy Sykes, Senior Advisor for Aging and Sustainability at U.S. EPA

*"Architecture should speak of its time and place, but yearn for timelessness." Frank Gehry*

### Introduction

Universal design and "visitability" are practical and sustainable principles and practices that enable persons of all abilities to live independently in our changing world. These approaches are particularly important given the dramatic demographic and environmental changes of this century. Life expectancy is continuing to rise and the age distribution of the population in the United States is steadily growing older. Non-renewable resources and open space are dwindling. Extreme weather that used to occur every hundred years is increasing in frequency and taking a heavy toll on public health and on the health of our planet.

By applying the principles of universal design and visitability, we can do much to improve our quality of life, minimize our environmental footprint, and make our homes and communities more resilient.

This post looks more closely at the principles of universal design and visitability; the demographic and environmental challenges that can be addressed through their implementation; and steps that have been taken to promote sustainable and independent spaces and places. It also includes examples from the [U.S. EPA Awards Program](#), [Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging \(BHCAA\)](#), presented between 2006 and 2001 to 21 communities, to illustrate what can be done and has been done to promote independence and environmentally sound living places.

### What are Universal Design and Visitability?

Universal design considers the strength, grip, and size of the inhabitants. But it is not only the disabled who benefit from universal design—the young and old also share the need of having structures within reach and easy to use. The child turning on a light switch, the elder with arthritis opening a door, and a person in a wheelchair moving about in a home all benefit from universal design. It's not a new concept. In 1961, the first accessibility standard, "Making Buildings Accessible to and Usable by the Physically Handicapped,"[1] was issued by what today is known as [American National Standards Institute](#), or ANSI. Over the next decade, it was adopted by a number of local and state governments.

Another important design concept that enables people to live independently and visit friends is visitability. Eleanor Smith, who recently retired from the organization she founded, [Concrete Change](#), defines visitability as, "a movement to change home construction practices so that virtually all new homes offer a few specific features making the home easier for mobility-impaired people to live in and visit."

To make standards clear enough to affect widespread policy, the visitability movement focuses on a short list of features that most directly impact the quality of life. These include physical features such as at least one zero-step entrance approached by an accessible route on a firm surface no steeper than 1:12, proceeding from a driveway or public sidewalk; 32 inches or more passage space through doors; and at least one half-bath on the main floor.

In illustrating such features, she describes how people are affected when they are left out, which cause, "daily drudgery; unsafe living conditions; social isolation; and forced institutionalization." The good news is that incorporating the short list of visitability features costs far less and is better for the environment if included in original building construction, avoiding barriers that negatively impact quality of life.

A report published in the Journal of the American Planning Association found that during the lifetime of a house built in 2000, there is more than a 60% chance that it will be occupied by a resident with a long-term, severe mobility impairment.[2]

Smith uses the analogy of seat belts to illustrate the importance and relevance of incorporating visitability features when building residential structures. Seat belts are universal components found in every car because we don't know which car will end up in an accident. Visitability is just as important for safely moving about in residential homes. One does not know when a temporary or permanent disability will occur. Recovering from an operation, a broken leg, or the birth of a child can be less burdensome in a home with visitability features. Moreover, a zero-step entrance is important for delivery workers or movers handling heavy and large pieces of furniture or appliances.

While spelling out design specifications is crucial, Smith says, "The spirit of inclusivity gives life to the specs." Constructing barrier-free homes is the moral choice because it is easy to, "create access in the great majority of new homes by not building major barriers that take a human toll on so many. Having the opportunity to be included and able to come to the party depends on the design." [3]

Charlotte, North Carolina, is one community that is applying these ideas. By integrating the principles of smart growth and active aging in its implementation of policies and practices, it is enhancing the quality of life for older adults. In 2005, Mecklenburg County adopted the Status of Seniors Initiative, which is a comprehensive set of recommendations to make Mecklenburg County more age-friendly by making improvements to the built environment. Over the past five years, Charlotte has used this adopted policy to organize and guide growth and development for the city. New growth has been concentrated in several key corridors and activity centers that have created higher densities, mixed-use developments, and a more walkable community.

More than 5,000 new housing units have been constructed. Sixteen miles of greenways, 88 miles of bike facilities, and 106 miles of sidewalks have been completed. By retrofitting dozens of streets and adding accessible ramps at intersections, the City has made improvements for pedestrians of all ages and abilities. Many communities look to Charlotte as a model for development that includes its centers, corridors, and wedges (growth strategy), Transportation Action Plan (policies and programs), and Urban Street Design Guidelines (complete streets guide). Charlotte incorporated senior-friendly design into street improvements, including increasing the size of its signage to cater to older drivers. Charlotte has also increased the number of crossing medians, provided longer and more audible crossing-area alerts, and continues to provide for pedestrian safety measures in project implementation. By focusing on the future of integrating transportation and land use, Charlotte will become a more sustainable, mixed-use city with a sense of community where elders can thrive. Charlotte, NC was recognized for its efforts to plan for the aging of its population and received the Award for Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging Achievement Award (BHCAA) in 2010.

The BHCAA award represents a successful effort to encourage the adoption of smart growth policies and active aging practices. Communities are recognizing that growing smart ensures that existing resources are used efficiently and that open space and important habitats are preserved. And they understand that having a range of housing options makes it possible for older Americans to find a safe and affordable home. Older adults prefer to have the option to age in place and within their communities. Transportation and mobility options are also important and espoused in smart growth principles.

#### Demographic Trends

If the baby on the cover of the [May 2013 issue of National Geographic](#) really does live to be 120 years old, what will her housing needs be throughout her lifetime? How can design assist persons of all ages and abilities to live independently throughout the course of their lives? Are there other sustainable factors that might be incorporated into a building's structure that will make it timeless and guarantee a long life for both its inhabitants and the building itself? Should centenarians have the option to remain living in a community-based home?

A number of communities are responding positively by planning for the demographic change occurring in their communities. The Atlanta Regional Council of Governments (ARC) received one of the first BHCAA achievement awards for their having facilitated zoning policy changes and the development of 30 senior housing developments located close to services and connected to existing neighborhoods. With more than 90% of Atlanta's elders relying on cars for transportation, ARC took steps to decrease auto dependency by promoting ride sharing through its six voucher programs and worked to improve bus stops and routes. These efforts increased the quality of life for elders and also benefit the environment. To encourage healthy lifestyles, ARC partners converted traditional senior centers to wellness centers, emphasizing physical activity and social interaction. Through community involvement, ARC listened to the needs of older adults and integrated age-appropriate features into parks, trails, and pedestrian paths. They also conducted sidewalk audits to ensure that local plans incorporated changes that would better serve older adults.



*Half Moon Bay Senior Campus activities in San Mateo, CA. Image courtesy of author.*

Another example is BHCAA award-winner San Mateo County, California. The county has a growing aging population, but limited affordable housing and supportive services. To address this gap, a collaborative group of local non-profits teamed with the county to develop the Half Moon Bay Senior Campus Plan—an integrated continuum of care for the county's older adults. The plan successfully integrates more than 250 units of affordable housing with a network of pedestrian walkways and open space intended for structured and unstructured activities. Based on evidence of reduced rates of car ownership among low-income elders, planners can limit the construction of parking facilities and reduce development costs and subsequent motor vehicle use. The network of pedestrian paths and open space encourages an active lifestyle with minimal interference from traffic. A special feature is raised pavement where paths intersect streets, signaling motorists to yield to pedestrians. The new housing project will be LEED-certified, a requirement that California

has for funding of public housing projects. California has a number of counties that have incorporated the need to address climate change in their master plans.

#### Climate Change and Extreme Weather Trends

Planning for the future demographic changes also requires recognizing the changing climate and severe weather trends that are happening worldwide and in the U.S. According to a report from The Lancet, "Climate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century. Effects of climate change on health will affect most populations in the next decades and put the lives and well-being of billions of people at increased risk."<sup>[4]</sup> Greenhouse gases are the primary driver of climate change. Greenhouse gases can lead to more frequent and severe heat waves as well as increases in ground-level ozone pollution, threatening the health and well-being of persons of all ages, especially the young and the old. Do Universal design and visitability reduce construction waste and help save energy by requiring less retro-fitting of inaccessible buildings?

In January 2013, the Global Climate Change Research program released its draft for public comment, The National Climate Assessment, which described that climate change is already happening and that the intensity and frequency of a number of weather events such as heat waves, heavy rains, floods or droughts are already occurring. The draft report also states, "Planning and managing based on the climate of the last century means that tolerances of some infrastructure and species will be exceeded. For example, building codes and landscaping ordinances will likely need to be updated not only for energy efficiency, but also to conserve water supplies, protect against insects that spread disease, reduce susceptibility to heat stress, and improve protection against extreme events."<sup>[5]</sup>

The worst natural disasters in the U.S., with respect to deaths and destruction, were caused by hurricanes Sandy (2012), Katrina (2005), and Rita (2005). "In 2011 and 2012 alone, the United States experienced 25 floods, storms, droughts, heat waves, and wildfires that each caused at least \$1 billion in damages. Combined these extreme weather events were responsible for 1,107 fatalities and up to \$188 billion in economic damages. This adds up to \$400 per household per year."<sup>[6]</sup>

In each of these disasters elders suffered greatly. The important question to ask ourselves now is if there are better ways to plan, which will enable us to be prepared for what our country will be facing with the aging of our population and need to better adapt to climate change?

#### Sustainable by Design

Building construction activities account for 60% of the raw materials (natural resources) used in the entire U.S. economy, with food and fuel making up the other 40%. Each year, nearly 170 million tons of building construction, renovation, and demolition wastes account for nearly 60% of the nation's non-industrial, non-hazardous solid waste generation. Furthermore, 20% of all energy used in the U.S. is from residential buildings. The good news is that we can take steps to reduce our housing ecological footprint by reducing our energy use and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. We can also reduce our water use and better manage our water resources.

Between 1950 and 2000, the U.S. population nearly doubled and during that same period, demand for water more than tripled. Household members use more water than occupants of other types of buildings. Simple strategies such as upgrading faucets and fixtures as well as changing landscaping and maintenance routines can reduce and preserve our water resources. There are many opportunities to incorporate green practices into building and construction— from the materials used to water and energy conservation—which if incorporated during initial building construction, in addition to the inclusion of visitability features, will result in energy-efficient, elder-friendly homes. Knowing these needs and realities ahead of time and addressing them at the planning and implementation phases will make durable, resilient structures for the young and the old that are beneficial to the environment.

Environmentally preferred materials and other information on being a green builder can be found on EPA's green homes website at <http://www.epa.gov/greenhomes/overview.htm>

#### Public Policy and Climate Change Resilience

A National Resources Defense Council released a report this May entitled, "Who Pays for Climate Change? U.S. Taxpayers Outspend Private Insurers Three-to-One to Cover Disruption Costs." According to the report, "When federal spending on last year's droughts, storms, floods, and forest fires are added up, the U.S. Climate Disruption Budget was nearly \$100 billion, equivalent to 16% of total non-defense discretionary spending in the federal budget—larger than any official spending category."<sup>[7]</sup> The report also highlights the shift from private insurers to taxpayers, which began when insurance companies incurred a \$72-billion bill after Hurricane Katrina, and it has continued to increase.

#### Public Policy and Visitability

Since 1999, 14 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands have enacted some form of public policy mandating or encouraging visitability, basic home access, and basic home design or universal access—often taking the form of a voluntary tax credit or mandatory requirement if public funds are used for constructing housing or rental units. Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, and Virginia introduced bills this year that are pending in respective legislatures.<sup>[8]</sup>

Pima County, Arizona, embraced visitability early on as part of an Inclusive Home Design Ordinance in 2002. St. Louis County, Missouri adopted an ordinance the following year. At the municipal level, a number of communities have adopted ordinances that tied public funds to visitability requirements, including San Antonio, Texas and Naperville, Illinois.

In June 2005, the U.S. Conference of Mayors passed a resolution entitled Visitability Opportunities for People with Disabilities. At that time, a number of municipalities and three states had adopted visitability standards in their building codes, including Chicago, Naperville, Bolingbrook, and Urbana in Illinois, Atlanta, Georgia, and Pima County, Arizona and states Vermont, Texas, and Kansas.<sup>[9]</sup>

#### Conclusion

Universal design and visitability have sustainable properties whose time has come. It is imperative for us to plan and adapt to the future population's demographic diversity and the expected increase in intensity and frequency of storms, floods, droughts, and heat waves that accompany climate change. Retirees with diverse backgrounds could contribute to a check list for building for all ages. Retired architects may also provide thoughtful insight into building for the long run instead of planning for retrofitting when the original design no longer benefits the user and becomes a barrier. We have much to draw from with our growing resource of retirees and senior entrepreneurs, with

their experience, ingenuity, and wisdom. Sustainable design can be the fabric and environment for our future lives if we listen to the people and world around us.

*"I never design a building before I've seen the site and met the people who will be using it." Frank Lloyd Wright*



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