

Visitability

Home design features that provide basic access and enhance homes for visitors and homeowners



Women's Community Revitalization Project developed the Karen Donnally Townhouses at 4th & Diamond Streets, Philadelphia - all of which are Visitable.

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Promoting Visitability in Philadelphia

Visitability ensures that everyone has basic access to visit homes with ease.

Visitability is an international movement promoting safety and flexibility through smart residential construction design.

Visitable features...

- at least one “no-step” entrance
- a bathroom on the first floor
- wide doorways
- a clear path of travel on the main floor



An example of one of the Pradera II housing units, a project developed by Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha (APM) in which all 53 units are Visitable.

What is Visitability?

- No-step entrance approachable by an accessible route.
- Doorways that provide 32 inches clear space throughout the home's main floor and hallways that provide 36 inches of clear width.
- Basic access to a half or full bath on the main floor with 30 inch by 48 inch minimum clear floor space contiguous to the water closet and lavatory.

The following features are not part of the official definition of Visitability but are easy to install and beneficial to all.

- On the first floor, light switches no higher than 48 inches above the finished floor.
- On the first floor, lever-style hardware for bathroom plumbing fixtures and entry doors.
On the first floor, wall reinforcement/ blocking in the bathroom walls so that grab bars may be added at a later date.

Other types of Barrier-Free Housing

- An accessible home is one which enables an individual to do what he or she needs and desires to do as independently as possible. This can include adding grab bars and a tub seat in the bathroom, ramping entrances, widening doorways, lowering counters, adding lever or loop-style hardware to doors and drawers, and modifying storage areas.
- An adaptable home has the capability by design of certain building spaces and elements, to be altered or added to so as to accommodate the needs of persons with and without disabilities, or to accommodate the needs of persons with different types of degrees of disability.

Who can be contacted to learn more about Visitability?

Visit the following websites for general information:

- www.visitabilitypa.com
- www.concretechange.org
- www.ap.buffalo.edu/idea/Visitability/index.asp
- http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/accessibility/2008_14_access.html - This is a major AARP Research Report, "Increasing home access: Designing for visitability", now on the AARP website, co-authored by Eleanor Smith of Concrete Change and Jordana Maisel and Ed Steinfeld of the IDEA Center.



The Twins at Powder Mills, 50 units developed by Impact Services Corporation in Northeast Philadelphia, includes 44 visitable units and 6 fully accessible units.

Is there a market for Visitable units?

Definitely. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that:

“Meeting the needs of people with disabilities is more than a question of legality. It is a growing market that needs to be explored.

Almost twenty percent of the population has some level of disability, the vast majority of those are adults 45 or older, the same group that will be the chief consumers of move up housing for at least the next twenty years, according to the National Association of Home Builders trade group.

As people age, they will progressively have trouble doing everyday tasks, such as reaching down to open a kitchen drawer, or stepping over the raised base of a shower stall without having something to grab onto.”



Visitable entranceway at one of the units at *The Twins at Powder Mills*.

Who Benefits from Visitability?

- Everyone!
- The community - promoting later degree of interaction between those temporarily or permanently disabled with society
- A friend or family member with a temporary or permanent physical disability who can easily visit your home
People who use wheelchairs
- People who develop activity-limiting disabilities and want to stay in their homes
- People who want to age in their homes



Photo courtesy of Nick Hammer



- People pushing strollers
- People carrying packages
- People moving furniture
- People who use Bicycles
- Police, fire and emergency personnel

Why Visitability in Philadelphia?

- Philadelphia has a disproportionate number of residents with disabilities, and a large and increasing population of residents aged 65 years and older.
- Whether due to injury or age, there is a great likelihood for each of us, at some time in our life, to suffer a temporary or permanent condition that limits mobility or the ability to perform daily tasks of living.
- A residence that provides minimal accessibility offers the possibility of occupancy or visitation by a person with a disability, enabling them to remain inclusive and active members of the community.
- An occupant of a home that is designed to be Visitable who becomes disabled is more likely to be able to remain at home, maintain independence, and avoid unnecessary institutionalization.
- For city-funded housing, it's required. A mandate in the section entitled: **Non-Homeless Special-Needs Housing Production** of Philadelphia's Consolidated Plan states, *"Through rehabilitation and new construction, new adaptable or accessible units are created. To the extent feasible, all new construction housing development projects must include "visitability" design features."*
- In order to increase the accessibility of the City's housing stock, new construction housing developments receiving Housing Trust Fund resources are required to make all their units Visitable within certain parameters.

How Much Does Visitability Cost?

- Visitability is cost effective if planned in advance.
- For new construction, Visitability costs less than 1% of the project.
- Visitability does not require including a long list of desirable access features or adhering to a full accessibility construction plan.
- The increased cost of constructing a residence to be "Visitable" is minimal, while the costs and disruption associated with retrofitting an existing home to make it minimally accessible, are substantial.

What is the Upfront Cost Versus the Cost of Retrofit to Make a Home Visitable?

- Wide passage doors
 - ⇒ \$50 per home to oversize doors in new construction
 - ⇒ Up to \$700 per door as retrofit
- Bath on the primary floor
 - ⇒ No cost if pre-designed
 - ⇒ Adding a bath can cost more than \$1,000
- No-step entrance
 - ⇒ Less than \$100 for new slab-on-grade construction
 - ⇒ \$300 to \$600 for new construction with crawl space or basement
 - ⇒ Up to \$3,300 as retrofit

Note: All the above figures are from the Concrete Change website - www.concretechange.org