

Visitability

Center for Accessible Living
David Allgood



What is Visit-ability?

Visit-ability, sometimes called inclusive home design, basic home access, core universal design or by any other name is a campaign for meaningful policy requiring a few essential access features in every new home.

Visitability involves “a few essential access features” :

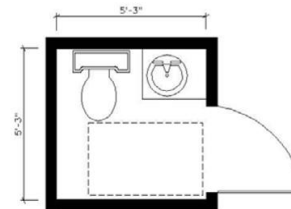
- One zero-step entrance on an accessible route—at the back, side or front of the home, or through the garage



- All main floor interior passage doors with 32 inches *clear passage space*.



- A main floor bathroom with basic maneuvering space.



Visitability Involves “access features in *every* new home....”

In new houses intended for all,
not just houses specifically designated for older people or PWD....

In whole neighborhoods, whole towns, eventually whole states....

and whole countries (for example, the United Kingdom, has required basic access in every new home since 1998).



Visitable houses from the United Kingdom






In a number of cases ramps are not built to code but the person is doing the best they can with what they have.

Typically if the house is sold, the ramp is removed and is no longer visitable.

Ramps are viewed as an eye sore and can lower property value.



Because for every home you see with an added ramp, there are many more people who have no ramp on their own houses, even though they can't get in and out. They lack the resources to modify their homes.


When it comes to health implications, the negative effects of basic barriers are major.



Many people lack resources to modify their home. They spend years unable to exit independently or get through their own bathroom door.


Public Health Effects of Barriers in Home Design

- Falls
- Inability to exit
- Bladder/kidney health
- Caregiver health
- Mental/emotional health



For example, lack of zero step entrance, increases falls. Falls are the number one reason people over 65 go to the emergency room and the number one reason they're admitted to hospitals as patients.

When we think of a person with poor balance attempting to get up a step into her house, holding her groceries while trying to manage the door, the danger of falling is high.



Another health implication is the inability to exit your home in case of fire or a gas leak or something of that nature.



Bladder and kidney health.

How can bladder and kidney problems be a result of barriers?

If you think through the inability of a person to enter a bathroom when they are visiting or even sometimes at their own home, you realize that what people do as a result is limit intake of fluids or not go to the bathroom for extensive periods of time. Saying, “Oh, I’m going to that party tonight; I had better not drink for three hours in advance.” If you do that repeatedly and chronically over time, as many mobility-impaired people do, it becomes a danger for bladder and kidney health.



Care giver health.

Numerous studies over the last few years show that the health of people who are doing major amounts of care giving is worse than the health of control groups who are not.

When you think of the stress that barriers put on care givers, you can see the added effort and worry it takes to get a neighbor or someone else to assist your loved one in and out of the house if you can't do it; the back problems that arise from attempting to carry your loved one up and down steps; and so on.



Mental and emotional health....

...the mental health fall-out of suddenly not being able to attend the family reunion everyone else will be attending

... not going to the super bowl party you have gone to for 20 years with your best friends

...being cut off from visiting other people

...or having it be so stressful that you choose not to go to their houses because of barriers.


And then suffer from loneliness, depression.

How many houses?

Of new houses built in 2000, by one measure of disability 25% and by the more likely measure 60% will have a resident with a long-term, severe mobility impairment at some point during the lifetime of the house itself.*

- *Journal of the American Planning Association, Summer, 2008*

It is not possible to predict in which houses disability will occur.



Sometimes people seem to want to correlate the number of wheelchair users at any one point in time with the number of houses needed!

When in fact the relevant population is not just wheelchair users at all, it's people who use walkers, and people who don't use a mobility device but have stiffness, weakness or poor balance.

Also, like other people, disabled people move from house to house. What we need to look at is the likelihood that a high percentage of houses will be impacted at some point by a need for access by a resident with long-term, severe mobility impairment.

Cost: Basic Access in New Homes is Extremely Affordable

Added Cost of the 2 most important features on new houses built on a concrete slab:

Zero step entrance:	\$100.00
5 wider main floor doors @ \$2	<u>\$ 10.00</u>
	\$110.00


Added Cost of the 2 most important features on new houses built over a basement:

Zero step entrance:	\$250.00
5 wider main floor doors @ \$2	<u>\$ 10.00</u>
	\$260.00

(sources of cost data available on request)

Continuing to build as we are is unaffordable:

- **Costs of Renovations (retrofits)**
 - **Medical costs due to injuries resulting from barriers**
- **Increased Institutionalization**



People often believe that these features would be, expensive or that it would be difficult to create basic access in houses.

We can look around and see access to the new bank and access to the new restaurant and we often think why would this be so expensive in a new house?

Fortunately, over the years, as advocates have succeeded locally in their areas and states to get Visit-ability mandates to occur, we have now demonstrated, with tens of thousands of existing VISIBLE houses already constructed, that the cost of the two most important features ---getting in and getting through the interior doors ---is extremely low.

And since nearly all new house plans already incorporate at least a half bath on the main floor, increasing square footage is not necessary.

Broad policies have already been put in place in some locales.



**Law: Every new house with access.
Pima County/Tucson AZ (2002)
21,000+ Visitable houses up as of 2010.**

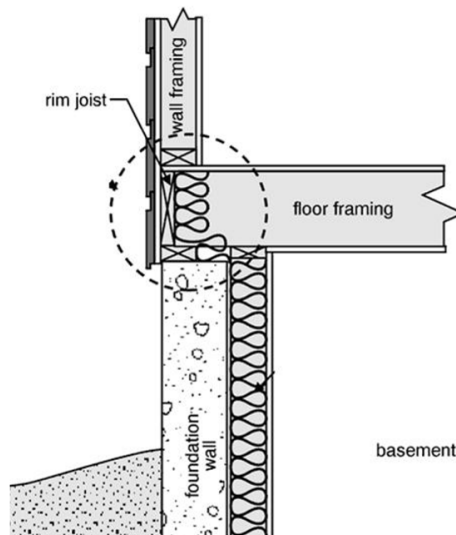


**Law: Every new house with access.
Bolingbrook IL, near Chicago (2002)
4,000+ Visitable houses up as of
2012— nearly all with basements.**

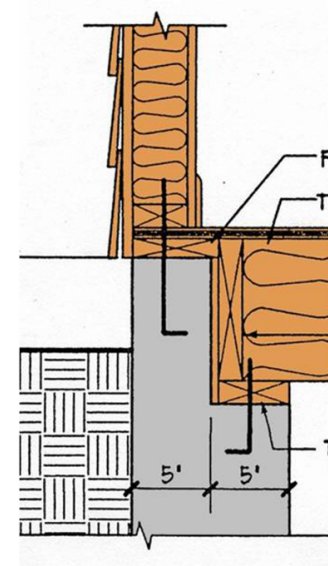
Houses on Steep Terrain



Inset Floor Joist Method for Houses with Basements or Crawl Spaces

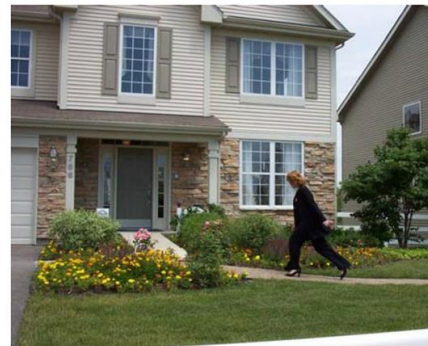


Conventional method: All of the framing is on top of the foundation.



Alternative method: Set the floor joists into a notch at the top of the foundation.

The Inset Floor Joist Method with basements permits a sidewalk to tie to the porch



Is a zero-step entrance ALWAYS practical?

Not always.

**Not if the site offers all
3 of these challenges:**

- is steep**
- AND has no driveway**
- AND has no back approach.**

**But a zero step entrance has
been demonstrated to be
practical in more than 95%
of cases.**



Policy Initiatives: Positive Examples

--Habitat for Humanity Affiliate Board
decisions to Build every new house
Visitable—Birmingham AL



--HUD Hope VI -- Extra point for developers'
applications for funding—Macon GA



Policy Initiatives/Examples, continued

Ohio Housing Finance Authority:
Board decision that developers who
receive the Low Income Tax Credit
Must incorporate Visitability



Dekalb County (Georgia) Housing
Authority— Paul Pierce -- approx.
100 homes whose owners received
first-time home owners' down
payment assistance .



Policy Initiatives/Examples, continued

**East Lake Commons--
Co-housing community
(Decatur GA): All 67
homes Visitable.**



**For-profit developer of
high-end, single-family
homes:
All homes visitable.
(Decatur GA)**





In Closing:

All Louisvillians regardless of their ability or disability should be afforded the basic right of access.

Visitability is an inexpensive alternative to traditional home building that allows everyone the same opportunity to own a new home, visit relatives or friends, and be included in the community.