VISITABILITY

Letter To Review Board

8/18/2025

Thank you for engaging the Accessible Community Task Force in the code review process. However, we were disappointed to read:

> "Discussions have taken place with the ACTF regarding increased Visitability requirements… although consensus was not reached amongst the committee members on the appropriateness of such requirements."

Respectfully, lack of unanimous consensus shouldn't end the conversation—especially when the public interest and data are this clear. A visitability baseline (one no-step entrance, 32" clear doorways, 42" wide first floor hallways, and a wheelchair accessible first-floor half bath) delivers outsized benefits, at minimal cost, for a large share of Naperville residents and future buyers. After all, visitability doesn't just serve a mobility device user; it also supports a parent with a stroller, a traveler with luggage, or a contractor with a dolly.

A FEW KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- ***This isn't a niche need.*** Over 12% of U.S. adults live with a mobility disability (serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs). In family households broadly, disability touches about one in four. That's our neighbors, parents, kids, and veterans today, not a hypothetical future group. (CDC, Census.gov)
- ***Homes will serve disabled residents over their lifetime.*** A landmark planning study by the *Journal of the American Planning Association* estimates a 60% probability that a newly built single-family home will house at least one disabled resident at some point before 2044, and roughly one in four will house someone with self-care limitations - the kind of needs that make a step-free entry and main-floor powder room necessary. (Taylor & Francis Online, archive.news.ufl.edu)
- ***Our housing stock is far behind.*** Research from Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies shows that well under 4% of U.S. homes are even "livable" for people with mobility impairments, and only about 0.15% are fully wheelchair accessible. We cannot retrofit our way out of this gap one ramp at a time; we have to stop building new barriers. (Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies)
- ***Visitability helps everyone.*** It is what scholars call the "curb-cut effect." Step-free entries, wider clearances, and a main-floor half bath make life easier for parents with strollers, delivery workers with dollies, injured athletes, and older adults aging in place. When we design for the margins, the whole community benefits. (Stanford Social Innovation Review)
- ***It's good business.*** Studies of homeowner and homebuyer perceptions find people prefer homes with visitable features and believe they sell faster—that's improved marketability for Naperville builders and sellers. (ScienceDirect)
- ***This is bipartisan common sense.*** Former Senate Republican Leader Dan McConchie (a Naperville-area neighbor) has publicly championed policies to remove accessibility barriers, recently launching the Accessibility Policy Institute to advance exactly this kind of practical change across political lines and across the country. (WTTW News, accessibilitypolicyinstitute.org)

EDUCATE. ENABLE. ENGAGE.

A CONSTRUCTIVE PATH FORWARD:

The ACTF heartily recommends that the Naperville Building Code (1) require one no-step entrance (front, side, rear, or through the garage), (2) ensure 32" clear doorways and 42" passgeways on the main level, and (3) provide an accessible first-floor powder room with blocking in the walls for grab-bar installation. These three AARP-identified visitability features are the proven, low-cost core that delivers the greatest benefit. We'd be glad to help draft language and work with staff and builders on practical compliance options. (CDS)

We are requesting that you reopen this item for further discussion rather than closing it out due to a lack of consensus. Naperville has the opportunity to lead with smart, pro-family, pro-aging, pro-business standards that quietly make every new home more welcoming, without changing the character or aesthetics our residents value.

Thank you for considering this. We will be attending the meeting on Wednesday, August 20th to present these points. In addition, we would welcome time on the next agenda—or a working session with staff—to walk through examples and cost-neutral design approaches.

- ACTF of Naperville

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NAPERVILLE'S LAND USE MASTER PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLE #1*

Ensuring housing is diverse, responsive to community needs, and accessible to everyone.

Naperville is a community that people want to call home. Its neighborhoods provide quality housing options situated with access to attractive natural areas and open spaces.

The City's neighborhoods are distinct communities within themselves. They offer renowned amenities which support connections and interactions between residents quite uncommon in a city the size of Naperville. The uniqueness of its neighborhoods is the foundation of the strong sense of community pride and identity that both attracts new and retains lifelong residents in Naperville. Protecting and reinforcing the quality of housing is critical to supporting Naperville's neighborhoods. It is a central consideration of future policy and planning for the City.

Naperville has become increasingly diverse over the past twenty years, with the white population decreasing 20% since 1990 while all other racial groups increased. The City's housing stock needs to reflect Naperville's increasing diversity and welcome individuals from different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. This includes homes of different types, price points, styles, and densities. Increasing housing diversity will also require embracing new and emerging trends in housing, such as accessory dwelling units or microunits. These will appeal to seniors, new families, and multigenerational households while reducing the need for large developable properties as the City approaches build out. The City should emphasize housing diversity to ensure Naperville offers homes that are comfortable, affordable, and inclusive to everybody.

Housing choices should be balanced with options that ensure existing residents can remain in the community, even as their needs change over time. In particular, Naperville has an aging population, increasing the importance of homes that allow seniors to downsize and adjust their lifestyles without leaving the community.

Place Types

Guiding Principle #1 is most applicable to the Single-Family/ Duplex Residential, Medium Density Residential, and High Density Residential Place Types, as defined in Chapter 4.

Implementation Measures

- Review existing and/or consider establishing new zoning and building codes and policies to accommodate:
- Accessory dwelling units and tiny homes in residential zoning districts
- Small lot single family development, including possible revisions to the 90% rule
- Microunits in commercial zoning districts
- Parking requirement modifications for multi-family and transit-oriented development Recommendations endorsed by City Council from the Housing Needs Assessment (2020) prepared by the Housing Advisory Commission Zoning incentives for affordable and senior housing {e.g. density bonus for affordable units/universal design, reduced masonry requirements, reduced parking requirements)
- Preservation of neighborhood character and natural areas using established standards such as maximum building coverage, density restrictions, impervious area coverage and similar approaches aimed at achieving a balance between market needs and the community vision. Redevelopment that is compatible with natural resources {e.g. stormwater improvements, wildlife habitat protection, native landscaping).

* https://www.naperville.il.us/businesses/development-resources/land-use-master-plan/

IMPACT STATEMENTS

Community Testimonials

"As a person living with a progressive disability I am excited to see the work you are doing to improve home accessibility in Naperville. I am confined to a power wheelchair and this prevents me from being able to visit friends and relatives due to all doorways having steps. I miss out on sharing holidays, celebrations and visits due to accessibility issues. Unfortunately I am not alone. According to the US Census Bureau there are currently over 42 million adults in the US living with a disability. It is time for us to address the housing issue and work with developers to ensure accessibility for all homes going forward."

Vicki Ponzo, Naperville Resident, February, 2024

"I have used a wheelchair for almost my whole life, and when I was a kid, it was very difficult for me to go to friends' houses to play or for birthday parties because most of their houses had steps and did not have accessible restrooms. I missed quite a few birthday parties because I couldn't get into kids' houses, and my friends would usually come to my house to play. It would have been nice if I could have gone to my friends' houses more easily. I hope houses in the future will be more visitable so that kids with disabilities can do the things I missed out on when I was a kid."

Chris Murphy, Naperville Resident, March 2024

"I cannot go into peoples houses in my power wheeelchair because of stairs. I also cannot use the bathroom on my own because I can''t get my chair into the bathroom and there are no grab bars."

Brigid Mason, Naperville Resident, March 2024

"I am a quadriplegic who wanted to move to Naperville 18 years ago, but the cost of rehabbing a home for essential accessibility was insurmountable. Instead, I built a home in Bolingbrook, where this has been the way of life since they proposed the Visitability Code amendment in 1999. I am able to visit my neighbors effortlessly and do not face the burden of asking for accommodation just to have a social life.

However, the stark contrast in accessibility became painfully evident during this Thanksgiving when my in-laws in Naperville hosted the family gathering. My inability to attend due to the presence of steps in their home left my children and husband deeply upset. Previously, family members' were able to assist me. Now, age and injuries have made it impossible for them to continue providing the necessary support. I found myself alone at home while my family celebrated, prompting my in-laws to invest in after-market ramps to ensure my inclusion.

Consider the profound relief, freedom, and joy derived from effortlessly entering one's own home. For many, this requires no imagination, as steps present no significant challenge. However, for those with mobility challenges, a no-step entry in all new construction homes goes beyond mere convenience. It becomes a lifeline, enabling individuals to live independently, fostering social inclusion, and eliminating the need for costly home modifications. Making this feature a standard in every new home is not merely a matter of design; it signifies a commitment to building a more inclusive, accessible, and compassionate society."

Allaina Humphreys, Bolingbrook Resident, March 2024

CAN YOU TELL THE DIFFERENCE?

Homes In Bolingbrook and/or Naperville

Some residents have expressed concern over the idea that Visitable homes would be eye-sores or somehow "look accessible" in a way that would bring down property values. We present a challenge! which of these homes is a Visitable home?

A

B

A

B

It is hard to spot the difference.

However, this home to the right is what an accessible home currently looks like in Naperville - drawing negative feedback from neighbors and showing it's owner's vulnerability.

Some disabled residents have expressed concern that such after-market accessibility additions could make them a target for crime.

ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY TASK FORCE ★ EDUCATE. ENABLE. ENGAGE.

LETTER OF SUPPORT

From the Naperville Senior Task Force

February 2024

To Whom it May Concern:

The Naperville Senior Task Force (NSTF) is writing to support the Accessibility Task Force's concept of Visitability. After discussions and presentations by Mary Hamill and Vicki Ponzo, we have realized the difficulties that Persons with Disabilities have in doing a simple task like visiting their relatives and friends.

We applaud their advocacy to enhance the building codes to support such things as a zero-step entrance, minimum 36" widths for ground-floor doorways and 42" for hallways, and ground floor bathroom blocking added to the underlying structure to ease the installation of grab bars.

It is an inclusive design approach integrating a few core accessibility features as mentioned above resulting in routine construction practices. It also ensures further compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As evidenced by surrounding communities that have had these codes in existence for many years, it has not added to the cost of building.

We encourage the City of Naperville to include this design feature in their building codes, so all members of the community feel welcomed and accommodated.

Thank you for your consideration,

The Naperville Senior Task Force

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Scan the QR Codes for More Information About Visitability

ACTF Website

Contains information and links to developer letter and many local resources.

Zero Step Entry Costs Affirmed

Provides Information on cost-effective methods & dispells misconceptions about the associated expenses.

All About Visitability

A large wealth of information on Visitability from the original source, visitability.org and its creator, Concrete Change, out of Atlanta, GA.

Five Ways to Plan for More Accessible Housing

At least 25% of U.S. residents will experience a disability that impacts their daily life. This details ways to prepare America's housing stock.

PDF of AIA Presentation on Visitability

This presentation is designed to educate design professionals, government officials, and advocates on visitability.

Whole Building Design Guide Visitability Info

Overview of Visitability with photos, best practices, standards and guidelines, and Universal Design education; created in 2022.

Slide Deck with Information on Implementation

138 page guide with information on visitability and it's iplementation, created by Concrete Change

Visability FAQ

This list covers the most common misperceptions and objections about Visitability, followed by the facts.

Bolingbrook's Full Visitability Code

Full text of the Village Code of Ordinances for Visitability in new home construction.

Naperville's Building Code Amendments

Quick link to full Code Amendments on the city's website. This link is evergreen - content is always current.