

Visitability

A Pathway Home



Frequently Asked Questions For Builders

Visitability is a national movement to build homes with three accessible design features:

1. One zero step entrance on an accessible path of travel from the street, sidewalk or driveway
2. Doorways that provide 32 inches clear space throughout the home's main floor and hallways that provide 36 inches of clear width
3. Basic access to a half or (preferably) full bath on the main floor



What are the advantages of Visitability for home builders?

Builders who commit to meeting the Visitability standards listed in the Visitability Resolution would be fast-tracked through plan review and permitting.

Builders who meet this standard will receive a Visitability Certificate along with a Certificate of Occupancy.



In addition to the three standard Visitability features, other features are listed to provide freedom for future occupants to make minor access changes of their own and use the premises without difficulty.



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More Visitable homes in Missoula means more options I have for my clients.

Rebecca Donnelly; Windermere Real Estate

Are Visitable homes for everyone?

Yes. Visitable homes are intended for the open market. They include features that can be enjoyed by those with and without mobility limitations. Visitable features blend right into a home's character and often aren't even noticeable.



Does Visitability mean that we should add all possible access features to homes?

No. Adding all possible access features to all new homes would be impractical and costly for everyone, whether they have a disability or not.

Some features, like lowered cabinets and sinks, are not desirable for all people.



Is Visitability cost effective for builders?

Yes. In new construction, it costs a negligible amount to make a home Visitable:

- \$0 - \$25 for a home on a concrete slab
- \$0 - \$600 for a home built with a basement

Visitable homes are not institutional in appearance! In fact, open floor plans that are usable by those with mobility devices are usually desired by the general public as well.

Communities with Visitability laws report that while the access features of homes remain unnoticed when toured by individuals not seeking them, they do increase the marketability of the home when toured by those who do need such features.



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Is it possible to make most new homes Visitable?

Yes. It's already been done in several areas of the country:

- 21,000+ homes in Pima County, Arizona
- 7,000+ homes in San Antonio, TX
- 3,700+ homes in Bolingbrook, IL

It is also a requirement for all new homes built in the United Kingdom.

All apartment buildings in the U.S. are already required to be Visitable. The Fair Housing Act requires all of the internal features & basic access requirements of Visitability in all apartment buildings and multi-level condominiums with elevators in addition to several other access features.



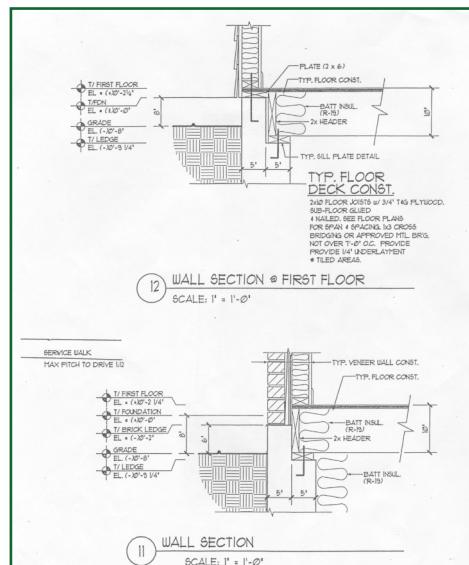
Is it possible to build a zero-step entry over a basement or crawl space?

Yes, it is. To keep the wood flooring away from moisture and termites, the traditional solution is to build a floor above grade on all sides.

There are other options, however. In Bolingbrook, IL, where nearly all houses have basements, a local ordinance requires all new homes to have a zero-step entrance.



In Bolingbrook, many builders use the inset floor joist pictured below. The average cost of adding this feature is \$250 or less.

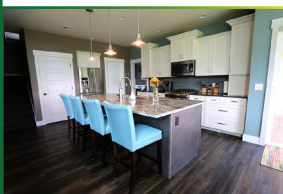


You can view this example as a larger image at:

www.bolingbrook.com/info/pdf/VisitbltyExam1_09_09.pdf

Or visit this site for other design strategies:

www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/strategies.pdf



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Why is Visitability becoming so popular?

Builders don't just respond to the market, they actively shape it. They continually promote new products and educate buyers. Visitability features are just one part of a new home.

Incorporating Visitable features in newly constructed homes saves money. Because building in Visitable features is less expensive when done during initial construction, homeowners aren't faced with needing to spend thousands of dollars renovating when future mobility needs change. When people are most likely to need access features in their own home, such as after a traumatic event that causes a decline in mobility, they are not often in a financial position to be able to spend thousands of dollars on renovations.

Families living in Visitable homes are also able to welcome family and friends who have limited mobility without the need to devise makeshift access features that could potentially be dangerous and cause injuries.

What does a Visitable home offer?

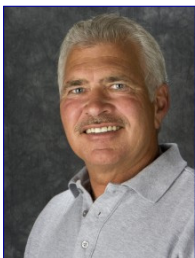
Having a Visitable home means that a person with a physical disability, or who has difficulty walking or using stairs, can easily visit someone in their house. It means that a home owner will be able to remain living in their own home as they age with less chance of needing costly renovations. It also means that visitors using the restroom can close the door, even if they use a wheelchair, walker or other mobility device.

Does a zero-step entrance require building a ramp?

No. There are many options for constructing a zero-step entrance. For example, a lot can be graded so that the sidewalk leads directly to the door.



Earls Construction, Inc.



A zero-step entryway should be attractive, welcoming and an integral part of the home.

This is accomplished by using thoughtful planning and design prior to construction.

Mark Earls; Earls Construction, Inc.

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Does a zero-step entrance have to be in the front of a home?

No. It can be on the side, leading from an alleyway or driveway, or coming from an attached garage.

On a multi-level home, it may be possible to have a zero-step entrance on each level if the home is on a hill.

Where are some websites I can visit to learn more about Visitability or other information contained in this packet?

Concrete Change Website <http://concretechange.org/>

University of Montana Rural Institute Fact Sheet on Visit-ability
http://mtdh.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/?page_id=976

AARP, Increasing Home Access: Designing for Visitability
http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008_14_access.pdf

AARP, Aging in Place: A State Survey of Livability Policies and Practices
<http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/liv-com/ib190.pdf>

Journal of the American Planning Association: Aging and Disability: Implications for the Housing Industry and Housing Policy in the United States
www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01944360802197132

National Association of Home Builders: Funding for Home Modifications & Programs
www.nahb.org/generic.aspx?genericContentID=89799

Home and Community Based Services aka the "Medicaid Waiver" Program
www.dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/moreinformation/brochures/MedicaidWaiver.pdf

Bolingbrook No-Step Entry Example
www.bolingbrook.com/info/pdf/VisitbltyExam1_09_09.pdf

Earls Construction
www.earlsconstruction.com



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Visitability Standards

All new single-family homes, duplexes and triplexes constructed with all of the following visitability features shall be fast-tracked through plan review and permitting:

- (a) Zero-step entrance: Provide at least one zero-step entrance to the main floor. The zero-step entrance shall be accessed via a visitable route.
- (b) Doors/Opening: All doors and openings on the main floor shall have a minimum net clear width of 32 inches.
- (c) Bathroom/Half Bath: Provide a bathroom or half bath on the main floor with unobstructed clear floor space of 30 x 48 inches (unencroached by a swinging door).
- (d) Bathroom/Half Bath Walls: All walls in the required bathroom/half bath shall have reinforcing/backing in the walls to allow for future installation of grab bars.
- (e) Wall Electrical Outlets: Wall electrical outlets on the main floor shall be mounted at least 15 inches above the finished floor.
- (f) Light Switches, Thermostats and Controls: Light switches, thermostats and other control devices on the main floor shall be no higher than 48 inches above the finished floor.

Concurrent with submittal of the standard Residential Site Plan Check List, applicants seeking fast-track plan review and permitting shall be required to complete, sign and submit a Visitability Check List requesting fast-tracking and verifying that each of the above standards is met in the submitted plans.

The Building Official or designee shall conduct preliminary review for substantial conformance with the visitability standards and authorize fast-tracking, whereupon those plans and any required resubmittals shall move to the front of the queue for plan review. Permits shall be ready for issue immediately upon completion of plan review.

Upon project completion, a Visitability Certificate shall be issued concurrent with the Certificate of Occupancy that affirms that the project meets the city's visitability standards.