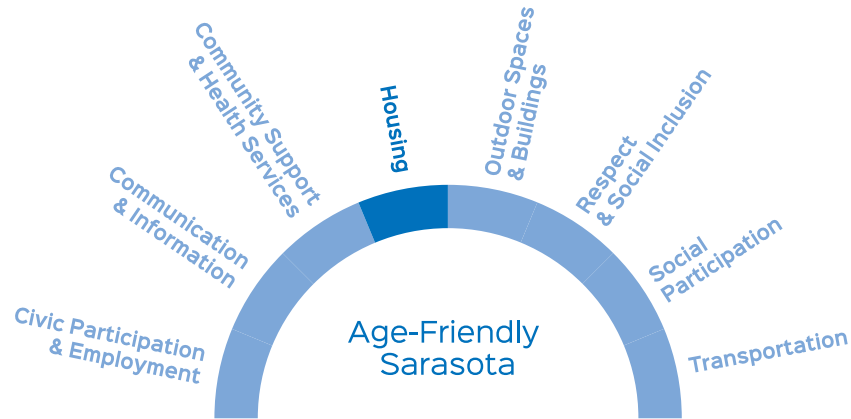




Age-Friendly Promising Practice Brief: Housing Municipal Resolution for Voluntary Universal Design and Visitability Program for Residential Housing



Summary

Increased age is associated with increased disabilities that may impact the ability to remain in one’s home.¹ Age-friendly communities are responding to the aspirations of their aging residents via a variety of domains including housing. Home construction can enable physically challenged persons of all ages to remain socially and physically engaged, and home design principles can facilitate the ability to age in place. This brief presents a municipal resolution about a voluntary Universal Design and Visitability program for residential housing units designed to promote aging in place.

What is Universal Design and Visitability?

Universal Design involves designing products and built spaces so that they can be used by the widest range of people possible. Recognizing the diversity of physical, perceptual and cognitive abilities throughout the life course, Universal Design creates amenities that are more functional and user-friendly for everyone and particularly helpful at advanced ages. According to the Center for Universal Design, there are seven principles of universal design:²

Principles of Universal Design	
1. Equitable use	5. Tolerance for error
2. Flexibility in use	6. Low physical effort
3. Simple and intuitive	7. Size and space for approach and use
4. Perceptible information	



*An initiative of The Patterson Foundation, in partnership with AARP Florida,
the Florida Policy Exchange Center on Aging at the University of South Florida, Florida Department of Elder Affairs,
Sarasota County Government and the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee.
Member of the World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.*



Visitability refers to a growing movement aiming to change construction standards so that new housing is designed to allow people with mobility impairments to live in and visit.³⁻⁵ The key features of visitability include wide doorways (at least 32 inches), at least one half bath on the main floor (preferably a full bath), and at least one zero-step entrance to buildings. Visitability does not ensure complete access in a home, but it ensures that public spaces, such as entrances, hallways, and bathrooms, are accessible to someone in a wheelchair. This minimal level of accessibility allows a person with a disability to access a home even if that person does not live there, and it allows a non-disabled person to continue residing in a home should they develop a disability.

Why is Universal Design and Visitability Important?

Universal design promotes the idea of creating places that are designed to be easily accessible and more functional to live in. Universal Design features enhance the ability to live at home for people of all ages and are particularly helpful for people who experience disabilities, which increases with age.¹ For those with physical disabilities, buildings can serve as a major obstacle to mobility. Providing for accessibility makes it easier for the disabled to be mobile, but even if a disabled person lives in an accessible building it will still be difficult for him or her to access the homes of the non-disabled. This inaccessibility makes it difficult for those with disabilities to visit friends and family. Homes accessible to people with disabilities can be just as convenient and aesthetically pleasing for the non-disabled.

Program Overview

To increase Universal Design and Visitability standards into housing at the design phase, the Sarasota County Resolution #2015 – 236 voluntary program: 1) encourages builders to increase the development and housing stock of accessible units over time via use of checklists of “standards”; 2) incentivizes builders via fast track permitting and marketing support; 3) recognizes builders via a variety of means including certification stickers and awards for builders, etc. The program is voluntary, not mandated, and the implementation of the program is cost-neutral to the local government, requiring easily executed steps to integrate into existing practices. Promotion of the program is also easily incorporated by municipal staff and outreach education will be further conducted by extant community groups such as the local builders association and aging advisory council. Evaluation metrics for the program include tracking outreach efforts as well as the number of certified properties.

References:

- ¹ Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics. (2013). *Older Americans: Key indicators of well being*. Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- ² The Center for Universal Design (1997). *The principles of universal design*, Version 2.0. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University.
- ³ Casselman, J. (2004). Visitability: A new direction for changing demographics. *Practicing Planner*. Winter.
- ⁴ Claar, R. C. , & Bowen, J.S., (2005). Visitability: The way of the future in home building. *Illinois Municipal Review*. January: 11-12.
- ⁵ Concrete Change. (2012). About visitability. Available at: <http://concretechange.org/>

Appendix:

- A: Resolution #2015 – 236 Universal Design and Visitability Program
- B: Builder Checklists for Universal Design and Visitability Standards



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