

A Step-by-Step Guide In Developing a Visitability Policy

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Introduction

- Based on Master's Dissertation "Developing a Visitability Housing Policy for the Province of Manitoba"
- Research included surveys, interviews and focus groups with visitability advocates, government representatives, homebuilders and the disability community

Introduction

- Research showed that it *could* be possible to implement visitability through amendment of local building codes
- Doing so could be difficult
 - Many are unfamiliar with visitable features
- Visitability should therefore be introduced gradually

5 Steps in Introducing Visitability

- 1) Design and build several visitable prototypes
- 2) Introduce Visitability in homes built with public funds
- 3) Introduce Visitability in Special Design Projects
- 4) Introduce Visitability in private housing through incentives
- 5) Introduce Visitability into jurisdiction's building code

Step 1 Prototypes

- Work with Habitat for Humanity (or similar non-profit builder) in building prototype homes
- Building, development and designers (students and professionals) will learn about visitability through the building of these homes
- Conduct tests of homes during construction phase to ensure that they are visitable

Step 2 Visitable Public Homes

- Require visitable features to be introduced in homes built with public funds
- Implementing such an ordinance would require intense lobbying from disability community and allied organizations

Step 2 (Continued)

- Lobbying would consist of
 - Finding allies in the local government, civil service and local media.
 - Providing testimony at public hearings and meetings
 - Drafting the proposed ordinances.
 - Developing educational materials and holding public forums and workshops for the government and community-at-large

Step 2 (Continued)

- Put together a core team of committed individuals who will decide what action should be undertaken
- Actions should be undertaken by other team members (volunteers, students)

Step 3 Special Development Projects

- Special Development Projects would be used to introduce *Visitability* to the private housing market
- Projects would include large-scale developments were public funds are being used
- Would introduce visitability to homebuilding community
 - Could lessen opposition to visitability

Step 3 (Continued)

- Such projects should include
- New Urbanism Developments
 - New Urbanism values are similar to those of disability community-promoting integration of different types of people
 - New Urbanism neighbourhoods are disability friendly
- Energy efficient features
 - Energy efficiency and visitability are similar in terms of cost effectiveness
- Advocate the marketing potential for visitable homes

Step 4 Incentives

- Use various incentives to encourage homebuilders to incorporate visitable features in homes
- Incentives could include tax rebates and the waiving of development fees

Step 4 (Continued)

- When a developer is given a subdivision permit, require a certain percentage of homes be built with visitable features
 - First year 5% of all new homes
 - Second year 10%

Step 5 Mandatory Visitability

- Mandate visitability in all newly built homes
 - Sole exceptions
 - Homes that have been built specifically for the owner
 - Self-built homes
 - Homes where topography would make visitability impractical

Visitability Policy

- Level entrances, or an entrance with a gradient no steeper than 1:12
- Accessible doorways on entry level floor with a clear width of no less than 34 inches or 850 mm (clear width is the width of the doorway when the door is opened at a 90 degree angle to the door stop)
- Accessible washrooms on entry level floor (with a doorway with a clear width of at least 34 inches/850 mm)
- Wider hallways (36 inches/900mm wide)
- Lever handles on doorways
- Reinforcements in the bathroom walls (for installation of grab bars)*
- Accessible climate controls*

Opportunities

- Raise awareness of disability issues and Universal Design in society at large
- Bridge gaps between disability community and other concerned stakeholders
- Learning and teaching opportunities

Conflicts

- Homebuilders industry will be oppose any visitability mandate
- Any dialogue would be uneasy
- Claims that homebuilding regulations are already too much of a burden
- Will claim that visitable features are costly and against the concept of free enterprise

Conflicts

- Visitable costs are minimal
- Show that there is a demand for visitable homes
- Many features in today's homes come from regulations and not supply and demand
- Regulations are not that much of an impact
 - Involve a modification of existing rules
 - Doors and hallways already have a minimal width

New Opportunities

- Use visitability as a means to ensure that the entire built environment is accessible
- Develop programs to renovate existing homes to ensure accessibility