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**Accessibility and Visitability Features in
Single-family Homes:
A Review of State and Local Activity**

by

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The AARP Public Policy Institute, formed in 1985, is part of the Policy and Strategy Group at AARP. One of the missions of the Institute is to foster research and analysis on public policy issues of importance to mid-life and older Americans. This publication represents part of that effort.

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Foreword

The architectural features of a home influence the quality of life and independence of its residents. But promoting features that enable people to enjoy the use of their home and age-in-place has proven to be a major challenge for policy makers. The federal government has played a central role in promoting accessibility features in apartment buildings, but more than two thirds of the homes built in recent years are single-family. Further, nearly three-quarters of people over age 65 live in single-family housing.

In the 1990s, several state and local governments began considering an assortment of incentives to encourage various accessibility features in single-family homes. The solutions that were adopted vary considerably in approach, but a trend is becoming clear. In fact, as this publication goes to print, two more jurisdictions -- Pima County, Arizona (which includes Tucson) and in Naperville, Illinois (a community of 130,000 outside Chicago) -- passed ordinances to promote more adaptable living environments in all new residential construction. The Pima County ordinance requires widened doorways, levers on some doors, a no-step entrance to the home, and grab bars in the bathroom. The Naperville ordinance calls for reinforced walls in the bathroom, switches no higher than 48", outlets no lower than 15", and 32" door openings on the first floor. Official versions of these two ordinances were not available in time to be included in the paper. However, they illustrate the continually changing landscape in this policy area.

This paper is part of AARP's Public Policy Institute research into independent living and housing issues. Related research includes the Public Policy Institute's "Progress in the Housing of Older Persons" (#D16953) and "Liveable Communities: An Evaluation Guide" (#D16905).

Executive Summary

Background

According to a 2000 AARP survey, more than 90 percent of persons age 65 and older would prefer to stay in their current residence as long as possible. But for those persons who develop a disability that limits their activities, meeting this expectation may be difficult or impossible. In fact, a recent Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) report shows that more than 1 million households with a disabled older resident have unmet structural housing needs. For example, the resident needs but does not have a ramp or accessibility features in the bathroom. One key method to promote continuing independence in the home is to modify the existing house, but in the long run it may be even simpler (and possibly cheaper) to incorporate a number of architecturally friendly design features into new homes as they are being built. Together with other strategies for independence¹, such accessible design elements may play an important role in enabling older persons to age-in-place.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to review the methods that various state and local jurisdictions are using to promote accessibility features in new single-family homes, and to identify important issues related to cost as well as consumer attitude.

Methodology

The author examined online state legislative resources, participated in internet listserves, reviewed published literature, and established informal contacts with advocates and local officials to identify jurisdictions with various accessibility statutes and to gain information about issues related to cost and consumer attitudes.

Summary of Findings

Broadly, four categories of existing state and local policy address accessibility and visitability in single-family homes:

- 1) Builder requirements for housing built with a public subsidy
- 2) Builder requirements or incentives for unsubsidized housing
- 3) Tax or fee incentives to the consumer
- 4) Consumer awareness campaigns

¹ In addition to home modification and design features in new homes, strategies for promoting independence may include transportation services, meals on wheels, home-based personal care, etc. See for instance Public Policy Institute publications “Coordinated Transportation Systems” (#2000-16), “Helping Helpers: State Supportive Services for Family Caregivers” (#2000-07), and “Changes in Home Care Use by Older People with Disabilities 1982-1994” (#2000-02).

To date, the first category of builder requirements for subsidized housing has garnered the most public attention. Typically these requirements encompass the concept of “visitability”, that is, a no-step entrance to the home, widened doors and hallways on the first floor, accessible climate controls and electrical outlets, etc. However, state and local policy has addressed other design features and policy incentives, and it is far too early to determine which approach is most effective in promoting independence for single-family residents. Moreover, experts and policymakers still debate the types of architectural guidelines that should be included, the costs associated with various features, and the appropriate balance between consumer awareness initiatives and public incentives or requirements.

Summary and Conclusion

Although most state and local jurisdictions currently have no policy to encourage accessibility or visitability features in single-family homes, the situation is far different from what it was only 10 years ago. At that time, there was no legislative activity other than recently implemented Fair Housing Laws for multifamily housing activity. In recent years, legislative bodies have begun to consider public policy to encourage accessible housing, especially with regard to visitability requirements for publicly subsidized single-family housing projects. The few new laws that have been enacted will gradually increase production and consumer awareness, leading to more reliable information about the marginal costs of various accessibility and visitability requirements. If feedback from consumers is favorable, more state and local jurisdictions are likely to add similar policy, especially as the baby boomers age in the next few decades. Nonetheless, most efforts are still facing considerable opposition because of concerns about cost and consumer perception.

Introduction

The ability to remain in one's own home is a key issue for older persons. According to a 2000 AARP survey, more than 90 percent of persons age 65 and older indicate that they would prefer to stay in their current residence as long as possible. Furthermore, four out of five persons in that age bracket believe that their current residence is where they will always live.² But for those persons who develop a disability that limits their activities, meeting such expectations may be difficult or impossible. A recent Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) report shows that more than 1 million households with a disabled older resident have unmet structural housing needs. For example, a resident needs but does not have a ramp or accessibility features in the kitchen or bathroom.³ There are many ways to address these needs, including home modifications and assistive devices that promote independence. However, many experts argue that incorporating architecturally friendly features into the original design of the home may be simpler (and possibly cheaper) than retrofitting at a later date.

Federal law addresses many of these issues in newly built multifamily housing, but the issue of accessibility in new single-family housing is left to state and local jurisdictions. Currently, most jurisdictions have not adopted accessible housing policy for single-family units. For those that have, the architectural features addressed and the incentives for providing those features vary widely. Policy ranges from consumer-oriented awareness campaigns, to tax and fee incentives, to explicit code requirements for all or a segment of the new single-family housing market. Meanwhile, the accessibility features promoted are typically very limited, at least in comparison to the broad set of universal design features many advocates believe are necessary to serve a comprehensive set of needs. Nonetheless, recent activity suggests a growing awareness of the need for accessible and adaptable housing design. This paper first discusses design issues and summarizes related federal statutes. It then reviews the methods by which various state and local areas promote accessibility features in new single-family homes and compares those accessibility features. An appendix provides examples of legislation that address the need for design features that promote accessibility and aging-in-place.

The Need for Accessible Design in Single-family Homes

State and local policymakers are displaying a growing awareness that the home can play a major role in enabling a person with disabilities to live independently. Often, they focus on funding to finance essential home modifications. For instance, in some states, policymakers are including home modification under a Medicaid waiver if it is part of an array of in-home services.⁴ And

² AARP "Fixing to Stay" Survey, 2000. Statistics for persons age 65 and older based on a detailed contractor's report.

³ HUD, "Housing Our Elders," November 1999.

⁴ A Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Medicaid waiver is used to provide services to a targeted population in the community, whose members would otherwise be at risk for institutionalization.

many areas use their own funds or federal block grants such as HOME⁵ funds to provide assistance to low-income households for renovation and repair.

At the same time, policymakers are becoming increasingly aware that accessible architectural features in new construction expand housing opportunities for frail persons and persons with disabilities. Federal fair housing laws, for example, require accessible housing in the multifamily arena. However, relatively little policy currently promotes accessibility features in new single-family housing, which is by far the most prevalent form of housing. Conventional single-family homes account for more than two-thirds of units built in recent years, and also more than two-thirds of the stock of occupied units.⁶

The issue is likely to become more prominent. Although the increase in the number of older persons will be relatively modest in the next 10 years, by the year 2030 the population age 65 and older will have doubled to around 70 million. This demographic pattern will be accompanied by increasing concern over older persons' frailty and their ability to live independently. But because single-family homes are often held for many years, unlike multifamily housing for which turnover is more frequent, many of the housing decisions by the future cohort of older persons in single-family homes are being made today.⁷

Architectural Features That Promote Independent Living

To counter some homebuyers' concerns that accessibility features are "institutional" or an unjustified expense, housing advocates have directed attention toward features that are as attractive or as inconspicuous as possible, and that enhance the way people are able to enjoy their home. Universal design, for instance, refers to attractive design concepts that increase the usability of a product by people of all ages and abilities, and that allow people to remain independent for as long as possible. In the context of home design, universal design features include architectural elements such as no-step entry, wide interior doorways and passages, maneuverable kitchen and bathroom layout, easy to use cabinets and sinks, contrasting colors, etc.

However, existing state and local policy for accessible design is generally geared toward a much more narrow set of features, largely because of the cost concerns of builders. One such narrow set of features has been termed "visitability" features. These include widened doorways and corridors on the first level of a home, a no-step entrance, electrical outlets that are slightly higher

⁵ HOME is a federal block grant program that provides funds to states and local governments for a variety of housing needs. States and local area housing agencies have broad discretion in how funds are used. One of the eligible uses is rehabilitation and repair of existing housing.

⁶ According to the Census Bureau's Construction Division, 67 percent of units completed in the past 10 years were conventional single-family, 15 percent were manufactured homes, and 18 percent were multifamily units. With regard to all housing currently occupied, HUD's 1999 American Housing Survey indicates that 69 percent of occupied units are conventional single-family homes, 7 percent are manufactured homes, and 24 percent are multifamily housing. Manufactured homes are distinguished from other single-family housing because they are built to a preemptive federal construction standard, rather than state or local requirements.

⁷ In 1999, single-family residents age 65 and older had been living in their unit for a median of 28 years, compared to 8 years for older residents of multifamily units (PPI analysis of HUD's 1999 American Housing Survey).

than standard, electrical switches slightly lower than standard, and easily usable climate controls. In all, visitability features are typically geared to promote the ability of a disabled person to access the main level of the home. Although the term “visitability” refers to design elements that enable mobility-constrained neighbors and relatives to visit socially, the features also allow for some degree of aging-in-place and are relatively low cost. A limited set of features is not, however, a comprehensive solution to a diverse set of needs. Thus, state and local incentives for a narrowly targeted set of design features are probably best viewed as one component in a broad strategy of public awareness and acceptance for universal design features.

In the context of promoting consumer acceptance, some advocates believe that it is possible to enhance the appeal of accessibility features by marketing them as amenities, with no explicit mention of universal design. Indeed, features such as large bathrooms and master bedrooms located on the first floor of a home are already viewed as amenities by many homebuyers, especially older shoppers.⁸

Federal Guidelines for Accessibility in Residential Dwellings

There are no federal requirements for accessibility features in single-family homes. However, federal standards for such features in multifamily housing have become a model for several state and local single-family initiatives. Because of the importance of federal multifamily policy, the following sections briefly describe the federal role.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 requires that recipients of federal funds, including affordable housing providers, make their programs and activities accessible to persons with a disability. At least 5 percent of the housing units in new or substantially rehabilitated multifamily housing must be accessible to people with mobility impairments, and at least 2 percent must be accessible to people with hearing or visual impairments. Units that meet the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS) are deemed by HUD to comply with the requirements of the act. Among the many architectural requirements in the UFAS are:

- Accessible doors that have a minimum clear opening of 32 inches (815 millimeters) with the door open 90 degrees.
- Handle, pull, latch, lock, and other operating devices on the entrance door that have a shape that is easy to grasp with one hand and does not require tight grasping, tight pinching, or twisting of the wrist to operate. This requirement only applies to the accessible entrance door.
- At least one accessible entrance. If a ramp is used, then the maximum slope is 1:12.
- At least one bathroom with:
 - clear area to the right or left of the toilet
 - architectural reinforcements to allow installation of grab bars (if not already installed)

⁸ For instance, nearly two-thirds of persons age 55 and older would prefer a master bedroom on the first floor of a two-story home. Source: *What Today's Home Buyers Want*, National Association of Home Builders, 1996.

- removable cabinets beneath sinks
- shower spray unit with a hose at least 60 inches long.
- Kitchen that has clear floor space of at least 40 inches, or 60 inches if the kitchen is U-shaped.
- Other requirements relating to accessible cabinets, work spaces, sinks, appliances, etc.

Section 504 also established the principle of reasonable accommodation in federally funded projects. A reasonable accommodation is a relatively simple change to rules, policies, practices, and/or services to give a person with a disability equal use of a unit or common areas. Common examples in housing are a waiver of pet restrictions for a guide dog or provision of a designated handicapped parking space close to the housing unit.

Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988

In 1988, Congress passed the Fair Housing Amendments Act (FHAA) that expanded the Civil Rights Act of 1968 to prohibit housing discrimination on the basis of disability. The FHAA included design and construction standards for all new or substantially rehabilitated multifamily housing,⁹ regardless of whether or not federal funds were used to subsidize construction. In addition to the design and construction standards, landlords are also required to permit a tenant to make reasonable modifications and accommodations to ensure persons with disabilities have equal access to housing.

Design and Construction Standards

Although the FHAA was passed in 1988, the design and construction standards did not apply until March 1991. For multifamily units built on or after this date, seven broad architectural guidelines apply:

- An accessible entrance on an accessible route;
- Accessible public and common use areas;
- Usable doors;
- Accessible routes into and through a dwelling unit;
- Reinforced bathroom walls;
- Useable kitchens and bathrooms; and
- Accessible light switches, electrical outlets, and environmental controls.

Local governments have no formal role under the act in interpreting or enforcing the federal accessibility requirements, even though they are responsible for issuing construction permits. Local jurisdictions adopt and administer model building codes that have been developed by code organizations such as Building Officials and Code Administrators International (BOCA) or Council of American Code Officials (CABO). Subsequent efforts turned, therefore, to getting the federal accessibility requirements into these major building codes. The Fair Housing Act

⁹ Multifamily housing is defined under the act to include owner-occupied housing with five or more units and renter occupied housing with four or more units.

referred to American National Standards Institute (ANSI)¹⁰ technical standards A117.1, but did not specify which revision of standard, or which of its many sections, satisfied requirements of the act. Thus, the independent code organizations spent several years debating how to incorporate the ANSI standards into their published standards. Adding to the confusion was the fact that the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) regularly approved loans for projects that were later found to be noncompliant, even though FHA technically must verify that the building meets all federal standards.

Currently, all the model building codes reference either the 1992 or 1998 edition of the ANSI A117.1 accessibility standard, and, late in 1999, HUD issued a report stating that both editions are consistent with fair housing. ANSI A117.1 includes many accessibility features beyond those suggested by the act, however, and the building industry pursued HUD approval for an alternative minimum standard that would satisfy FHAA requirements. In May 2000, HUD acknowledged that a smaller set of requirements called Code Requirements for Housing Accessibility (CRHA) would serve as a “safe harbor” for compliance with the Fair Housing Act.¹¹

Reasonable Modifications and Accommodations

The FHAA extends the principle of reasonable accommodation to all multifamily properties regardless of federal funding (see Section 504 above). In addition, the FHAA establishes a requirement for reasonable modification: landlords must allow a person with a disability to make reasonable changes to a housing unit if such changes are needed by that individual for the full use and enjoyment of the unit. The change must be related to the disability, and the landlord may require the resident to pay for the alterations. The landlord may also require the work to be done in a professional manner and in compliance with building codes, and the resident may be required to restore the unit to its original condition before vacating.

For both modification and accommodation, the definition of “reasonableness” is sometimes disputed and must be resolved based on existing case law.¹²

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act does not contain architectural guidelines for residential units, but it does address a wide range of public accommodations. In multifamily housing, public accommodations include common use areas such as laundry rooms, recreation rooms, meeting halls, and parking facilities. Such public accommodations must provide accessibility for persons with mobility limitations or other impairments.

¹⁰ ANSI, a private nonprofit organization supported by industry and government agencies, is a voluntary administrator and coordinator of standardization systems for private industry. ANSI standard A117.1 was originally developed in the 1960s to promote accessible and usable buildings and facilities and has been revised periodically since then.

¹¹ CRHA was developed by the International Code Council (ICC).

¹² The law stipulates two conditions for “reasonableness”: 1) it cannot impose a “fundamental alteration” to a program and 2) it cannot impose “an undue financial burden.” Case law has helped to refine those defining characteristics.

SuperNOFA: Federal Incentives for Visitability in Subsidized Single-family Homes

There are no federal visitability or accessibility requirements for single-family housing, but there are some incentives for developers using federal tax dollars to subsidize the building of affordable housing. These incentives appeared in the FY 1999, FY 2000, and FY 2001 SuperNOFA, which is HUD's notice of funding availability and application procedures for its direct housing and grant programs.¹³ In it, HUD included a statement that visitability features would be one of the factors by which an application for federal funding would receive favorable attention. Visitability features in the SuperNOFA include at least one entrance at grade (no steps) approached by an accessible route such as a sidewalk, and an entrance door and interior passage doors that are at least 2 feet 10 inches wide. These SuperNOFA incentives apply to both single- and multifamily housing that receive a direct federal subsidy. However, relatively few single-family homes are actually built or substantially rehabilitated using HUD funds, although some construction does occur under programs such as HOPE VI.^{14,15}

State and Local Single-Family Accessibility and Visitability Laws

Passing legislation for accessibility features in unsubsidized single-family construction can be extremely difficult, because local builders often oppose it. Builders state that even modest increases in the cost of a new home will price some households out of the market, or lead homebuyers to sacrifice other features or amenities to attain the same price. This has proven to be an effective argument, especially in light of recent house price inflation. Builders also argue that their customers typically do not request the features contained in most accessibility/visitability legislation. And because the proposed features do not necessarily address immediate safety, they argue that the legislation sets a bad precedent.

Accessibility advocates respond that the costs of many features (especially visitability features) are too modest to have a significant impact on affordability. At the same time, they argue that the issue of access is an important social goal even when the features benefit a person who does not reside in the unit and that access is fully in the spirit of fair housing. In addition, the features promoted are generally helpful to persons without physical limitations. For instance, an

¹³ The SuperNOFA does not apply to block grants such as HOME and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Prior to 1998, HUD issued as many as 40 different Notices of Funding Availability (NOFAs) for a range of housing and community development programs. Rules, application procedures, and processing methods varied widely. As a result, it was difficult for communities to coordinate their efforts efficiently. Critics believed that it forced communities to respond to HUD's bureaucratic procedures, rather than allowing HUD to respond to communities' needs. Thus, HUD redesigned funding into a more coordinated process that, to the extent possible, combines procedures into a set of rules offering a menu of programs. This new announcement of funding availability and application process is called SuperNOFA.

¹⁴ HOPE VI, which is covered by the SuperNOFA, addresses severely distressed public housing. Eligible activities include the construction of replacement units. In Atlantic City, for example, the public housing authority has plans to construct 600 affordable single-family units using HOPE VI funds, of which 400 will be for purchase. Designs for these units will include accessibility features.

¹⁵ The largest program under which single-family construction and rehabilitation occurs is the HOME program, which has a wide variety of qualifying uses. But the HOME program is a block grant to states and local areas, and is therefore not subject to the SuperNOFA.

accessible entrance and wide doors and hallways are obviously convenient when moving furniture or appliances, maneuvering a baby stroller, etc.

These arguments have led to small gains by advocates in a few areas, but, given builders' reluctance, relatively few jurisdictions have passed legislation regarding accessibility features in new single-family construction. Among those that have, the types of policy are varied. In some local areas, features are mandated in return for local financial or in-kind support, while other locations promote accessible design in all homes. Some localities gear tax or fee incentives directly toward the consumer, and there is at least one prominent example of a public awareness campaign. The following sections summarize these current local and state legislative initiatives.

Builder Requirements and Incentives: Subsidized Single-family Homes

In 1992, an important and influential ordinance was passed in Atlanta, Georgia, requiring basic visitability features in any single-family home or duplex built with any type of subsidy from the city.¹⁶ A group called Concrete Change, led by its founder Eleanor Smith, successfully argued that locally subsidized housing construction should offer basic, low-cost visitability features in return for support from the city. The success of this effort attracted attention from accessibility advocates in other states, and in a few years similar ordinance proposals and state bills appeared elsewhere. Although local construction interests have often been suspicious of added regulation and potential cost and have generally opposed local visitability legislation, the Atlanta ordinance appears to be gradually gaining acceptance by policy makers in other communities. In 1998, Austin passed a very similar ordinance, as did Urbana, Illinois, in 2000. Likewise, the state legislatures of Georgia, Minnesota, and Texas have similar laws that are triggered by the use of a state subsidy for new construction. Comparable bills have been introduced in Kansas, Wisconsin, and Illinois.

Except for Minnesota, these statutes require at least one accessible entrance; wide hallways and doors; reinforced bathroom walls to accommodate grab bars; and easy to reach light switches, electrical outlets, and thermostats. The Atlanta and Austin ordinances are nearly identical in those respects, except that Austin explicitly limits certain requirements to the first floor of the home. The Georgia and Texas statutes also limit certain requirements to the first floor of the home. In addition, the Urbana ordinance adds language on landings, non-slip surfaces, and permitted grade on the accessible route. Minnesota differs in that it does not address hallways, reinforced bathroom walls, or the location of light switches and environmental controls. Table I summarizes these requirements.

¹⁶ A subsidy may take the form of tax incentives, a city loan or financial grant, land grant, or local disposition of funds from a federal block grant, etc.

**Table I: Summary of Local Ordinances and State Laws
for Visitability in Subsidized Construction**

Year Ordinance/ Law #	Atlanta, GA 1992 92-0-0938	Austin, TX 1998 981007-A	Urbana, IL 2000 2000-09-105	Georgia 2000 SB 443	Minnesota 2001 HF5 (SS)	Texas 1999 SB 623
1. Entrance to home	At least one no-step entrance on accessible route; minimum opening 32"	At least one no-step entrance on accessible route; minimum opening 32"	At least one no-step entrance on an accessible route; minimum opening 32"	At least one no-step entrance on an accessible route; minimum door 36" (yields at least 32" opening)	At least one no-step entrance; 32" clear width door opening	At least one no-step entrance on an accessible route; minimum door 36" (yields at least 32" opening)
2. Interior doors	All interior doors minimum 32" opening and lever handles	All interior doors on <i>first floor</i> minimum 30" opening and lever handles	All doors or openings minimum 32"	All interior doors on <i>first floor</i> minimum 32" opening	All doorways 32" clear width	All interior doors on <i>first floor</i> minimum 32" opening
3. Accessible route	36" wide level route provided through main floor of unit	36" wide level route provided through main floor of unit	Corridors shall be at least 36" wide	36" wide level hallways <i>on first floor</i>		36" wide level hallways <i>on first floor</i>
4. Bathroom walls	Bathroom walls reinforced	<i>First floor</i> bathroom walls reinforced	Bathroom walls reinforced	<i>First floor</i> bathroom walls reinforced		<i>First floor</i> bathroom walls reinforced
5. Light switches, thermostat, electrical outlets, electrical panel	Max 48" height, minimum 15" height	For <i>first floor</i> , max 42" height, minimum 18" height	Max 48" height, minimum 15" height	For <i>first floor</i> , max 48" height, minimum 15" height		For <i>first floor</i> , max 48" height, minimum 15" height
6. Misc:			Additional requirements for accessible route to the home regarding landing, non-slip surfaces, and slope	Electrical box must be inside building on first floor	There must be at least a one-half bathroom on the main level.	Electrical box must be inside building on first floor
Waiver	Through Commissioner of Department of Housing if topographical conditions make compliance impossible	Through the building official if topographical conditions render compliance an undue hardship	Where site conditions or other restrictions warrant, Building Code Board of Appeal may recommend waiver, which must be granted by City Council		Minnesota Housing Finance Agency may waive no-step entrance if site conditions make impractical. One-half bathroom and no-step entrance may be waived if reduces affordability for targeted population.	

Little direct research has been conducted on the cost of implementing these visitability standards and the impact these costs would have on housing affordability. The Atlanta-based organization Concrete Change estimates that the addition of a no-step accessible entrance; wide hallways and doors; reinforced bathroom walls to accommodate grab bars; and easy to reach light switches, electrical outlets, and thermostats would add around \$200 in direct costs to a typical new home.¹⁷

The final cost may largely depend on the topography of the construction site. A ramp, if necessary to provide no-step access to the home, can cost up to \$2,000 per 12 horizontal feet.¹⁸ The three major visitability ordinances in Atlanta, Austin, and Urbana therefore allow for waivers necessitated from topography, but the waiver provisions vary. The Atlanta ordinance provides a waiver if topography makes the requirements “impossible,” while the Austin ordinance provides for a waiver based on “undue hardship.” In those two cities, a local official is responsible for approving a waiver. Urbana provides no guidance in its ordinance about when a waiver should be granted, and a waiver must be approved first by the Building Commission and then again by the City Council.

Other than the no-step entrance in certain cases, costs are relatively minor. The placement of light switches, electrical outlets, and environmental controls at an alternative height is unlikely to substantially influence construction costs. Alternative equipment such as lever door handles and wide doors may be slightly more expensive than conventional hardware, but is commonly available as a consequence of similar requirements for multifamily construction.¹⁹ Reinforced bathroom walls require extra lumber, but often the excess lumber generated from construction can be used for reinforcement purposes. A problem, although modest, arguably comes from the requirement for widened hallways; builders are particularly sensitive about having to sacrifice space from other uses. Four inches width added to a 15-foot hallway is the equivalent of 5 square feet of space and may be viewed as the loss of a small closet or pantry. On average, a square foot of floor space has a sales value of \$68, so keeping all other features of the home constant and adding extra width to the hall in the illustration above is the equivalent of adding \$340 to the price of a home.²⁰ This cost is considered “indirect,” because it is not clear whether building sizes would in fact change, or whether the consumer would absorb the space trade-off elsewhere in the home.

Builder Requirements and Incentives: Unsubsidized Single-family Homes

Little legislation currently encourages accessibility features in privately built single-family homes. The legislation that does exist generally excludes “custom homes,” that is, those that are built to a design specifically selected by the owner and are often built on the owner’s land.

¹⁷ Source: Concrete Change. Most of this is borne by the no-step entrance (\$150) and the rest by interior doors (\$50).

¹⁸ Extended Living Services, Chicago IL.

¹⁹ Concrete Change reports the total cost difference in a typical home for a set of interior widened doors would be about \$50.

²⁰ Census Bureau, “Characteristics of New Housing 1999,” Series C-25.

Instead, efforts have focused on “spec” built housing. “Spec” is an abbreviated form of “speculation,” and refers to homes that are pre-built, and later sold with the lot as a package. Tract developments are a common example of spec homes, but spec homes are also sold on scattered lots by smaller construction companies.

One well-known law addressing accessibility in unsubsidized single-family homes is the 1989 Florida “Bathroom Law.” As the nickname indicates, it is not a full set of features, but only addresses accessibility to at least one bathroom in a home. That bathroom is required to have a 29-inch door opening. Although this requirement may lead to a slight change in the design of the bathroom to allow the door to have a full range of movement, there has already been a trend toward 29- and 30-inch clear interior door openings in new construction, nationally.²¹ The law has no other effect on the bathroom or any other part of the home. The Florida Accessibility Code, which otherwise addresses ADA requirements for multifamily homes, contains the requirements of the law under Section 4.22.2 [see sidebar].

Section 4.22.2 Florida Accessibility Code

All new single-family houses, duplexes, triplexes, condominiums, and townhouses shall provide at least one bathroom, located with maximum possible privacy, where bathrooms are provided on habitable grade levels, with a door that has a 29-inch clear opening. However, if only a toilet room is provided at grade level, such toilet room shall have a clear opening of not less than 29 inches.

[Editor’s Note: these sentences establish a priority. If the grade level of the home has both a full and a half bath, then the full bath must conform to the requirement. If there is only a half bath on the grade level of the home, then the half bath must conform.]

A much more comprehensive set of requirements was adopted by Vermont in the spring of 2000. Vermont law now requires any spec-built single-family or multifamily housing unit to adhere to a number of construction standards that closely follow the broad visitability legislation discussed earlier. However, unlike Georgia and Texas, the Vermont requirements extend to privately financed housing, making Vermont the first state to establish a set of visitability features for almost all housing. Custom homes built by the owner for personal use are exempt from Vermont’s requirements. The law goes into effect for housing construction started after July 1, 2001.

²¹ The building codes adopted in many states now call for a 29¾-inch clear opening for interior doors. Clear door opening is generally measured between the face of the door and the opposite doorstop. Typically, a door has a clear opening about 2 inches smaller than its width, once the interior door frame and thickness of the door in an open position is accounted for. Thus, a 30-inch door would generally have about a 28-inch opening, and a 32-inch door about a 30-inch clear opening. Thirty-two-inch doors with an approximate 30-inch clear opening are becoming common in new construction, although narrower doors are still frequently used for shallow closets, etc.

The Vermont statute requirements include:

- At least one first floor exterior door that is at least 36 inches wide
- First floor interior doors that are at least 34 inches wide, or open doorways that are at least 32 inches wide
- Level, ramped, or beveled doorways on the first floor
- Interior hallways that are level and at least 36 inches wide
- Light switches, outlets, environmental controls at accessible heights in compliance with standards adopted by the Vermont access board
- Bathroom walls that are reinforced to permit attachment of grab bars

Notably, the Vermont visitability requirements do not require a no-step entrance to the home. This feature was included in the original proposal, but builders strongly objected. Vermont construction typically includes a cellar and a first floor that is 18 to 24 inches above ground; builders were concerned about the appearance and cost of either dropping the basement further to provide a no-step entrance, or redesigning plans to include a ramp.

As part of a compromise, the Vermont statute requires the state Commissioner of Aging and Disabilities to prepare a pamphlet that explains visitability standards and the advantages of voluntarily providing a no-step entrance. The Commissioner is also instructed to promote distribution of the visitability pamphlet by working with homebuilders, lenders, real estate brokers, and other interested parties, and to report the success of those efforts to the legislature. Finally, the Department of Aging and Disabilities is authorized to award funds to build a model home demonstrating visitable architecture.

Bolingbrook, Illinois, a town of 55,000 outside of Chicago that experienced rapid growth throughout the 1990s, has also recommended a comprehensive set of requirements for all “spec” homes. The requirements were approved by the Planning Commission on September 1, 1999, and may be signed as an ordinance by the mayor. In the meantime, the mayor has chosen to disseminate the design features as a voluntary design standard for local builders, and local officials estimate that around 200 conforming homes were built through the end of 2000.

In summary, the Bolingbrook design standards include the following requirements:

- Wall switches no more than 48 inches above the floor (thermostats and breaker panels excluded)
- Electrical receptacles no less than 15 inches above the finished floor
- At least one no-step entrance located on an accessible route from parking area or public way
- Reinforced bathroom walls
- At least one washroom on the first floor, containing at least one toilet and sink.
- Wheelchair accessible full and half bathrooms
- Exterior and interior doors that are at least 36 inches in width and 6 feet 8 inches in height, with a minimum clearing of 32 inches
- Hallways on the level with the no-step entrance at least 42 inches in width, and other hallways at least 36 inches in width

Part of the reason that these design standards have not yet been turned into a formal ordinance may have to do with cost. Because the standards are more comprehensive than some other visitability codes, and include features on all levels of the home, the local builders have voiced concern about the issue of cost and affordability.²² In fact, city staff conducted a survey of local builders and estimated that the average price increase per home would be around \$2,900 (approximately 1.5 percent of the average price of a home in the area).²³

Illinois passed legislation in 1999 establishing a program to promote accessibility features in single-family housing through voluntary participation by builders. The Illinois Accessible Housing Demonstration Grant Program allows builders to submit a request for funds to cover the costs of providing accessibility features in their homes. While the homes built under the demonstration program are therefore subsidized, the intent is to generate builder expertise and public awareness that will lead to acceptance in the unsubsidized market. The demonstration features must include:

- At least one no-step entrance, with 36-inch wide entrance door
- All interior passages with at least 32-inch width
- Electrical outlets no lower than 15 inches and light switches no higher than 48 inches
- Environmental controls in accessible locations
- Reinforced walls for all bathrooms

The stated goal of the program is to get builders to provide these features in at least 10 percent of the homes in a housing development. The sponsors of the legislation hope that the program will raise public awareness and encourage consumer acceptance, because shoppers could compare a model with those features to other models of homes in the same development. The model may also demonstrate to builders the relative ease with which such features can be incorporated into new home design. And perhaps most importantly to housing policymakers, it could very well become a key source of comparable cost data; within each neighborhood of presumably similar housing, the design, cost, and sales of homes with these features could be compared to those without. However, the utility of the model depends on the active participation of homebuilders. As of May 2001, there had been no activity in the fund, even though \$1 million was appropriated for it by the legislature. The lack of activity may only be a temporary setback, since the task force established by the legislation to provide information to builders had not yet been appointed by the governor.

Consumer-Based Strategies: Tax and Fee Incentives

Tax and fee incentives are useful policy tools, because they shift the decision from the supplier to the consumer and thus eliminate some of the political obstacles. Federal tax incentives do not

²² Another contributing reason for the cost may be basements, which are common in the Midwest. Because a portion of the basement typically rises above ground level to allow for small windows, this could make a zero-step entrance more costly, on average, than for homes that do not have a basement.

²³ In 2000, a similar ordinance in Tucson, Arizona, failed to pass largely because of cost concerns by business interests. The city's Commission on Disability Issues estimated that a set of visitability requirements would cost no more than \$100 per home, but the area home builder association reported estimates of around \$1,200 per home.

promote the general provision of accessibility features in a new single-family home, although homeowners may deduct the cost of home modifications on an existing house if they are medically necessary.²⁴ Some states and local jurisdictions, however, have begun to consider offering tax or fee incentives to encourage accessibility features.

For instance, in Freehold Borough, New Jersey, permit fees for constructing of accessibility features may be waived as the result of an ordinance passed in 1999. The ordinance does not explicitly define what qualifies as accessibility features, but the city has shown a willingness to waive fees for commonly recognized features such as ramps. To date, however, the fee waivers have only been applied to rehabilitation of existing homes. The applicability of the ordinance to accessibility features offered in new homes has not been tested because Freehold Borough has very little new construction activity. A code official indicated that for future new construction that included accessibility features, the city would probably interpret the ordinance to allow some prorated waiver of a portion of the permit fee over the full cost of the construction project.²⁵

The state of Georgia, meanwhile, passed a law in 1998 that provides a tax credit toward the cost of selected accessibility features for persons with disabilities.²⁶ For new single-family homes, a tax credit in the amount of \$500 is available if the home provides *each* of the following accessibility features:

- A no-step entrance
- Interior passage doors providing 32-inch clear opening
- Reinforced bathroom walls
- Accessible light switches and outlets

The Georgia law also allows a tax credit based on the actual cost of retrofitting existing single-family homes, up to \$125 per feature. The total credit cannot exceed \$500.

Taking a cue from the Georgia law, Virginia passed its own legislation in 1999 to encourage the same set of accessibility features. Virginia law expands the Georgia statute by allowing anyone to take the credit, not just persons with disabilities. However, the Virginia law provides a credit only for retrofitting an existing home. The credit is for 25 percent of the cost of the qualifying installations, or \$500, whichever is less. Unused credits may be carried over for up to five years.

Consumer-Based Strategies: Consumer Awareness

The strongest effort to use consumer education to expand accessibility in single-family homes is taking place in Irvine, CA. In early 1999, several housing advocates in Irvine proposed that all new homes be made “visitable” for persons with disabilities. Inspired by fair housing laws, the initial proposal called for ramped entryways, larger front doors, wider halls, and bathrooms with

²⁴ The IRS will require a written recommendation from a doctor to prove the expense is necessary. A professional appraisal of property value may also be required, because the deduction only applies to the difference between cost of the modification and the value it adds to the property.

²⁵ Discussion with author, August 2000.

²⁶ The disability qualification is based on whether the resident has a disabled parking permit under subsections (c) or (e) of Georgia Code 40-6-222.

enough space to accommodate wheelchairs. To study the requirements more closely and to give consideration to builders' concerns about costs, the city council appointed a 13-member advisory committee that included developers, builders, residents, seniors, realtors, and representatives of the building commission and city staff.

Ultimately, the committee was unable to agree upon an ordinance to require visitability features in all new homes, but the discussions did result in compromise between advocates and industry. Under the new program, builders in Irvine are required to offer buyers a list of access-friendly design options [see Table II] that goes far beyond basic visitability into the much broader realm of universal design. Each option is designated by the builder as a "standard" feature (comes with the home), a "limited" feature (available to some homes, typically depending on the characteristics of the lot), optional feature (at consumer's request), or not available. Because builders must indicate if they are unable to provide an accessibility feature, this list is sometimes referred to as a disclosure. If a feature is offered as an option, the builder provides a cost estimate as part of the document, as well as a cut-off date by which the buyer must make the request.²⁷ Both the seller and the buyer are required to sign an acknowledgment that the feature list was provided to the buyer.

²⁷ The cut-off date allows the builder to get commitments from suppliers and subcontractors without unnecessary construction delays and delivery. Otherwise, last minute changes could add significantly to the project cost.

**Table II:
Universal Design Options Included in Mandatory Builder Acknowledgment
Irvine, California**

General

1. Accessible path of travel to dwelling
2. Maximum ½" vertical change in level at thresholds
3. 32" wide interior doors
4. 18" to 24" strike edge clearance at doors
5. Lever door hardware
6. Entry door sidelight of high/low peep hole viewer
7. Doorbell at 48" maximum height in accessible location
8. Visual fire alarms and visual doorbells
9. Switches, outlets and thermostats at 15" to 48" above the floor
10. Rocker light switches
11. Closet rods and shelves adjustable from 3' to 5' 6" high

Kitchen

12. 30"x48" clear space at appliances or 60" diameter U-shape kitchen
13. Removable base cabinets at sink
14. Countertop height repositioning to 28" high
15. Lever controls at kitchen sink faucet
16. Base cabinets with pull-out shelves
17. Base cabinets with Lazy Susans
18. Contrasting color edge border at countertops
19. Microwave oven at countertop height
20. Under cabinet task lighting

Bathrooms

21. Grab bar backing in walls
22. Grab bars
23. 5' diameter turning circle
24. 36"x36" or 30"x48" clear space
25. Lavatory with level faucet controls
26. Open-front lavatory with knee space and protection panel
27. Contrasting color edge border at countertops
28. Anti-scald devices on all plumbing fixtures
29. 17" to 19" high water closet seat
30. Roll-in shower in lieu of standard tub or shower
31. Shower stall with 4" lip in lieu of standard tub
32. Hand-held adjustable shower head

The program is still too new to determine how many consumers are willing to select optional universal design features, or the extent to which such design features increase the final sales price of the home. However, Irvine is likely to become an important source of information on these issues in coming years.

International Perspectives

Many countries have adopted various access requirements for new housing, but like the United States, these requirements are typically intended for new multifamily buildings. Countries with multifamily accessibility policies include Italy, Netherlands, Denmark, France, Spain, Greece, and Sweden. Sweden in particular has been very active in promoting accessibility in new multifamily housing and has also actively promoted plans to encourage retrofitting of existing multifamily buildings.

The United Kingdom is the exception, because this country extended requirements to single-family homes. In March of 1998, a British mandate was passed that led to the revision of the existing accessibility requirements under Part M of the national construction standards. Previously, this section of the regulations dealt with accessibility in residential buildings specifically intended for persons with disabilities. The mandate, however, required a basic set of visitability features in *all* residential homes, including single-family homes, regardless of the needs of the occupants. The new requirements were intended to “allow people to be able to invite disabled people to visit them in their own homes, and for homeowners to be able to remain in their own homes longer as they become less mobile as they get older.”²⁸

The new requirements are a significant departure from traditional voluntary methods of promoting accessibility and visitability features. The regulations will affect essentially all of the approximately 150,000 housing units built annually in the United Kingdom, although a waiver for some requirements may be granted based on lot topography. Because such a major change clearly would require a broad set of regulatory standards, the new law gave the construction directorate more than a year to develop and disseminate the new regulations. The new requirements apply to all new homes in the United Kingdom for which the construction process began on or after October 25, 1999.²⁹

Broadly, the requirements of the new Part M are:

- A level entry to the principal entrance
- An entrance door wide enough to allow wheelchair access
- Wide halls
- A bathroom on the entrance level or first habitable story
- Raised electrical outlets and lowered light switches
- Depending on topography, a level or gently sloping approach from the parking space to the dwelling

²⁸ Construction Minister Nick Raynsford, March 1998.

²⁹ The regulation refers to the beginning of the erection of a building. Although this is left to local authorities and approved inspectors to judge, the guidance provided by the department refers to preparing the foundation of the home.

Although generally receptive to the idea of promoting visitability features in the home, the domestic construction industry has nonetheless expressed concerns about some of the new legislation's requirements. Among the concerns are the costs of the new regulations, which the British Home Builder Federation (HBF) believes could potentially affect the affordability of smaller units marketed to first-time buyers and, in effect, lead to reduced numbers of "starter" homes. Space, in particular, is an expensive commodity; the typical size of a British single-family home is smaller than half the typical size of a new single-family home in the United States.³⁰ Size constraints may make it difficult to provide for a water closet in some designs that traditionally do not include one on the first floor. The HBF also has concerns about water entering level threshold homes, as well as consumer acceptance of some new features (for instance, low-level light switches). To collect information on these and related issues, the HBF is preparing to conduct a builder survey for the government on homes constructed since the new requirements went into effect.

Housing advocates argue that costs are modest, and they often point to a study conducted by the Joseph Rountree Foundation (JRF) that was influential in passing the British mandate.³¹ JRF had already promulgated design features for "Lifetime Homes" that were very similar to the revised Part M, and which were used by builders in more than 400 homes [see appendix B for a detailed comparison]. The two-year study of those homes had found that the average costs were about £200 (roughly \$300) for a three-bedroom house, and would typically only rise above £300 (or about \$450) for homes where a first floor toilet was not already a part of the traditional home design. Other costs would relate to a covered/illuminated entrance, reinforced walls in the bathroom, door/hallway width, and provision for a future stair lift. Features such as lowered light switches, raised electrical sockets, ground floor bed space, and a level approach from parking to the entrance of the home were considered to add no additional cost if incorporated into the early design. In all, the study estimated that the new features would add about 1 percent to the cost of a home.

In addition, the foundation sponsored research to show that design changes could achieve an average savings over 30 years of about £250 (\$375) per dwelling.³² These cost savings would occur through a reduced need for retrofitting, delaying moves into a residential care facility, reduced need for temporary residential care, and savings in home care costs within the resident's home. Together with the earlier research, JRF argued that the modifications were, in fact, cost effective.

³⁰ In 1995, the average size of a single-family home in the U.K. was around 915 square feet, compared to 1,740 square feet in the United States (Housing Economics, December 1995, p. 12). The Joseph Rountree Foundation, a U.K. housing advocacy group, sponsored research on accessibility features in 1997. One of the largest homes examined was a 4 bedroom house measuring 1,033 square feet. In the United States, a new 4 bedroom house would measure 2,800 square feet, on average (PPI tabulation of Census Bureau's 2000 Survey of Construction).

³¹ Kim Sangster, "Costing Lifetime Homes," 1997, York Publishing. Summary available at the Joseph Rountree Foundation website, <http://www.jrf.org.uk>.

³² Christopher Cobbold, "A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Lifetime Homes," 1997, York Publishing. Summary available at the Joseph Rountree Foundation website, <http://www.jrf.org.uk>.

Finally, the foundation conducted a small 50-person survey of residents living in the homes built with “Lifetime Home” features.³³ Two-thirds of respondents were not aware that their homes were built to the enhanced standard, and more than 90 percent thought the features were worth paying a premium. Further questioning indicated that respondents were willing to pay a premium of about 1 percent, consistent with the estimated additional cost. Detailed questions regarding individual features led the researchers to conclude that those features were generally considered attractive.

Conclusion

At this time, there are relatively few state and local laws that address accessibility and visitability in single-family homes. Those jurisdictions that have adopted policy demonstrate a wide variety of approaches to promoting accessibility and visitability. The most common approach appears to be requiring a basic set of visitability features in single-family homes built with some state or local subsidy. However, other approaches range from requirements for all single-family homes, to incentives and consumer awareness activities. In many cases, the features promoted are based on federal requirements for architectural features in multifamily construction. Though it is not yet clear which approach is the most effective or appropriate, an examination of different state and local legislation helps illuminate key architectural features, cost concerns, and issues of consumer and builder acceptance.

³³ David Bonnett and Nicholas Walliman, “Residents’ Perception of Lifetime Homes,” David Bonnett Architects. Summary available at the Joseph Rountree Foundation website, <http://www.jrf.org.uk>.

Appendix A: State and Local Laws

Atlanta Ordinance

AN ORDINANCE

BY: COUNCIL MEMBER MYRTLE DAVIS

AN ORDINANCE ADDING A NEW SECTION TO THE CITY OF ATLANTA CODE OF ORDINANCE ARTICLE

F, DIVISION 3 ENTITLED: BARRIER FREE REQUIREMENTS WHERE FUNDING OR ASSISTANCE FROM PUBLIC FUNDS IS RECEIVED, PARAGRAPH 8-2182

WHEREAS, no statutory requirements presently exist on a state or local level to require that new single-family, duplex or triplex dwellings be constructed to provide accessible housing for disabled persons; and

WHEREAS, people with disabilities and their immediate families are often isolated into their own homes because the homes of most of their acquaintances contain insurmountable barriers, and often experience difficulty in finding a suitable house to rent or buy; and

WHEREAS, certain features in construction make new houses visitable, and in many cases livable, for persons with disabilities.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ATLANTA, GEORGIA, as follows:

SECTION 1: Statement of Intent.

The provisions of this ordinance are specifically enacted to further the policy of the city of Atlanta to provide that new single-family, duplexes and triplexes which are constructed with public funds, as herein described, be provided with design features to provide accessibility and usability for physically disabled people.

The purpose of this ordinance is to specially promulgate certain standards which may be less restrictive than ANSI A117.1 while economically providing solutions to accessibility.

SECTION 2: Applicability.

The following regulations shall be applicable to new, single-family dwellings, duplexes, and triplexes which receive city assistance. For purposes of this (code section) "city assistance" shall mean funding or assistance from the City of Atlanta, or any agent thereof, through any of the following means: (i) receipt of a building contract or similar contractual agreement involving any city-funded program or fund, including but not limited to the Urban Residential Finance authority (URFA), the Housing Trust Fund, or similar programs; (ii) real estate purchased, leased or donated from the City of Atlanta or any agency thereof, (iii) receipt of preferential tax treatment, bond assistance, mortgage assistance, or similar financial advantages derived from the City of Atlanta, or any agency thereof; (iv) dispersal under city auspices of any Federal or State construction funds such as CDBG; or (v) receipt of any other funding or financial benefit from the city of Atlanta or any agency thereof.

SECTION 3: Design Requirements.

The following design requirements shall apply:

Requirement 1. Building Entrances.

Applicable dwelling units shall be designed and constructed to have at least one building entrance on an accessible route served by a ramp complying with ANSI A117.1-1986, Section 4.8, having a maximum slope not to exceed twelve (1:12), unless it is impractical to do so because of terrain or unusual characteristics of the sight. Such building entrance doors shall comply with ANSI A117.1, 4.13, and shall have a minimum clear opening of 32 inches.

Any entrance at the front, side or back of acceptable as long as it is served by an accessible route such as a garage or sidewalk.

Requirement 2. Interior door criteria.

All dwelling units, whether or not on an accessible route, shall be designed in such a manner that all the doors designed to allow passage into and within all premises are sufficiently wide to allow passage by persons in wheel chairs. Lever hardware is required.

Doors, except those serving closets less than 15 feet square in area, within individual dwelling units intended for user passage must provide minimum 32" clear opening. A 2' 10" door or standard 6' 0" sliding patio door assembly is deemed sufficient to comply with this requirement, provided however, compliance with ANSI Section 4.13.6 (Maneuvering Clearance at Doors) shall not be mandatory.

Requirement 3. accessible routes into and through the dwelling unit.

An accessible route shall be designed and constructed in such a manner that a 36" wide level route, except at doors, must be provided through the main floor of the unit with ramped or beveled changes at door thresholds.

Requirement 4. Wall reinforcement in bathroom.

Reinforcement in the walls shall be provided at designated locations as specified by ANSI A 117.1, Section 4.24, Section 4.32, figure 48 and figure 49 so that grab bars may be installed, if needed, at a later date without the necessity of removing portions of the existing wall.

Requirement 5. Light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats and other environmental controls.

All applicable dwelling units shall be designed and constructed in such a manner that all premises contain light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats and other controls in accessible locations.

Controls shall meet the requirements of ANSI A117.1, Section 4.25. Where multiple controls serve the same elements (e.g., two remote switches for a light) only one need be accessible.

Section 4: Contracts.

The provisions of this (code section) shall be incorporated in all city of Atlanta contracts.

Section 5: Waiver of Exterior Disability Accessibility Regulations.

The requirements of Section 3 Requirement 1 (Building Entrances) herein may be waived by the Commissioner of the Department of Housing or (Commissioner), through the issuance of an "Exterior Disability Accessibility Waiver" ("waiverx").

A person requesting said waiver shall file an application for disability accessibility waiver with the Commissioner, including all documents necessary to prove the existence of the exemption standard herein. The application shall demonstrate that typographical conditions on the sight render it impossible to comply with the provisions of said section.

If the application so demonstrates, the Commissioner shall issue an Exterior Disability Accessibility Waiver to the applicant, in writing, within ten (10) days of receipt of a completed application which shall become an official component of any issued contract. The Commissioner shall retain a copy of said waiver in the Department's official records, and shall also forward a copy of said waiver to the Director of the Bureau of Buildings at the time of issuance.

Section 6: All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with this ordinance are hereby repeal to the extent of said conflict.

Section 7: This ordinance shall become effective immediately upon approval by the Mayor or upon becoming law without approval.

ADOPTED as amended by Council June 15, 1992
APPROVED by the Mayor June 18, 1992

Austin Ordinance

Ordinance No. 981007-A

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 7-1 OF THE CITY CODE TO REQUIRE BARRIER-FREE RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION WHERE CITY FUNDS ARE EXPENDED.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

PART 1. The City Council finds that:

1. Persons with disabilities and their immediate families are often isolated in their homes because the homes of most of their acquaintances contain barriers insurmountable to persons with disabilities;
2. Person with disabilities and their immediate families often experience difficulty in finding suitable housing; and
3. There are features in construction which can make new houses visitable, and in many cases livable, for persons with disabilities.

PART 2. Statement of Intent. The provisions of this ordinance are enacted to implement the City's policy that new single-family dwellings, duplexes, and triplexes constructed with public funds be constructed using design features that provide accessibility and usability for persons disabilities, and to promulgate standards that may be less restrictive than ANSI A117.1 while economically providing greater opportunity for accessibility.

PART 3. Chapter 7-1 of the City Code is amended to add Article IV to read as follows:

ARTICLE IV. ACCESSIBILITY IN HOUSING CONSTRUCTED WITH PUBLIC FUNDS

DIVISION 1. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Sec. 7-1-171 APPLICABILITY.

- A. Except as otherwise provided in this section, this article applies to the new construction of a single-family dwelling, duplex, and triplex after the effective date of this article that is funded with financial assistance from the City.
- B. This article does not apply to an application for financial assistance from the City on a dwelling structure for which a certificate of occupancy has been issued under the City of Austin Building Code.
- C. City financial assistance covered by this article includes:
 1. a building contract or similar contractual agreement involving a City-funded program or fund, including the Austin Housing Finance Corporation, or a similar program;
 2. a real estate purchase, lease, or donation by the City or its agents;
 3. preferential tax treatment, bond assistance, mortgage assistance, or similar financial advantages from the City or its agents;
 4. disbursement of federal or state construction funds including a Community Development Block Grant; or
 5. a City contract to provide funding or a financial benefit for housing.

Sec. 7-1-172 WAIVER OF EXTERIOR ACCESSIBILITY REGULATIONS

- A. A person requesting a waiver under this section must file an application with the building official, attaching any documents necessary to demonstrate the applicant's eligibility for the waiver.
- B. The building official may waive the requirements of Section 7-1-181 by issuing an exterior disability accessibility waiver if the applicant demonstrates that the topographical conditions of a site render compliance with this article an undue hardship.
- C. When the building official receives a waiver application, the building official shall post a notice stating that:
 1. the building official has received the application;
 2. written comments may be filed with the building official not later than the 10th day after the notice of application was posted; and a decision on the application will be made and posted not later than the 15th day after the notice of application was posted.
- D. If the building official determines that the waiver is appropriate, the building official shall issue a waiver to the applicant, in writing, not later than the 15th day after the notice of application is posted.

Sec. 7-1-173 APPEAL.

- A. A waiver applicant or a person who submits written comments under Section 7-1-172 (C)(2) may appeal a decision of the building officials under Section 7-1-172 to the Building and Fire Code Board by filling a written notice to appeal with the building official not later than the 20th day after the decision was issued.
- B. The building official shall forward a copy of the notice of appeal to the City Clerk and request a hearing of the appeal on the next available Building and Fire Code Board meeting.

Sec. 7-1-174 MONITORING REQUIRED The City Manager shall monitor the administration of this article.

DIVISION 2. DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS Sec. 7-1-181 BUILDING ENTRANCES.

- A. A dwelling unit must provide at least one building entrance that complies with the City of Austin Building Code standard for an accessible entrance on an accessible route served by a ramp or no-step entrance. A building entrance door must have a minimum net clear opening of 32 inches.
- B. The entrance may be at the front, side, or back of a dwelling as long as it is served by an accessible route such as a garage or sidewalk.

Sec. 7-1-182 INTERIOR DOORS

Except for a door that provides access to a closet of fewer than 15 square feet in area, interior doors located on the first floor of a dwelling unit must have a minimum clear opening of at least 30 inches. A 2' 8" door or standard 6'0" sliding patio door assembly complies with this requirement. Lever door handle hardware is required on the affected doors.

Sec. 7-1-183 ACCESSIBLE ROUTES WITHIN THE DWELLING UNIT.

A dwelling unit must provide an accessible route through the hallways and passageways of the first floor of the dwelling unit. The route must provide a minimum width of 36 inches and be level with ramped or beveled changes at door thresholds.

Sec. 7-1-184 WALL REINFORCEMENT IN BATHROOMS

First floor bathroom walls of a dwelling unit must be designed and constructed with reinforcements using the following standards:

- 1. Lateral two-inch x six-inch or larger nominal wood blocking must be installed flush with stud engines of bathroom walls.
- 2. The centerline of the blocking must be 34 inches from and parallel to the floor.

Sec. 7-1-185 LIGHT SWITCHES, ELECTRICAL OUTLETS, THERMOSTATS, AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROLS.

- A. A light switch, thermostats, or electrical panel located on the first floor must be no higher than 42 inches above the floor. Receptacles must be at least 18 inches above the floor.
- B. An electrical panel located outside the dwelling unit must be no higher than 42 inches above the ground, at least 18 inches above the ground, and adjacent to an accessible route.

PART 4. The Council waives the requirements of Sections 2-2-3 and 2-2-7 of the City Code for this ordinance.

PART 5. This ordinance takes effect on November 1, 1998.

PASSED AND APPROVED October 7, 1998.

Urbana Ordinance

ORDINANCE NO. 2000-09-105

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE 1989 CABO ONE- AND TWO-FAMILY DWELLING CODE

WHEREAS, the Urbana City council finds the following:

- a. That persons with disabilities and their immediate families are often isolated in their homes because most homes contain barriers to persons with disabilities; and
- b. That persons with disabilities and their immediate families often experience difficulty finding suitable, affordable housing; and
- c. That there are features in construction that can make new house visitable, and in many cases livable, for persons with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the Urbana City Council finds that it is appropriate to implement visitable construction standards for single and two-family construction in projects where the City participates; and

Whereas, the Urbana City Council finds that it is appropriate to promulgate standards that may be less restrictive than the Illinois Accessibility Code and the accessibility requirements contain in the City of Urbana Building Codes for larger construction projects.

WHEREAS, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF URBANA, ILLINOIS, as follows:

Section 1. That the City of Urbana Building Code is hereby amended as follows:

- a. The 1989 CABO One- And Two-Family Dwelling Code as previously adopted by the Urbana City Council is hereby amended to include Appendix F entitled "Visibility Standards" and to read as follows:

Section F - 101 (Scope)

The provisions of this appendix shall control the design of visitability features in new construction of one and two family dwellings funded with financial assistance originating from or flowing through the City of Urbana and shall supersede other requirements of this code.

Section F - 102 (Definitions)

Public Funds means funds subject to the control or regulation of the City of Urbana, Illinois or any of its officers in their official capacity, except pension

Financial Assistance means providing public funds intended to be used for paying for labor or materials in the construction of a new single-family or two-family structure. It also includes use of public funds to acquire the parcel of land or the donation of the parcel of land owned by the City, on which a new single-family or two-family structure is to be constructed. Such financial assistance shall not include infrastructure, sanitary or storm sewer or other public infrastructure improvements.

Section F - 103 Applicability

For the purpose of this section "new construction" shall include the construction of a new single-family or duplex dwelling on a vacant lot. It shall not include additions to or remodeling of existing buildings. Such financial assistance shall include funds only used for the purchase of land or the donation of land from the City used to construct structures governed by this ordinance. It shall also include funds used for the actual construction of the governed structures, but shall not include infrastructure installation such as sanitary or storm sewers, streets or other costs.

If public funds are utilized to upgrade a particular element(S) of a structure for hazard mitigation, such as higher wind resistance, tornado shelters or other similar features, it shall not in and of itself, require the building to meet the requirements of this section.

Section F - 104 Visitability Features

F-104.1 - No step entrance: There shall be at least one entrance (front, side, rear, or through the garage) which has no steps and is served by walks and/or ramps meeting the specifications of section F-103.2.

F-104.2 - Visitable Route: The required no step entrance shall be accessed via a visitable route that shall meet the following criteria.

F-104.2.1 Grade: Sidewalks and ramps that are part of a visitable route shall have the maximum slope and length shown in Table Number F-103.1

Table F-104.1 Max Grade and length for visitable route elements

ELEMENTS	GRADE	LENGTH
Sidewalks	1/20	N/L
Type 1 Ramp	1/8	5' (Max 7.5" rise)
Type 2 Ramp	1/10	12' (Max 14.5" rise)
Type 3 Ramp	1/12	30' (between landings)_

F-104.2.2 Width: The visitable route shall have a minimum clear width of 36 inches.

F-104.2.3 Landings: Landings in a visitable route shall be not less than 36" by 36" clear or shall meet the requirements of Section 400.

Illustration B, Figures 7 or 25 of the Illinois Accessibility Code - (4/24/97) whichever is greater.

F-104.2.4 Surfaces: Surfaces shall be non-slip.

F-104.2.5 Drainage cross slope: Cross slope shall be no greater than 1/50.

F-104.3 Doors/Openings: All doors or openings shall have a minimum net clear width of 32".
Exception: Doors to closets with an area of 15 square feet shall be excluded from this requirement.

F-104.4 Bathroom Walls: Each bathroom or other room containing a toilet, bathtub, shower stall, or shower seat shall have reinforcing in the walls to allow for future installation of grab bars around those fixtures.

F-104.5 Corridors: Corridors shall be at least 36" in width.

F-104.6 Environmental Controls:

F-104.6.1 Wall Electrical Outlets: Wall electrical outlets shall be mounted at least 15 inches above the finished floor.

F-104.6.2 Light switches, thermostats and other controls: Light switches, thermostats and other control devices shall be mounted no higher than 48 inches above the finished floor.

F-105. Waivers. In cases where site conditions or other restrictions warrant, waivers from this code may be granted by the Urbana City Council after consideration and recommendation of the Building Code Board of Appeals (Board). Said waivers will be forwarded to the City Council only if the Board recommends their approval by majority vote of the members present and voting. If the Board does not reach a favorable recommendation, the waiver is denied and the Board's findings will be the final administrative decision on such a waiver. The City Council shall have the authority to grant or deny waiver requests that the Board forwards.

Section 2. The City Clerk is directed to publish this Ordinance in pamphlet form by authority of the corporate authorities, and this Ordinance shall be in full force and effect from and after its passage and publication in accordance with Section 1-2-4 of the Illinois Municipal Code.

Georgia Visitability Law

SB 443

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED AN ACT

To amend Article 3 of Chapter 3 of Title 8 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the State Office of Housing, so as to provide that single-family affordable housing constructed with state or federal funds awarded by the State Office of Housing shall contain certain features to make such housing more accessible to persons with mobility impairments; to authorize the State Office of Housing to grant certain waivers; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Article 3 of Chapter 3 of Title 8 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the State Office of Housing, is amended by adding at the end thereof a new Code Section 8-3-172 to read as follows:

8-3-172.

(a) The State Office of Housing shall award state or federal funds to construct single-family affordable housing for individuals and families of low and very low income only to persons whose application indicates that the affordable housing that is the subject of the application and for which a building permit is issued on or after July 1, 2000, will be constructed so that:

(1) At least one entrance door, whether located at the front, side, or back of the building:

(A) Is on an accessible route served by a ramp or no-step entrance; and

(B) Has at least a standard 36 inch door;

(2) On the first floor of the building:

(A) Each interior door is at least a standard 32 inch door, unless the door provides access only to a closet of less than 15 square feet in area;

(B) Each hallway has a width of at least 36 inches and is level, with ramped or beveled changes at each door threshold;

(C) Each bathroom wall is reinforced for potential installation of grab bars;

(D) Each electrical panel or breaker box, light switch, or thermostat is not higher than 48 inches above the floor; and

(E) Each electrical plug or other receptacle is at least 15 inches above the floor; and

(3) The main breaker box is located inside the building on the first floor.

(b) A person who builds single-family affordable housing to which this Code section applies may obtain a waiver from the State Office of Housing of the requirement described in subparagraph (a)(1)(A) of this Code section if the cost of grading and other improvements to the terrain which are required in order to meet the requirement of such subparagraph is unreasonably expensive."

SECTION 2.

This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2000.

SECTION 3.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.

Signed into law 4/20/00

Minnesota Visitability Law

HF5 (Special Session)/ Ch.4 Art. 4 Sec. 35

VISITABILITY REQUIREMENT

All new construction of single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes, and multilevel townhouses that are financed in whole or in part by the agency* must incorporate basic visitability access into their design and construction. For the purpose of this section, "visitability" means designing a dwelling so that people with mobility impairments may enter and comfortably stay for a duration. The specific design elements include one no-step entrance, 32-inch clear doorways throughout the dwelling, and a one-half bathroom on the main level. The agency may waive the one-half bathroom requirement if it reduces affordability for the targeted population of the agency program from which it is funded. The agency may waive the no-step entrance requirement if site conditions make the requirement impractical or if it reduces affordability for the targeted population of the agency program from which it is funded. This section does not apply to owner-occupied housing financed by the agency through a mortgage program unless the agency has provided appropriated funds to finance the construction of the new owner-occupied housing.

Approved by Governor June 30, 2001

Effective July 1, 2001

* Note: Refers to Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA)

Texas Visitability Law

Senate Bill 623

AN ACT

relating to certain requirements applicable to the construction of affordable housing.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Subchapter X, Chapter 2306, Government Code, is amended by adding Section 2306.514 to read as follows:

Sec. 2306.514. CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS FOR SINGLE-FAMILY AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

(a) If a person is awarded state or federal funds by the department to construct single-family affordable housing for individuals and families of low and very low income, the affordable housing identified on the person's funding application must be constructed so that:

- (1) at least one entrance door, whether located at the front, side, or back of the building:
 - (A) is on an accessible route served by a ramp or no-step entrance; and
 - (B) has at least a standard 36-inch door;
- (2) on the first floor of the building:
 - (A) each interior door is at least a standard 32-inch door, unless the door provides access only to a closet of less than 15 square feet in area;
 - (B) each hallway has a width of at least 36 inches and is level, with ramped or beveled changes at each door threshold;
 - (C) each bathroom wall is reinforced for potential installation of grab bars;
 - (D) each electrical panel or breaker box, light switch, or thermostat is not higher than 48 inches above the floor; and
 - (E) each electrical plug or other receptacle is at least 15 inches above the floor; and
- (3) each breaker box is located inside the building on the first floor.

(b) A person who builds single-family affordable housing to which this section applies may obtain a waiver from the department of the requirement described by Subsection (a)(1)(A) if the cost of grading the terrain to meet the requirement is prohibitively expensive.

SECTION 2. The change in law made by this Act applies only to single-family affordable housing for which new construction begins on or after the effective date of this Act. Affordable housing for which new construction begins before the effective date of this Act is covered by the law in effect when the construction began, and the former law is continued in effect for that purpose.

SECTION 3. This Act takes effect September 1, 1999.

SECTION 4. The importance of this legislation and the crowded condition of the calendars in both houses create an emergency and an imperative public necessity that the constitutional rule requiring bills to be read on three several days in each house be suspended, and this rule is hereby suspended.

Signed into law 6/20/99

Vermont Visitability Law

N. 88 AN ACT RELATING TO RESIDENTIAL HOUSING STANDARDS

H.612

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS

The general assembly finds that:

- (1) People over 65 are the fastest growing sector of the American population and life expectancies continue to increase. 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.
- (2) The increased cost of constructing a residence with doorways wide enough to permit wheelchair access, electrical outlets reachable by a wheelchair-bound person, and bathroom walls reinforced to permit installation of grab bars is minimal, while the costs and disruption associated with retrofitting an existing home to be minimally accessible are substantial.
- (3) A residence that provides minimal accessibility offers the possibility of occupancy or visitation by a disabled person. An occupant of a home that has wide doorways and reachable outlets who becomes disabled, whether temporarily or permanently, may be able to remain at home and avoid or delay the great expense and emotional trauma of institutionalization.

Sec. 2. 21 V.S.A. § 274(c) is added to read:

Unless required by federal law, any single dwelling unit of two or more stories within a building consisting of four or more dwelling units is not required to have a vertical access within the dwelling unit, provided that five percent of the dwelling units, or one unit, whichever is greater, has an accessible entrance, and all the dwelling units meet or exceed the minimum standards required in section 286 of this title.

Sec. 3. 21 V.S.A. chapter 4 is redesignated as follows:

CHAPTER 4. ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS FOR
PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND PARKING
Subchapter 1. Public Buildings and Parking

Sec. 4. 21 V.S.A. chapter 4, subchapter 2 is added to read:

Subchapter 2. Residential Building Standards

§ 286. ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS; RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION

- (a) For the purposes of this subchapter, "residential construction" means new construction of one family or multifamily dwellings. "Residential construction" shall not include a single-family dwelling built by the owner for the personal occupancy of the owner and the owner's family, or the assembly or placement of residential construction that is prefabricated or manufactured out of state.
- (b) Any residential construction shall be built to comply with all the following standards:
 - (1) At least one first floor exterior door that is at least 36 inches wide.
 - (2) First floor interior doors between rooms that are at least 34 inches wide or open doorways that are at least 32 inches wide with thresholds that are level, ramped or beveled.
 - (3) Interior hallways that are level and at least 36 inches wide.
 - (4) Environmental and utility controls and outlets that are located at heights that are in compliance with standards adopted by the Vermont access board.
 - (5) Bathroom walls that are reinforced to permit attachment of grab bars.
- (c) A violation of this section shall neither affect marketability nor create a defect in title of the residential construction.

Sec. 5. DEPARTMENT OF AGING AND DISABILITIES; VISITABLE HOUSING INFORMATION

- (a) The commissioner of aging and disabilities, in consultation with the commissioners of labor and industry and housing and community affairs and representatives from the homebuilding industry, shall prepare a pamphlet that explains the construction standards and advantages of "visitabile" housing, including zero-step entries and other accessibility features, to assist potential new homebuyers make informed decisions. The pamphlets shall be completed no later than December 1, 2001. For the purposes of this section, "a visitabile home" is a dwelling unit that is built, at a minimum, in accordance with the provisions in 21 V.S.A. § 286(b).
- (b) The department shall work with interested parties, including home builders, lending institutions, real estate brokers and consumer groups to promote and facilitate timely distribution of the pamphlets to persons purchasing or contracting for residential construction. On or before March 15, 2002, the commissioner of aging and disabilities shall report to the general assembly on the success of the efforts to distribute the pamphlets to homebuyers prior to construction.
- (c) The department of aging and disabilities may award incentive funds, through a competitive process, to build a model home to demonstrate the feasibility of constructing a "visitabile" home.

Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage, except that Sec. 4 shall apply to residential construction begun after July 1, 2001.

Approved: April 27, 2000

Georgia Accessibility Tax Credit

HB 1621
Introduced 2/11/98
Signed into law 4/2/1998

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

To amend Article 2 of Chapter 7 of Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the imposition, rate, and computation of income tax, so as to provide for a tax credit with respect to purchasing or retrofitting certain single-family homes with accessibility features; to provide for conditions, limitations, and exclusions; to provide for authority of the state revenue commissioner with respect to the foregoing; to provide an effective date; to provide for applicability; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Article 2 of Chapter 7 of Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the imposition, rate, and computation of income tax, is amended by adding a new Code section immediately following Code Section 48-7-29, to be designated Code Section 48-7-29.1, to read as follows:

48-7-29.1.

(a) As used in this Code section, the term:

(1) 'Accessibility features' means:

(A) One no-step entrance allowing access into the residence;

(B) Interior passage doors providing a 32-inch wide clear opening;

(C) Reinforcements in bathroom walls allowing later installation of grab bars around the toilet, tub, and shower, where such facilities are provided; and

(D) Light switches and outlets placed in accessible locations.

(2) 'Taxpayer' means a permanently disabled person who has been issued a permanent permit under subsection (c) of Code Section 40-6-222 or a person who has been issued a special permanent permit under subsection (e) of Code Section 40-6-222.

(b) A taxpayer shall be allowed a credit against the tax imposed by Code Section 48-7-20 as follows:

(1) In the amount of \$500.00 with respect to the purchase during that taxable year of a new, single-family home containing all of the accessibility features defined under subsection (a) of this Code section; or

(2) For qualifying expenditures made to retrofit an existing, single-family home with one or more accessibility features as defined under subsection (a) of this Code section, a credit shall be allowed with respect to each such accessibility feature in the amount of \$125.00 or the actual cost of such accessibility feature, whichever is lower, provided that the aggregate amount of such credit under this paragraph for such accessibility features shall not exceed \$500.00.

(c) In no event shall the total amount of the tax credit under this Code section for a taxable year exceed \$500.00 per residence or the taxpayer's income tax liability, whichever is less. Any unused tax credit shall be allowed to be carried forward to apply to the taxpayer's next three succeeding years' tax liability. No such tax credit shall be allowed the taxpayer against prior years' tax liability.

(d) The commissioner shall promulgate any rules and regulations necessary to implement and administer this Code section."

SECTION 2.

This Act shall become effective on January 1, 1999, and shall be applicable to all taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 1999.

SECTION 3.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.

Illinois Accessible Housing Demonstration Grant Program

Public Act 91-0451

HB2492

AN ACT to create a demonstration grant program to build accessible housing.

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois, represented in the General Assembly:

Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Accessible Housing Demonstration Grant Program Act.

Section 5. Definitions. In this Act:

"Authority" means the Illinois Housing Development Authority.

"Spec home" means a private single-family residence constructed by a builder or individual for sale on the open market and not built for an individual for immediate occupancy.

Section 10. Accessibility demonstration grant program. Subject to appropriation for this purpose, the Authority shall establish a demonstration grant program to encourage the building of spec homes that are accessible to the disabled. Through the program the Authority shall provide grants to builders who build spec homes meeting the basic access standards described in Section 15. The goal of the demonstration program shall be that at least 10% of all new spec homes within a development participating in the demonstration grant program for which construction begins 6 or more months after the effective date of this Act meet the minimum standards for basic access as described in Section 15.

Builders who wish to participate in the demonstration grant program shall submit a grant application to the Authority in accordance with rules promulgated by the Authority. The Authority shall prescribe by rule standards and procedures for the provision of demonstration grant funds in relation to each grant application.

Section 15. Basic access standards. Every spec home for which a builder is eligible to receive a grant under this Act shall include the following features:

(1) The home shall have at least one no-step exterior entrance with a 36-inch-wide entrance door to allow for wheelchair access into the home.

(2) All interior passage doors in the home shall allow at least 32 inches of clearance in width.

(3) No electrical outlet in the home shall be lower than 15 inches from the finished floor and no light switch in the home shall be more than 48 inches from the finished floor. All environmental controls in the home shall be in accessible locations.

(4) In each bathroom or other room containing a toilet, bathtub, shower stall, or shower seat, the walls adjacent to those fixtures shall be reinforced in a manner that will allow the later installation of grab bars around those fixtures.

Section 20. Task Force on Housing Accessibility. There is created a Task Force on Housing Accessibility. The Task Force shall consist of 7 members who shall be appointed by the Governor as follows: the executive vice president of the Illinois Association of Realtors or his or her designee, the executive vice president of the Home Builders Association of Illinois or his or her designee, an architect with expertise and experience in designing accessible housing for persons with disabilities, a senior citizen, a person with disabilities, a representative from the Attorney General's Office, and the Director of the Authority or his or her designee. The terms of the Task Force members shall last 4 years and shall begin 60 days after the effective date of this Act, or as soon thereafter as all members of the Board have been appointed. At the expiration of the term of each Task Force member, and of each succeeding Task Force member, or in the event of a vacancy, the Governor shall appoint a Task Force member to hold office, in the case of a vacancy, for the unexpired term, or in the case of expiration, for a term of 4 years or until a successor is appointed by the Governor. The members shall receive no compensation for their services on the Task Force but shall be reimbursed by the Authority for any ordinary and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties.

The Task Force shall provide recommendations to builders regarding the types of accommodations needed in new housing stock for disabled persons. The recommendations shall include provisions on how to build homes that will retain their resale and aesthetic value.

Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon becoming law.

Signed into law September 1999.

Appendix B: United Kingdom – Part M Standards and Comparison to Rountree Foundation ‘Lifetime Standard’

	Part M Standard	Lifetime Standard	Notes:
	Width of approach, excluding space for a parked car, should take account of the needs of a wheelchair, stick or crutch. Excluding the car parking space, the path should not be less than 900 mm wide.	Where there is car parking adjacent to the home, it should be capable of enlargement to attain 3,300 mm width	When the space for the car is included, the width of the Part M standard is probably very close to the Lifetime standard
	The approach should be as safe and as convenient for disabled people as is reasonable, and, ideally, be level or gently sloping. If the plot gradient is less than 1:20 then no part of the approach must be steeper than 1:20. If the plot gradient is between 1:15 and 1:20, then individual slopes of 5 meters or less may have gradients up to 1:12 and individual slopes 5 to 10 meters in length may have gradients up to 1:15. Paths should be at least 900mm wide.	The approach to all entrances should be level of gently sloping. The distance from the car parking space to the home should be kept to a minimum and should be level or gently sloping. It is preferable to have a level approach. Where topography prevents this, a maximum gradient of 1:12 is permissible on an individual slope of less than 5 meters or 1:15 if it is between 5 and 10 meters, and 1:20 where it is more than 10 meters. Paths should be a minimum of 900mm width.	
	An accessible threshold at the entrance should be provided. Where unavoidable, a maximum 15mm upstand may be incorporated.	All entrances should be illuminated and have accessible level access over the threshold level and the main entrance should be covered.	
	Where a lift is provided, it should be suitable for an unaccompanied wheelchair user. There should be a clear landing entrance to the lift of 1500x1500mm, and the minimum internal dimensions of the lift should be 900x1250mm. The lift controls should be between 900 and 1200mm from the floor and 400mm from the lift's internal front wall. There should be tactile control buttons and visual and audible story indicators in blocks of more than three stories.	Communal stairs should provide easy access, and where homes are reached by a lift it should be fully wheelchair accessible. The minimum dimensions and control positioning/specification should be as described in the Part M standard, above, except that the internal dimensions of the lift should be 1100x1400mm.	
	Doors and corridors should be wide enough to allow wheelchair users to maneuver into and out of rooms (including one that contains a water closet). The entrance door must always be at least 775mm in width. The internal doorways and corridor widths should be at least 750mm and 900 mm respectively (may be greater depending on approach)	The entrance door must always be at least 775mm in width. The internal doorways and corridor widths should be at least 750mm and 900 mm respectively (may be greater depending on approach) There should be 300mm to the side of the leading edge of the doors on the entrance level (this would usually only apply to the front door, as other doors open into the room). There should be space for turning in a wheelchair	
		The design should incorporate a provision for a future stair lift, an identified space for a potential through-the-floor lift from the entrance level to the first floor. There should be a minimum of 900mm clear distance between the stair wall (on which the lift would normally be located) and the edge of the opposite handrail/balustrade. Unobstructed ‘landings’ are needed at the top and bottom of the stairs.	
		The design should provide for a reasonable route for a potential hoist from a main bedroom to the bathroom.	
	A water closet should be provided in the entrance story of the dwelling and should be located so that there is no need to negotiate a stair to reach it from the habitable rooms in that	There should be a wheelchair accessible entrance level water closet, with drainage provision enabling a shower to be fitted in the future. In dwellings of three bedrooms or more, a	

	<p>story. The water closet compartment should provide a clear space for wheelchair users to access the water closet. The washbasin should be positioned so that it does not impede this access. The clear usable space between the front of the water closet bowl and the opposite wall/door should be a minimum of 750mm. The distance from the central line of the cistern and the adjoining wall should be a minimum of 450mm. Where oblique access is provided, there should be a minimum of 250mm to the side of the door. The water closet door will need to open outward.</p>	<p>wheelchair user should be able to close the door from within the closet and achieve side transfer from a wheelchair to at least one side of the water closet. There must be at least 1100mm clear space from the front of the water closet bowl. The door of the water closet will often need to open outward to allow this accessibility. In small two-bedroom dwellings where the design has failed to achieve this fully accessible water closet, the Part M standard water closet will meet this standard.</p>	
		<p>Walls in bathrooms and water closets should be capable of taking adaptations such as handrails. Reinforcements should be located between 300 and 1500mm from the floor.</p>	
		<p>The bathroom should be designed to incorporate ease of access to the bath, water closet, and wash basin.</p>	
		<p>Living room window glazing should begin at 800mm or lower and windows should be easy to open/operate.</p>	
	<p>Switches and socket outlets for lighting and other equipment should be located so that they are easily reachable (ie, between 450 and 1200mm from the floor).</p>	<p>Switches, sockets, ventilation and service controls should be at a height usable by all (ie, between 450 and 1200mm from the floor).</p>	

Source: Joseph Rountree Foundation