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# Prince George Visitable Housing Project

Prepared for: The City of Prince George

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## Summary Report February 2011

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# Acknowledgments

## Prince George British Columbia Visitable Housing Project

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## TERMINOLOGY

To increase understanding it is necessary to clarify the difference between “accessibility” and a “visitable” home. Accessibility is a concept that applies to many aspects of the built environment. Building an “accessible” house can be a significantly greater undertaking in comparison to a few inexpensive changes to make a home “visitable.” Visitable Housing combines principles of accessibility and universal design for the three basic features (no step entrance – widened door jams – accessible first storey bathroom). The term accessibility may be discussed as well as others terms like universal design, and adaptable housing, which share similarities, but are not the same as Visitable Housing.

The terms and definitions below will be referred to throughout the Summary Report and VHP:

<b><i>First Storey:</i></b>	The uppermost storey having its floor level not more than 2 m above grade. (BC Building Code) This term can be interchangeable with main floor.
<b><i>Building of New Construction:</i></b>	Means a new building constructed as a separate entity, or an addition to an existing building where the addition has no internal pedestrian connection with the existing building. (BC Building Code)
<b><i>Accessibility:</i></b>	Refers to homes, buildings, public spaces, technology, programs and support services (etc.) being free of barriers, enabling all people to use them independently.
<b><i>Inclusion:</i></b>	Welcoming and enabling participation from everyone so that all members of a community are or at least feel included and that they belong.
<b><i>Universal Design:</i></b>	Refers to the design approach of environments, products and services that are usable by all people regardless of age, size or ability <sup>1</sup> .
<b><i>Visitability:</i></b>	An affordable and sustainable design strategy aimed at increasing the number of basic-access family homes and neighbourhoods <sup>2</sup> .

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<sup>1</sup> Mahaffey, Rebekah. (Planning for the future: Age-friendly and Disability-friendly Official Community Plans. British Columbia: Union of BC Municipalities, 2010) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Zamprelli, Jim. Understanding the Status of Visitability in Canada. Ottawa, Ontario: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2008.

**Living Room:** A space or room with no steps dedicated in the home for socializing.

**Visitable Features:** These features were based on the definition in the Lanny L.M. Silver Architect report, *Visitable Housing Cost estimate summary June 2007*, and have been modified to suit the needs of this project. The four features are as follows:

1. A home with accessible path of travel to at least one no-step entrance to the first storey to accommodate a person with limited mobility and persons using a wheelchair.
  - A path of travel with a gentle grade (maximum 1:20 or 5%) from the street, sidewalk, back lane, or the homes parking space to a first storey accessible entrance. The entrance may be located at the front, side, rear, or through the garage of the home;
  - The path of travel shall be firm, stable, and slip resistant;
  - The path of travel shall be a minimum of 36" (915mm) in width (preferred 48" (1220mm));
  - No steps shall occur along this path of travel;
  - A minimum 36" (915mm) clear width of the entrance door;
  - A no or low profile threshold at the door. Raised thresholds of 1/4" (6mm) or less do not require any special requirements. Thresholds over 1/4" (6mm) to a maximum of 1/2" (13mm) must be beveled at a maximum slope of 1:2 (50%).
2. Passable Interior Circulation on the first storey adequate for passage way to visitable washroom and living room.
  - Interior doorways – minimum 32" (810mm) (preferred 33 1/2" (850mm)) clear width;
  - Clear passage throughout with a minimum 36" (915mm) (preferred 48" (1220mm)) clear width to access first storey washroom and living-room;
3. Access to a first storey Washroom. A first storey washroom that a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, can enter, close the door, and use the facilities.
  - This would require a 5'-0" (1520mm) turning circle in front of the toilet with the washroom door not crossing the turning circle while being closed or opened;
  - Clear space under wall-hung fixtures can be included in the 5'-0" (1520mm) requirement;
  - The washroom must have at a minimum one sink and one toilet<sup>3</sup>.
  - Recommended additional feature as developed by the Prince George Visitable Housing committee. Access to a first storey living room allowing a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, to enter and use space.
4. One entrance into a living room with a minimum 36" (915mm) clearance; thus allowing a person using a mobility device to enter and exit into the living room.
  - The living room should have enough space to allow the person using a mobility device to adequately move through the space; this would require an allotted 5'-0" (1520mm) turning circle within the living room.

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<sup>3</sup> Hilderman Thoams Franks Cram Landscape Architecture and Planning. Cost estimate summary report. Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (MHRC) Visitable Housing. June 2007.

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# Visitable Housing

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*“Visitability or visitable housing is an essential element that contributes to a more livable and sustainable built environment by addressing homeowners and community needs over time”*  
(Concrete Change).

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The City of Prince George, in partnership with *Affordability and Choice Today* (ACT), has taken a positive step towards incorporating ‘Visitable Housing’ values into the infrastructure of our city. Visitable features are easily incorporated in the design and construction of new homes, and will typically not even be noticed as “special features,” however, they do make a home more functional, safe, and usable for residents and their guests. The goal of the *Prince George Visitable Housing Project* (PGVHP) is to compile a comprehensive package to assist the City of Prince George in the implementation of its myPG Social Sustainability Goal for “Affordable, Accessible Housing”. The PGVHP will develop guidelines for the *Official Community Plan* (OCP,) development review process, and also serve to inform and educate the public. The City wishes to prepare objectives, policies, guidelines and/or mandatory regulations that address visitable housing for new, market rate, single-family and two-family homes that address Visitable Housing. This project introduces the three basic features of Visitable Housing to development in Prince George and a potential fourth feature unique to the City of Prince George.

The **three features of Visitable Housing** are:

1. At least one no-step first storey entrance;
2. Adequate passage doors minimum width of 81.28 cm (32 inches) and hallways minimum width of 91.5 cm (36 inches) wide on the first storey to a visitable bathroom; and,
3. A bathroom on the first storey that allows a person using a wheelchair to enter and close the door.

A fourth principle of Visitable Housing is suggested, and proposes an addition of adequate access (doorways and hallways) to a living room or living space on the first storey floor due to our northern climate necessitating an indoor visiting space.

The scope of the Prince George Visitable Housing project includes a discussion paper, survey of stakeholders, and recommendations of best management practices and visitable options. These components were developed to attain the deliverables of the funder and are explained as follows:

1. A **discussion paper** on VISIBLE Housing and visible options for Prince George (Appendix A). This includes best management practices and explains how visible options pertain to the City of Prince George at a local level. The Discussion paper was created as an introductory paper to summarize existing information on VISIBLE Housing. Best management practices and other visible options are introduced, as well as an examination of other historical and current VISIBLE Housing initiatives. This step helped to identify relevant standard terminology and to establish a definition of VISIBLE Housing that is unique to Prince George. The Prince George VISIBLE Housing Committee reviewed and critiqued the discussion paper and several interviews are incorporated into the document. It served as a basis for the information in the final paper, which expands on the relevant information and material in the discussion paper.
2. A **survey** for identified stakeholders was the next step (Appendix B). This included homebuilders, contractors, sub trades and others contacted through the City of Prince George Business License Department and through the Canadian Home Builders' Association of Northern B.C. The goal of the survey was twofold. First and primarily, the survey identifies concerns with implementing VISIBLE Housing regulations and guidelines from local homebuilders in Prince George. The survey also presents incentives that may influence homebuilders to adopt mandatory visible regulations and/or voluntary visible guidelines. Secondly, the survey is an information tool to initiate raising awareness of VISIBLE Housing issues in Prince George. The survey was used to gather responses about stakeholders' current knowledge of VISIBLE Housing and determine opinions on its importance, and gauge the level of willingness to develop VISIBLE Housing in a variety of ways. The survey results were analyzed and a list of recommendations based on the results was produced.
3. A Summary report focusing on **recommendations, mandatory regulations and/or voluntary guidelines** and other incentives is the final step. The report also focuses and expands on key elements of the discussion paper and is a compilation of information from the survey, discussion paper, and further research. A list of recommendations based on best management practices in other municipal or regulatory bodies and the survey results are presented within this report.

**Note:** This Summary Report is one section of the Prince George VISIBLE Housing project. For further background information and terminology please refer to the Prince George VISIBLE Housing Discussion Paper. Furthermore, meeting minutes, surveys, interviews, and other supporting documentation of the project are cataloged and stored with Long Range Planning, City of Prince George.

### ***Prince George VISIBLE Housing Committee***

The Committee is a progressive and diverse group of people that came together to work towards visible housing and to contribute to the larger goal of a more accessible Prince George. The committees' roles were to provide feedback and input into the project through review of the discussion paper, review of the survey, brainstorm, and guide in creating recommendations. The PGVHC participated in numerous meetings to provide guidance and feedback each step of the

project. The feedback of the PGVHC has been extremely valuable in shaping this project, and ensuring it continues to advance forward. The recommendations for a local Visitable Housing strategy will be considered for inclusion in the OCP of Prince George.

## WHY VISITABLE HOUSING

Not unlike many communities in Canada, Prince George is expected to experience a dramatic increase in elderly residents (65+) in the coming years from 7,195 in 2008 to 19,049 in 2038. This change increases the pressure and need for Visitable Housing in Prince George<sup>4</sup>. The percentage of residents in BC over the age of 65 grows steadily after 2010 at 15% of the population to 23.9% of the population in 2036. This indicates a growing number of elderly residents in BC in the following years<sup>5</sup>. Over the lifetime of a house, **25% to 60% of all new homes** will have a resident with a long-term severe mobility impairment and **80% of people over the age of 50** prefer to remain in their homes as long as possible<sup>6</sup>. As the aging population is growing in Canada, there needs to be more basic access in homes.

The **Prince George Official Community Plan** discusses changing housing preferences in Prince George and mentions a significant trend is an overall aging of the population, and the desire of older residents to remain in the community<sup>7</sup>. The OCP lists Growth Management Policies that include providing for changing population demographics. This policy supports a wider range of housing types and particularly supports more ground-oriented multi-family developments to provide higher density housing for seniors, “empty nesters” and young adults.

The **Prince George Declaration on Visitable Homes** was developed out of the MUTN “Creating Universally Designed Healthy Sustainable Communities Conference” in April of 2009. This conference brought together 175 delegates from various professions and represented several provinces as well as the USA. Based on presentations and discussions at the conference, the delegates highlighted resolutions such as:<sup>8</sup>

- 1) All new single family homes be built to have a basic level of access (visitable) and
- 2) All new multi-family homes and apartments be built to have a basic level of access (visitable) throughout and that a percentage of all suites be fully universally designed or accessible and;
- 3) The local, provincial and federal levels of government work towards establishing laws, by-laws, codes and incentive programs to ensure visitability at all levels of jurisdiction.

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<sup>4</sup> Milburn, Dan. ACT Grant Application - Prince George Visitable Housing Project. Prince George: City of Prince George Planning and Development Department - Staff Report May 6, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Government of BC. BC Stats (Accessed September 2010). <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/>

<sup>6</sup> Concrete Change

<sup>7</sup> City of Prince George. Official Community Plan. (Chapter 6 pg 37)

<sup>8</sup> Milburn, Dan



## Historical Background

The history of VISIBLE Housing can be traced back to Sweden in the late seventies. In 1976 Sweden started using the term and implementing design strategies. Sweden was progressive in addressing the country's housing needs. In addressing these needs, Sweden subsequently helped to bridge the knowledge gap with regard to the concept of visible housing in the rest of Europe, the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, the United States and Canada<sup>9</sup>.

The American visibility movement was spearheaded by Eleanor Smith. Smith's assertion was that basic design allowing access to a new home improves livability for everyone, and at the core, it is a basic civil and human right. This movement helped launch the Concrete Change organization in 1986<sup>10</sup>.

Across Canada, the concept of Visibility is seen as an important addition to building communities, and thus, public interest has been growing. The Canadian Centre of Disability Studies (CCDS) lists several municipal, provincial, and federal initiatives across Canada that are addressing Visibility. Some of these initiatives are discussed in more detail in other sections of this report<sup>11</sup>.

The "Understanding the Status of Visibility in Canada" project by the CCDS presents identifying research that highlights the fact that Canada is lagging behind other nations in terms of legislation, incentives, and education on Visible Housing. Among many other trends, there appears to be a growing interest in Visible Housing in Canada however, and people are anxious to move forward and have access to tools and resources on Visible Housing. The District of Saanich in BC is one of the leaders in the nation, as it has created both mandatory regulations and voluntary guidelines that encourage Visible Housing.

The role of persons with limited mobility in society are ever expanding and need to be recognized. Not only are persons with limited mobility recipients of services, they are also providers. "They participate in all aspects of community life and in doing so, utilize all types of buildings"<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Krassioukova, Olga. "Moving Toward Livable, Sustainable Housing and Communities." *Government of Canada, Understanding the Status of Visibility in Canada. CMHC: Socio-economic Series 08-011*. 2008.

<http://www.abilities.ca/agc/article/article.php?pid=&cid=&subid=185&aid=1720>

<sup>10</sup> "Visibility: Making Your Home a Welcoming Place for Visitors with Disabilities." Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities The University of Montana Rural Institute. May 2009.

<http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/IL/Ruralfacts/Visibility.htm>

<sup>11</sup> "Canadian Initiatives." Canadian Center On Disability Studies. [http://www.visiblehousingcanada.com/can\\_init.html](http://www.visiblehousingcanada.com/can_init.html).

<sup>12</sup> The Building Access Handbook (pdf). (Victoria, BC: Crown Publications, 1998), 1

## Barriers

There are a number of issues that may prevent the construction of Visitable Homes and these issues need to be addressed to further progress movement toward Visitable Housing. Some general barriers that are thematic in communities all over North America are:

- There is lack of housing stock with basic access in Canada
- There are few voluntary regulations in Canada and even fewer mandatory regulations.
- Given the decreasing budgets of institutionalized housing for seniors, adaptable housing makes sense.
- Housing industry, planners, and designers need education on Visitable Housing
- Lack of common terminology regarding visitability around the world
- Knowledge of the costs, affordability, and buy-in, both real and perceived
- Attitudes of industry, professionals, and individuals (i.e. fear of change to regulations and routine)
- There is a lack of education and marketing
- There is a lack of awareness and support by Government<sup>13</sup>

**Changing mindset and attitudes** through education on Visitable Housing is an opportunity to remedy one of the main barriers. In the Yukon, the fear of changing to regulations and the routine of constructing homes was found to be a significant barrier to the development of (Interview with Yukon Housing Corporation, Allyn Lyon). The initial learning curve of constructing visitable homes is difficult and can intimidate home builders and home buyers. This perception of difficulty can be reduced by educating people that the costs of constructing a Visitable Home are relatively little , but indeed have great benefit. Establishing Visitable Housing designs and real examples are a potential solution to encourage Visitable Housing. Other strategies to change attitudes on Visitable Housing are:

- Education and training of public, professionals, and national advocacy groups
- Educate people about universal design approach as a good design practice for all people
- Training
- Education Strategies (Target and persuade key groups, maintain momentum, training)

There are some **Visitable Housing myths** or **perceived barriers** to constructing Visitable Housing in the north, for example, beliefs around the costs of building a no-step entrance over a basement.<sup>14</sup> Dispelling these myths is a strategy to encourage positivity around Visitable Housing. In the case of constructing a zero step entrance, there are instances when it is not practical, but **this only becomes an issue in 5% of new homes**. That means that it is actually

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<sup>13</sup> Concrete Change Measuring up the North. WEB - Zamprelli, Jim - Sannich Planning - (Laurie Reanhart – Interview – September 9,2010) - CCDS Research

<sup>14</sup> Concrete Change

**practical to build 95%** of homes with a no-step entrance. Below are some examples of some myths and facts that correspond to them.<sup>15</sup>

- **MYTH 1** A zero-step entrance works only on flat graded lots
- **FACT 1** A lot with grade (steep) is often easier than a flat lot
- **MYTH 2** A zero-step entrance is feasible only when building on a concrete slab
- **FACT 2** New home construction with a basement or crawl space does not deter a cost-effective zero-step entrance.
- **MYTH 3** Zero-step entrances must always be located at the front of the home
- **FACT 3** The best location depends on the lay of the land

## Opportunities

The District of Langford has experienced success in constructing VISIBLE Homes because it requires homes built through the “Affordable Housing Act” to also be visitable (District of Langford Affordable Housing policy, interview with Leanne Blackwood). This means that every “affordable” house built will also be visitable. Two social issues are addressed in this approach. Linking visitability to current planning objectives and government incentive programs creates actual VISIBLE Homes and further educates the public. Other examples of planning objectives and incentive programs that visitability could be linked to are:

- Link visitability with sustainability practices, liveable and age friendly communities initiatives, healthy communities initiatives, and other initiatives
- The U.S Green Building Councils Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program has made an important step towards visitability. It recently established a Pilot Program for Neighbourhood Development that will designate a point toward a LEED rating when designers incorporate basic universal access into plans for single-family homes.<sup>16</sup> This will link the ‘social’ component to sustainability infrastructure.
- Visitability requirements could be linked to granting funds or other benefits.

Using **tools and resources** available to municipalities and other government bodies is also an excellent strategy to establish opportunities for VISIBLE Housing. There are many such tools, including broad mandates to change building codes, legislation and regulation changes, adding policy to OCP’s, voluntary guidelines, and identifying funding and resources. Municipalities and other government bodies have tools to advance VISIBLE Housing. Some potential tools and resources are:

- Phased Development Agreements under Section 905.1 of *Local Government Act* (LGA)
- Section 219 Covenants of the *Land Title Act* (LTA)

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<sup>15</sup> Measuring up the North. WEB

<sup>16</sup> Access guide

- Leasing municipal land or lease housing on municipal land below market rates to non-profit groups that provide housing for people with disabilities or seniors
- Local Government Act Section 2 (94:95) Density Bonusing Bylaw<sup>17</sup>. (See District of Langford Best Management Practice)
- Other Housing Agreements such as mortgage incentives. For example, the Yukon Housing Corporation offers the incentive to reduce mortgage rates by 0.75% or 1.25% depending on meeting specific “visitable” requirements. (See Yukon Housing Corporation Best Management Practice)
- Networking and coordination (Develop a networking mechanism and central coordination point for activities)

## Financial Costs

One of the perceived barriers in building Visitable Housing is the cost of building. In fact, the costs are minimal and the benefits far outweigh any financial costs<sup>18</sup>. Building homes with **all** Visitable housing features saves the costs involved in renovating homes to later incorporate Visitable features. A home owner in the Yukon estimated the costs of adding all Visitable Features (including many beyond the three basic features) at an extra \$5000 (Allyn Lyon Yukon). The price of renovating one Visitable feature (\$1000 to widen one doorway) to a new home is the same as building a home with all Visitable Housing features considered in the original construction (\$1000 extra). A breakdown of costs and issues associated with each costs is as follows. Although this breakdown is an example of costs in the USA, they are comparable to Canadian costs;

- 1) Building a **no step entrance** may seem like a great cost to construction but if a no step entrance is in the plans before construction, there is minimal cost. Since all lots have to be graded for development, grading a lot with the intention of building a no step entrance may cost anywhere from \$100-\$600 extra. A reasonable average additional cost for a no step entrance on a concrete slab is US \$100 and US \$300-\$600 over a crawl space or basement. A conservative estimate of adding a safe zero step entrance to an existing home is US \$3,300.
- 2) **Wider doors** are estimated at US \$20 per home. In most cases, an architect does not need to be called in to change the plans and the builder can adjust the existing plans by manually drawing a minor adjustment to the doorways. Adding square footage is not necessary. A conservative average to widen each interior doorway is \$700<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Access guide

<sup>18</sup> Sannich Planning

<sup>19</sup> Concrete Change

## Social and Psychological Costs

Not only are there are more than financial costs to consider in creating communities with Visitable Housing, but there are social and psychological consequences to people affected by a lack of Visitable Housing. These consequences impact individuals, families, and communities. The chart on the next page is a comparison of the **costs of not changing** our homes to provide basic access to the **costs of changing** our homes.

Social and Psychological Costs	
COSTS OF NO CHANGE	COSTS OF CHANGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress of finding a house with Visitable Housing to people in need.</li> <li>• Stress caused by impending danger of living in a house without basic access</li> <li>• Increased Falls</li> <li>• Inability to visit friends without basic access, isolation, depression, loneliness</li> <li>• Added work of people living in homes that work around no basic access (carrying friends and relatives, etc)</li> <li>• Being ejected from your home into an institution</li> <li>• Costs of institutionalization</li> <li>• Safety and increased injuries—difficult for responders to save lives during fires, increased likelihood of residents falling, particularly older people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An additional \$1000 to the construction costs of building a new single family or two families home.</li> <li>• It becomes easier to maintain, easier to move furniture in and out of, easier to get into and out of with a baby carriage, bicycle or cart, easier to have older friends and relatives visit and easier for anyone with difficulty moving around to live in.</li> <li>• Less falls and injuries</li> <li>• Less stress on seniors and disabled to search for accessible homes and</li> <li>• Increase well being of seniors and disabled by being able to visit family, friends and to live in an accessible home.</li> <li>• The developer/house builder is viewed in a positive light taking a proactive and leading role in the community.</li> </ul>
This chart was compiled after our research and used 'concrete change' as the major base	

## BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

### The District of Langford, BC

Langford is taking steps to become more socially inclusive by creating basic access in all new 'affordable' housing units to make them accessible to persons with disabilities. The decision to incorporate visitable features to affordable homes was made in 2007. In the Affordable Housing, Park and Amenity Contribution Policy, Policy No: 6940-00-004, visitable requirements are enforced. Section "m" of the policy indicates that all affordable units must meet minimal visitability standards on the ground floor level, and continues to name the three basic visitable features presented in this project. Langford amended its affordable housing program to require these changes<sup>20</sup>.

- The "Affordable Housing" program requires developers to allocate 10% of development to be both affordable and visitable. One in every ten houses will be affordable and visitable. Section 904 of the *Local Government Act* (LGA) regulation for zoning bylaw allowance for amenities and affordable housing either through density bonusing or designating an area within a zone if the owners consent..

### The District of Saanich, BC

The District of Saanich in British Columbia is an example of a progressive municipality that has incorporated mandatory regulations and voluntary guidelines. On June 1, 2004, the District of Saanich Bylaw changed and accommodated mandatory adaptable (based upon the principle of "visitability") regulations to new apartment style buildings that made the new residences easier for people to live in through illness, injury, and aging<sup>21</sup>. It is important to note that these Mandatory adaptable regulations were approved prior to B.C. Building Code changes that now require Ministerial Approval for above and beyond B.C. Building Code Regulations. Voluntary design guidelines were also created to focus on providing better adaptability and accessibility in single family and townhouses beyond the BC Building Code. These voluntary guidelines intend on raising awareness of accessibility and adaptability in residential buildings and encourage builders to incorporate features in new buildings where possible. The developers in Saanich agreed that Adaptable Housing was the right thing to do, even though it would add costs and regulations to development. Saanich is focused on the issue as it provided a member on the provincial Adaptable Housing Task Force to look at possible amendments to the BC Building Code.

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<sup>20</sup>Victoria. "Langford affordable housing to feature access for disabled." *Times*, December 14, 2007

<sup>21</sup> Sannich Planning. VOLUNTARY DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR ADAPTABLE HOUSING (pdf). June 1, 2004.

## Yukon Mortgage Standards

The Yukon Territory has voluntary program that promotes the construction of visitable homes. This incentive reduces mortgage rate by either 0.75% or 1.25% depending on the level of adaptability<sup>22</sup>.

The Yukon Housing Corporation (YHC) has developed a “Builders’ Guide and Checklist” to establish more “Accommodating Homes”. In 1999, a stay at home program helped advance visitability in the Yukon. Three years of researching helped the YHC develop the checklist which exceeds basic visitable requirements. The checklist tackles issues of accommodating for parking, a stair-free access to an exterior entrance with wide landings, wide doors, wide hallways, wide stairs, ample maneuvering space in key rooms, and various others accessible features beyond basic visitable requirements.

- The influence of key progressive builders and real estate agent in the community was vital to the success of the checklist.
- Major setback is the learning curve and trust of builders (effort and hassle of change)
- The checklist provides two levels that a builder can attain. The first level is building a home with “A” features and is a shortlist of essential things to address during a home’s design and construction. Homebuilders have said meeting all level A standards is an extra \$5000.
- The next level is with “B” features that makes a dwelling even more adaptable and user-friendly.
- **Interest Rate Breaks:** Homeowners wishing to buy or build a certified Accommodating Home may qualify for an interest rate reduction of up to 1.25% off the average rate available at major banks. Developers and contractors building Accommodating Homes for re-sale purposes do not qualify for the incentive – their customers do. The interest rate reduction is based on the number of Accommodating Home features which are built into the new residence.

## Bolingbrook, Illinois

Bolingbrook is one of the best practice examples of Visitable Housing in North America. Roger Claar, the mayor of Bolingbrook passed a visitability ordinance for all new housing in 2003 and thousands of homes have been built with no complaints.<sup>23</sup> The Mayor spoke of his experiences passing the ordinance in a city similar to the City of Prince George. For example; the cities have similarities in population (72,000), they are both a winter cities, and both are multicultural cities. When Visitable housing was originally proposed to builders there were no complaints. The

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<sup>22</sup> CCDS Research

<sup>23</sup> CCDS Research. Canadian Centre on Disability Studies: Research and Education on Issues that Affect Us All. Winnipeg, Manitoba. <http://www.visitablehousingcanada.com/>.

success of constructing visitable homes without regulation inspired Mayor Roger Claar to pass an ordinance, ensuring Visitable Housing construction in the future.<sup>24</sup>

Bolingbrook has passed a mandatory ordinance to make homes Visitable. Roger Claar, the mayor of Bolingbrook passed the “Visitability Code” ordinance on June 24, 2003 which was adopted into the Bolingbrook Building Code in its entirety. The Code requires alterations to electrical wall switches, electrical wall receptacles, step free entrance, wall reinforcement, first floor washroom, doors and hallways, and routes within a dwelling unit.<sup>25</sup> Thousands of homes have been built with no complaint and there are 15,000 people enjoying visitable homes.<sup>26</sup>

Here are some facts about Bolingbrook Visitability;

- Mayor Claar said the deal with builders was made on a “handshake” with no regulations put into place. After a few years of successfully building Visitable Homes, he decided to ‘memorialize’ visitable housing and created an ordinance.
- The ordinance defines a penalty for “any person, firm, or corporation that violates any provision of this Article” to be subject to a fine not less than \$75 to no more than \$1000 for each offense, and each day which the violation occurs.
- The section of requiring a “step free entrance” has an exception which states the Director of Public Works and Engineering may waive the entrance requirements if it is not feasible.

Although Bolingbrook is situated in the United States of America, some of the concepts and ideas might be a good base for further discussion about visitable housing in Prince George.

## SURVEY SUMMARY

The goal of the survey served two purposes. First and primarily, the survey identified issues in implementing Visitable Housing and whether mandatory regulations and/or voluntary guidelines appeal to local homebuilders in Prince George. The secondary purpose of the survey was an information tool to help raise awareness of Visitable Housing issues in Prince George.

The next section of this report provides a summary of the recommendations from the survey. Details of the survey’s demographics, question response, analysis and recommendations can be found within APPENDIX B.

The survey population consisted of 297 respondents that were homebuilders, contractors, sub trades and others contacted through the city’s Business License Department and the Canadian Home Builders Association of Northern B.C. Although there were 24 out of 297 survey’s returned

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<sup>24</sup> Claar, Roger C. And they said it couldn’t be done. 10 min., 21 sec. Message from: Mayor of Bolingbrook, Illinois, USA for Measuring Up The North. <http://www.measureupthenorth.com/UserFiles/Media/RogerClaar.wmv> (accessed September, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Visitability Code -[http://www.bolingbrook.com/info/pdf/MC\\_Chapter25\\_6\\_25\\_10.pdf](http://www.bolingbrook.com/info/pdf/MC_Chapter25_6_25_10.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> CCDS Research. Canadian Centre on Disability Studies: Research and Education on Issues that Affect Us All. Winnipeg, Manitoba. <http://www.visitablehousingcanada.com/>.



to the City, out of these responses there was a high rate of completed surveys. The majority of surveys were completed in full and some questions were left out in a few of the surveys.

### **Recommendations from Survey Questions Response**

The analysis of the respondents questions to this survey have led to the following recommendations:

- More information is needed to inform homebuilders.
- A flexible and creative approach has to be taken to inform the public and other stakeholders about Visitable Housing.
- With today's aging population and an increasing number of people with mobility issues, the need for Visitable Housing is apparent.
- Information on who benefits from Visitable Housing is needed.
- Further information is needed on the cost and market value of Visitable Homes.
- Incentives should be considered for Visitable Housing to move forward in Prince George
- More information on the need and demand for Visitable Housing is needed by builders
- Consider a strategic incentives plan for home builders and home buyers
- Mandatory regulations should only be advanced with progressive consultation and education.

### **Analysis of Additional Respondents Comments**

Many of the comments indicate a lack of understanding about Visitable Housing as some comments believed it was housing for special needs or believed the costs were too great. Many respondents expressed negative attitudes about mandatory regulations.

### **Survey Overview**

It is recommended for further surveys contemplated for home builders, that extra response time might see larger participation in the survey. An information session held prior to distributing the survey might increase participation. However, self addressed envelopes should be used again, due to high return rate. Moreover, an online survey may result in additional responses. This would allow quicker response and analysis of data, while building a database on local housing needs. Early in the process it was discussed with researchers and city staff to include all trades that were directly or indirectly involved in new home construction. Even though the participation rate was low in the survey it achieved a main goal of the survey which was to inform the new home builders in Prince George of the Visitable Home concept.

## PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

### Considerations

The following considerations are put forth for the City of Prince George Council and Planning staff to aid in the advancement of Visitable Housing Design concepts in the City.

1) **More Information for home builders.** The results from the PGVHP largely indicate Visitable Housing is not a well-known housing strategy. The financial cost of adding visitable features in the construction of a new home is considered too high to the development community and is a barrier preventing the success of Visitable Housing. Informing home builders and the public on the costs and benefits of Visitable Housing will aid in its success. Keeping stakeholders informed before moving ahead with a visitable option will aid in its success. It is recommended that informational presentations on Visitable Housing be provided to the B.C. Real Estate Association, Prince George Construction Association, and the Canadian Home Builders Association of Northern B.C.

2) **A flexible and creative approach to inform the public.** Such as a media strategy campaign; introduce into curriculums of direct and indirect relevant disciplines (trade schools); professional development credits information sessions; and other inventive and creative strategies. This would involve utilizing the City's Prince George 2.0 Communication and Engagement practices through various means including social media.

3) **Public Private Partnership.** The City can provide a leadership role by requiring a guarantee through its land sales for residential development to meet a certain quota to be visitable homes. In addition to this, Winton Global has expressed an interest to join on a pilot project. The strategy would involve construction of a Visitable Home and showcasing it in the community. Consideration should be given to construct a Visitable Home in conjunction with a non-profit origination such as "Hospice House".

4) **Linking Visitability:** Visitable Housing can be linked to other socially inclusive housing programs such as Affordable Homes. Prince George has an opportunity to make visitable features a requirement for socially inclusive housing programs.

5) **Incentives:** Although specifically identified incentives were not presented in the survey, it appears that incentives are the most desired visitable option based on the PGVHP survey results. Incentives below are suggestions based on research of best management practices in

other communities. Policy that contemplates further analysis of implementing amenity policy and incentives packages is recommended.

- Density Bonusing is used by the District of Langford to encourage developers to build affordable homes with visitable features in return for higher density. However, this is dependent on the market demand for housing and population growth to support it within the City of Prince George.
- Recognition to those constructing Visitable Housing is another form of incentive. A “Visitable Housing” certificate or award to builders or buyers recognizes the value of Visitable Housing as an option. The award could be a signed certificate by the mayor or an official plaque from the City of Prince George.

In 2010, the City of Prince George put forward draft housing objectives and policies for the Official Community Plan review based on information received from the community through the development of ‘myPG’ Integrated Community Sustainability Plan. A proposed policy within the **Accessibility** section of the Draft Housing Policy was to “*consider developing voluntary or mandatory guidelines for visitable housing in single family and semi-detached housing*”. The Prince George Visitable Housing Project (PGVHP) addresses this objective by proposing Voluntary Guidelines in conjunction with Mandatory Regulations for new single and two family homes shown below and within APPENDIX C. Appendix C is recommended to be used for City Council consideration.

## Voluntary Design Guidelines

**Visitable Features:** These features were based on visitable housing feature definitions from other municipalities throughout North America and have been modified to suit the needs of this project.

The City of Prince George is considering incorporation of the **Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines (VHVDG)** into the Official Community Plan Bylaw 7281, 2001 (OCP) which is currently under review, providing an opportune time for Visitable Housing policy incorporation into the revised OCP. Below are recommended steps to ensure successful use of Voluntary Guidelines.

**STEP 1** – The current OCP includes objectives and policy for *Affordable, Rental and Special Needs Housing*, for example Policy 6.3 19. b. identifies that “*The City will encourage developers to make a percentage of all new housing units or lots available for affordable and/or special needs housing.*” It is recommended that this policy be maintained and

expanded to include visitable housing in Objectives and Policies within the relevant Affordable, Rental and Special Needs housing section in the OCP Review currently underway. This would include the following Policy: *“Support the incorporation of, and remain active in the maintenance of, Visitable Housing Guidelines for new single and two family home construction in Prince George B.C.”*

**STEP 2** – Ensure that Visitable Housing Policies and Objectives are also included within general housing direction within the OCP review as creating a visitable home may not always be considered under the Affordable, Rental and Special Needs Housing heading, but provides direction to provide a diverse housing stock and choices. For example, the current OCP Policy 6.3 23. Seniors Housing *“The City will support a range of seniors housing throughout the city. This may include establishing partnerships with groups or individuals that can actively encourage increased seniors housing opportunities. Locations for seniors housing will be dispersed throughout existing and new neighbourhoods in the city, and are particularly supported near high amenity areas where services are nearby.”* It is recommended that policy contemplating diversity of housing types and choices be maintained and expanded to include visitable housing in Objectives and Policies within the relevant housing sections in the OCP Review currently underway utilizing the following recommended policy: *“The City will support and encourage the concept of Visitable housing for new single and two family homes constructed in Prince George.”*

**STEP 3** - It is recommended the following implementation item be considered for inclusion within the OCP *“The City of Prince George has developed northern focused Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines recommended to be monitored through a checklist of visitable features included in development applications to proponents for information”*. This can include rezoning, development permit, and building permit applications and included within general internal procedures for review and advising (Informational Circulars). Identification of verified Visitable Home construction should be established through the Building Permit Application process to facilitate monitoring.

**STEP 4** – It is recommended the following implementation item also be considered for inclusion within the OCP *“The City considers incorporation of Visitable Housing features within an Amenity Contribution Policy and any incentives packages contemplated by the City.”*

**STEP 5** – The proposed VHVDG 01 checklist of design features should be a supplement to the OCP.

**STEP 6** - The proposed VHVDG 01 checklist should be referenced to and/or incorporated into a future Sustainability Checklist implementation for development applications considered by the City.

**STEP 7** – The following Visitable Housing Guideline should be considered for incorporation into the Residential Development Permit Area Guidelines within the City of Prince George Zoning Bylaw No. 7850, 2007 Section 8.5 for designated areas for comprehensive duplex dwelling areas, or comprehensive strata developments to apply to single and two family dwellings to be included as informational purposes only: *“Basic Accessibility design through the use of Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines are encouraged within comprehensive duplex dwelling areas, or comprehensive single family strata developments. This is for informational purposes only and is a voluntary guideline”.*

The **Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines (VHVDG 01)** document consists of the five visitable design features. It will read as follows:

The Prince George Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines suggest design features that would provide greater accessibility in first storey circulation and first storey amenities in single family and two-family homes beyond the requirements of the BC Building Code. Use of the visitable design guidelines is voluntary.

## **DWELLING ACCESS**

**A home with accessible path of travel to at least one no-step entrance to the first storey to accommodate a person with limited mobility and persons using a wheelchair.**

- A path of travel with a gentle grade (maximum 1:20 or 5%) from the street, sidewalk, back lane, or the homes parking space to a first storey accessible entrance.
- The entrance may be located at the front, side, rear, or through the garage of the home. The path of travel shall be firm, stable, and slip resistant.
- The path of travel shall be a minimum of 36” (915mm) in width (preferred 48” (1220mm)).
- No steps shall occur along this path of travel.
- A minimum 36” (915mm) clear width of the entrance door.
- A no or low profile threshold at the door. Raised thresholds of 1/4” (6mm) or less do not require any special requirements.

- Thresholds over 1/4" (6mm) to a maximum of 1/2" (13mm) must be beveled at a maximum slope of 1:2 (50%).

## **CIRCULATION**

**Passable Interior Circulation on the first storey adequate for passage way to visitable washroom and living room.**

- Clear passage throughout with a minimum 36" (915mm) (preferred 48" (1220mm)) clear width to access first storey washroom and living-room.

## **DOORS AND DOORWAYS**

**A home with door openings on the first storey to accommodate a person with limited mobility and persons using a wheelchair.**

- Interior doorways – minimum 32" (810mm) (preferred 33 1/2" (850mm)) clear width.

## **WASHROOM**

**Access to a first storey Washroom.** A first storey washroom that a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, can enter, close the door, and use the facilities.

- This would require a 5'-0" (1520mm) turning circle in front of the toilet with the washroom door not crossing the turning circle while being closed or opened.
- Clear space under wall-hung fixtures can be included in the 5'-0" (1520mm) requirement.
- The washroom must have at a minimum one sink and one toilet.

## **FIRST STOREY LIVING ROOM**

**Access to a first storey living room allowing a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, to enter and use space.**

- One entrance into a living room with a minimum 36" (915mm) clearance; thus allowing a person using a mobility device to enter and exit into the living room.
- The living room should have enough space to allow the person using a mobility device to adequately move through the space. This would require an allotted 5'-0" (1520mm) turning circle within the living room.

## Mandatory Regulations

Mandatory regulation features would provide better visitable home accessibility in single family and two-family homes beyond what is required by the BC Building Code. Broadly applied mandatory regulations may be a possible course of action for the City of Prince George in the future; however, it is recommended that the City consider regulating its own land sales at this time to provide a leadership role. Any future consideration of broadly applied mandatory regulations should be dependent on the monitoring of the Visitable Housing Project and other market indicators or successes in Visitable Housing at the currently recommended Voluntary Guideline level and City Acquisition considerations identified below. It is recommended the following recommended policies be considered within the Official Community Plan review:

- City land sales for residential development of market-rate single and two-family homes should require 15% to be Visitable Housing through a covenant under Section 219 of the *Land Title Act*. The selection of 15% is correlated to the percentage of B.C. residents with a disability according to Statistics Canada in 2006.
- City land sales for residential development of non-market single and two-family homes require 100% to be Visitable Housing.

## IMPACTS

The impacts from introducing the above mentioned Voluntary Design Guidelines and Internal City Mandatory Regulations in Prince George will include:

- Address the aging population (65+) (7,195 in 2008 to 19,049 in 2038) and their need for functional access into homes to visit to secure and maintain important social connections
- Create more visitable spaces for people with limited mobility issues.
- Decrease the pressure and need for Visitable Housing in Prince George, assuring citizens remain in our community.
- Create a well rounded community, more versatile for people of all ages and mobility.
- Begin to implement the **Prince George Declaration on Visitable Homes** in a leadership role.

## CONCLUSION

The opportunity provided to the City of Prince George from the Affordability and Choice Today (ACT) program has facilitated key recommendations to advance development of visitable housing within new market-rate single and two-family homes specific to the City's Northern Climate. Best Management Practices research has identified some initiatives in various locations to learn from in order to facilitate Visitable Housing on the recommended Voluntary Guideline basis. The researched practices, stakeholder consultation and the Prince George Home Builders survey have clearly identified the participation of Home Builders is key to success. The City should continue to support accessibility in the community by providing a leadership role through its own land disposition, but also as a key point of information and facilitating the conversation that needs to begin with home builders.

In addition to the tools and resources identified within the Opportunities section of this report, the recommendations and next steps include objectives and policies necessary for incorporation into the City's ongoing Official Community Plan review to complement other implementation steps and supplementary considerations. An informational handout on this Visitable Housing Project has also been developed to be utilized in conjunction with these recommendations to ensure the conversation of Visitable Housing starts to occur within the northern City of Prince George.



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Note: This project was referenced based on Chicago Style from the "Purdue Online Writing Lab"

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# APPENDIX A

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# Visitable Housing

Prince George British Columbia

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Connecting Community...



With



Visitable Infrastructure.

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# Acknowledgments

## Prince George British Columbia Visitable Housing Project

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# Visitable Housing

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*“Visitability or visitable housing is an essential element that contributes to a more livable and sustainable built environment by addressing homeowners and community needs over time” (Concrete Change).*

## INTRODUCTION

Visitable housing is a simple yet powerful concept for new home construction. One broadly used base definition of Visitable Housing is, ‘a home with one no step entrance, adequate passage doors, first storey bathroom [refer to page 7 Terminology for detailed definition]. The City of Prince George in partnership with Affordability and Choice Today (ACT), has taken the positive step towards incorporating ‘Visitable Housing’ values into the infrastructure of Prince George. The scope of the Prince George Visitable Housing project has three main steps;

- 1) A discussion paper on Visitable Housing and visitable options - how these options pertain to the City of Prince George at a local level.
- 2) Survey stakeholders - Survey population will consist of Prince George home builders.
- 3) Create recommendations for regulations and guidelines with appropriate next steps.

The objective of these steps is to compile a comprehensive package for the City of Prince George planners to use as a tool to approach council; develop guidelines for the *Official Community Plan* (OCP) review process; and inform the public. The City of Prince George objective is to prepare policies, voluntary visitable guidelines and/or mandatory visitable regulations for the building of new construction market homes, single-family and two-family homes for visitable housing.

This discussion paper will introduce key terms and terminology pertaining to Visitable Housing. A section on design examples will have a visual component to further help distinguish between visitable and non-visitable homes. It will look at visitability from an international



perspective and funnel it down to the local municipal level. It will look at barriers and constraints to implementing Visitable Housing. The purpose of this project is to introduce the three basic features of Visitable Housing to development in Prince George. The three Visitable Housing features are:

1. At least one no-step first storey entrance;
2. Adequate passage doors minimum width of 81.28 cm (32 inches) and hallways minimum width of 91.44 cm (32 inches) wide on the first storey to a visitable bathroom; and,
3. A bathroom on the first storey that allows a person using a wheelchair to enter and close the door.

## TERMINOLOGY

Before presenting some of the key terms in this paper, knowing the difference between accessibility and Visitable is beneficial. Accessibility is a term that applies to many aspects of the built environment. Building an accessible house could be a greater undertaking in comparison to building a Visitable Home. Visitable Homes are just a few inexpensive changes. Visitable Housing uses principles of accessibility and universal design for the three basic features (no step entrance – widened door jams – accessible first storey bathroom). The term accessibility may be discussed as well as others terms like universal design, adaptable housing, which share similarities but are not the same as Visitable Housing.

**First Storey:** The uppermost storey having its floor level not more than 2 m above grade. (BC Building Code) This term can be interchangeable with main floor.

**Building of New Construction:** Means a new building constructed as a separate entity, or an addition to an existing building where the addition has no internal pedestrian connection with the existing building. (BC Building Code)

**Accessibility:** Refers to homes, buildings, public spaces, technology, programs and support services (etc.) being free of barriers, enabling all people to use them independently.

**Inclusion:** Welcoming and enabling participation from everyone so that all members of a community are or at least feel included and that they belong.



**Universal Design:** Refers to the design approach of environments, products and services that are usable by all people regardless of age, size or ability<sup>1</sup>.

**Visitability:** An affordable and sustainable design strategy aimed at increasing the number of basic-access family homes and neighbourhoods<sup>2</sup>.

**Living Room:** A space or room dedicated in the home for socializing

**Visitable Features:** These features were based on the definition in the Lanny L.M. Silver Architect report, *Visitable Housing Cost estimate summary June 2007*, and have been modified to suit the needs of this project. The three features are as follows:

1. A home with accessible path of travel to at least one no-step entrance to the first storey to accommodate a person with limited mobility and persons using a wheelchair.
  - A path of travel with a gentle grade (maximum 1:20 or 5%) from the street, sidewalk, back lane, or the homes parking space to a first storey entrance accessible entrance. The entrance may be located at the front, side, rear, or through the garage of the home;
  - The path of travel shall be firm, stable, and slip resistant;
  - The path of travel shall be a minimum of 36" (915mm) in width (preferred 48" (1220mm));
  - No steps shall occur along this path of travel;
  - A minimum 36" (915mm) clear width of the entrance door;
  - A no or low profile threshold at the door. Raised thresholds of 1/4" (6mm) or less do not require any special requirements. Thresholds over 6mm to a maximum of 1/2" (13mm) must be beveled at a maximum slope of 1:2 (50%).
2. Passable Interior Circulation on the first storey adequate for passage way to visitable washroom and living room.
  - Interior doorways – minimum 32" (810mm) (preferred 33 1/2" (850mm)) clear width;
  - Clear passage throughout with a minimum 36" (915mm) (preferred 48" (1220mm)) clear width to access first storey washroom and living-room;

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<sup>1</sup> Mahaffey, Rebekah. (Planning for the future: Age-friendly and Disability-friendly Official Community Plans. British Columbia: Union of BC Municipalities, 2010) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Zamprelli, Jim. Understanding the Status of Visitability in Canada. Ottawa, Ontario: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2008.



3. Access to a first storey Washroom. A first storey washroom that a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, can enter, close the door, and use the facilities.

- This would require a 5'-0" (1520mm) turning circle in front of the toilet with the washroom door not crossing the turning circle while being closed or opened;
- Clear space under wall-hung fixtures can be included in the 5'-0" (1520mm) requirement;
- The washroom must have at a minimum one sink and one toilet<sup>3</sup>.

(Recommended additional Visitable Housing Feature) Access to a first storey living room allowing a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, to enter and socialize.

- This would require an entrance into the living room that allows a person using a mobility device to enter and exist into the living room.
- The living room should have enough space to allow the person using a mobility device to adequately move through the space and provide the ability to enter and exist the passage way in and out of the living room.

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<sup>3</sup> Hilderman Thoams Franks Cram Landscape Architecture and Planning. Cost estimate summary report. Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (MHRC) Visitable Housing. June 2007.



## VISITABLE HOUSING BACKGROUND

The history of VISIBLE Housing can be traced back to Sweden in 1976. Sweden started using the term and implementing design strategies helping bridge the knowledge to the rest of Europe, the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, the United States and eventually Canada<sup>4</sup>.

The American visibility movement was spearheaded by Eleanor Smith's conviction that basic design allowing access for new homes improves livability for everyone and at the core is a basic civil - human right. This launched the Concrete Change organization in 1986<sup>5</sup>.

Visibility has been growing across Canada as being an important addition to building our communities. The Canadian Centre of Disability Studies (CCDS) lists several municipal, provincial, and federal initiatives across Canada addressing Visibility. Some of these initiatives are discussed in more detail in other sections of this paper<sup>6</sup>.

The "Understanding the Status of Visibility in Canada" project by the CCDS present their research highlights and identify that Canada is lagging behind other nations in terms of legislation, incentives, and education on Visible Housing. Among many other trends, there appears to be a growing interest in Visible Housing in Canada and people are anxious to move forward and have access to tools and resources on Visible Housing. The City of Saanich in BC is one of the leaders in the nation as it has created both mandatory regulations and voluntary guidelines that encourage Visible Housing.

The role of persons with limited mobility in society are ever expanding and need to be recognized. Not only are persons with limited mobility receivers of services, they are also providers. They participate in all aspects of community life and in doing so, utilize all types of buildings<sup>7</sup>.

## DESIGN EXAMPLES OF VISIBILITY

People with limited mobility have active roles in society and their mobility should not limit them in living independently at home. This problem can be solved through progressive design of homes.

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<sup>4</sup> Krassioukova, Olga. "Moving Toward Livable, Sustainable Housing and Communities." *Government of Canada, Understanding the Status of Visibility in Canada. CMHC: Socio-economic Series 08-011*. 2008. <http://www.abilities.ca/agc/article/article.php?pid=&cid=&subid=185&aid=1720>

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<sup>7</sup> The Building Access Handbook (pdf). (Victoria, BC: Crown Publications, 1998), 1



## Exterior

The four photos on below are examples from the Concrete Change web page. They illustrate the concept of a no step exterior entrance. Image one: zero-step entrance on a lot with a significant amount of grade. Image two: highlights curb-appeal; how zero-step is still aesthetically pleasing. Image three: zero-step entrance in an urban area. Image four: smaller square footage home in a rural setting.

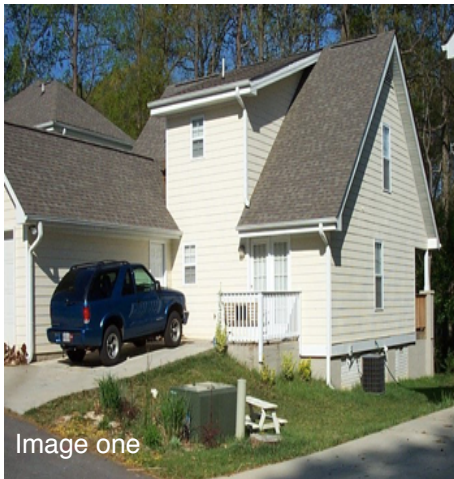


Image one

Zero-step entrance at the back of steep lot (Decatur GA Housing Authority policy)



Image two

Zero-step entrance proceeds from the driveway of steep lot



Image three

Raised alley leads to zero-step entrances via attached garages (Austin TX ordinance)

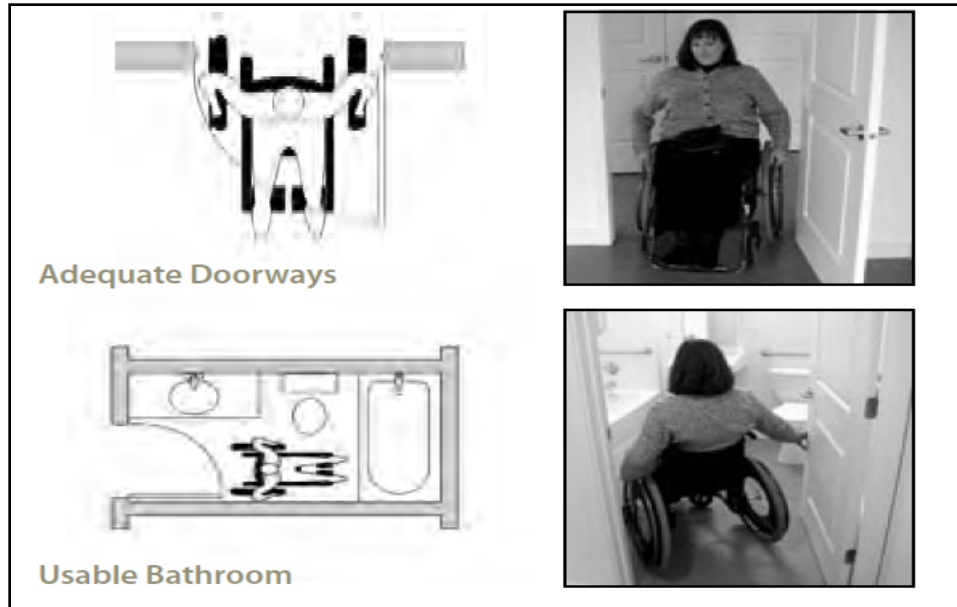


Image Four

San Antonio TX ordinance

## ***Interior***

The diagrams and photos below are examples of design feature two (wider doors) and design feature three (bathroom on the first storey).



## **EXAMPLES IN THE USA**

### ***Bolingbrook, Illinois***

Bolingbrook is one of the best practice examples of Visitable Housing in North America. Roger Claar, the mayor of Bolingbrook passed a visitability ordinance for all new housing in 2003 and thousands of homes have been built with no complaint<sup>8</sup>. The Mayor spoke of his experiences passing the ordinance in a city similar to the City of Prince George in several ways such as having population of 72,000, being a winter city, and being a multicultural city. Originally, he proposed the idea to builders to build homes with visitable features and there were no complaints. The success of constructing visitable homes without regulation inspired Mayor Roger Claar to pass an ordinance, ensuring Visitable Housing construction in the future<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> CCDS Research. Canadian Centre on Disability Studies: Research and Education on Issues that Affect Us All. Winnipeg, Manitoba. <http://www.visitablehousingcanada.com/>.

<sup>9</sup> Claar, Roger C. And they said it couldn't be done. 10 min., 21 sec. Message from: Mayor of Bolingbrook, Illinois, USA for Measuring Up The North. <http://www.measureupthenorth.com/UserFiles/Media/RogerClaar.wmv> (accessed September, 2010).

### ***Legal Success in Pima County, Arizona***

In 2002, Pima County put an ordinance into effect that required basic access in new homes in unincorporated Pima County. This ordinance was challenged in court by builders as being unconstitutional and claimed it violated property rights and personal freedom. The issue passed through the US District Court of the State of Arizona and the State Superior Court only to be denied. The case went to the Court of Appeals which ruled in favour of the ordinance and stated that “Disability is a growing problem both nationally and locally, and the county also introduced evidence that Arizona’s population of people over the age of sixty is expected to triple by 2020”<sup>10</sup>.

## **VISITABLE HOUSING IN CANADA**

### ***National Level***

Visitability has been growing across Canada as an important addition to building our communities<sup>11</sup>. There are several municipal, provincial, and federal initiatives across Canada addressing Visitability. Some of these initiatives are discussed in more detail below.

Canada is lagging behind other nations in terms of legislation, incentives, and education on VISIBLE Housing. Among many other trends, there appears to be a growing interest in VISIBLE Housing in Canada as people in Canada are anxious to move forward and to have tools and resources on VISIBLE Housing. Provincially and Territorially, the Yukon, BC and Manitoba are leaders in addressing VISIBLE Housing. At the municipal level, the City of Saanich and the City of Langford are leaders in the nation as in creating voluntary and mandatory regulations<sup>12</sup>.

### ***British Columbia Challenges***

In BC, local governments face challenges in making their communities more accessible. This effects local governments from building VISIBLE Homes. Their efforts are restricted by the introduction of B.C. Reg. 86/2004, which prevents local governments from building standards more stringent than the Building Code without provincial consent. The Building Code itself consists of “lackluster” accessibility provisions which do not enforce VISIBLE Housing options to single family and two family homes<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Concrete Change. “VISIT-ABILITY (Inclusive Home Design): Every New home VISIBLE.” 2008. <http://concretechange.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> CCDS Research

<sup>12</sup> CCDS Research

<sup>13</sup> Access guide. 81





## Best Management Practices

### ***Yukon Mortgage Standards***

The Yukon Territory has voluntary program that promotes the construction of visitable homes. This incentive reduces mortgage rate by either 0.75% or 1.25% depending on the level of adaptability<sup>14</sup>.

### ***The City of Saanich, BC***

The City of Saanich in British Columbia is an example of a progressive municipality that has incorporated mandatory regulations and voluntary guidelines. On June 1, 2004, the City of Saanich Bylaw changed and accommodated mandatory adaptable (based upon the principle of “visitability”) regulations to new apartment style buildings that made the new residences easier for people to live in through illness, injury, and aging<sup>15</sup>. Voluntary design guidelines were created to focus on providing better adaptability and accessibility in single family and townhouses beyond the BC Building Code. These voluntary guidelines intend on raising awareness of accessibility and adaptability in residential buildings and encourage builders to incorporate features in new buildings where possible. The developers in Saanich agreed that Adaptable Housing was the right thing to do, even though it would add costs and regulations to development. How this was achieved politically will be addressed in the *Visitable Housing Final Report*. Saanich is focused on the issue as it provided a member on the provincial Adaptable Housing Task Force to look at possible amendments to the BC Building Code.

### ***The City of Langford, BC***

Langford is creating basic access in all new ‘affordable’ housing units built to make them accessible to persons with disabilities. Builders are required by the municipality to make minor changes to ensure ‘visitability’. How this was achieved politically will be addressed in the *Visitable Housing Final Report*. Langford amended its affordable housing program to require these changes<sup>16</sup>.

### ***The City of North Vancouver, BC***

The Community Development Department of the Corporation of the City of North Vancouver created Adaptable Design Guidelines to encourage new accessible housing options. Three levels were designed in addition to the Barrier-Free requirements of the current Building

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<sup>14</sup> CCDS Research

<sup>15</sup> Sannich Planning. VOLUNTARY DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR ADAPTABLE HOUSING (pdf). June 1, 2004.

<sup>16</sup>Victoria. “Langford affordable housing to feature access for disabled.” *Times*, December 14, 2007





Code. Level one is basic design features and is required in all multiple unit buildings with common corridors. Level Two and Level Three provide a greater range of adaptability. Council endorsed Zoning Bylaw requiring Level One Adaptable Design in all medium and high density apartment zones in January 1999<sup>17</sup>.

### ***The City of Winnipeg, MB***

The City of Winnipeg implemented a Universal Design Policy October 16, 2001 approved by the Access Advisory Committee. The policy is:

*That the City of Winnipeg will ensure all new construction and/or major renovations to buildings, exterior environments, as well as purchases and new developments in services, products, or systems that are funded in whole or part by The City will follow Universal Design Criteria<sup>18</sup>.*

Visitable Guidelines also provide basic information for builders, developers, and citizens of Winnipeg who are interested in Visitable Housing.

## **PRINCE GEORGE VISITABLE HOUSING**

### ***Growing Population of Seniors: Local Demand***

Not unlike many communities in Canada, Prince George is expected to experience a dramatic increase in elderly residents (65+) in the coming years from 7,195 in 2008 to 19,049 in 2038. This change increases the pressure and need for Visitable Housing in Prince George<sup>19</sup>. The percentage of residents in BC over the age of 65 grows steadily after 2010 at 15% of the population to 23.9% of the population in 2036. This indicates a growing number of elderly residents in BC in the following years<sup>20</sup>.

### ***Local Initiatives***

The Prince George Accessibility Advisory Committee (PGAAC) was created by City Council in 1987, after the Rick Hansen Man in Motion Tour, to work towards creating a barrier-

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<sup>17</sup> City of North Vancouver. The Corporation of the City of North Vancouver Community Development Department. July 2005. <http://www.cnv.org/c//DATA/3/343/ADAPTABL%20DESIGN%20HANDOUT-COMBINED.PDF>.

<sup>18</sup> Universal Design Policy. Report of the Executive Policy Committee. File CR-3 (Vol. 5). December 5, 2001. [http://winnipeg.ca/ppd/planning/pdf\\_folder/EPC\\_UnivDesign.pdf](http://winnipeg.ca/ppd/planning/pdf_folder/EPC_UnivDesign.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Milburn, Dan. ACT Grant Application - Prince George Visitable Housing Project. Prince George: City of Prince George Planning and Development Department - Staff Report May 6, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Government of BC. BC Stats (Accessed September 2010). <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/>



free community. Their objectives are to remove physical and social barriers which impede the full participation of persons with disabilities and seniors in all aspects of community life<sup>21</sup>.

In recent years, the **Measuring Up the North** (MUTN) initiative has advocated for communities to become accessible. The efforts of MUTN targeted VISIBLE Housing as a strategy to make our communities more inclusive. The project brings together partnerships between local governments, community members and organizations, business and industries in over 40 cities, towns, villages and districts of Northern BC to work on making their communities livable age-friendly, disability-friendly, universally designed, inclusive for all citizens and visitors<sup>22</sup>. MUTN has been influential in promoting VISIBLE Housing in Prince George.

### ***Prince George Official Community Plan***

The OCP discusses changing housing preferences in Prince George and mentions a significant trend is an overall aging of the population, and the desire of older residents to remain in the community<sup>23</sup>. The OCP lists Growth Management Policies that include providing for changing population demographics. This policy supports a wider range of housing types and particularly supports more ground-oriented multi-family developments to provide higher density housing for seniors, “empty nesters” and young adults.

### ***Prince George Declaration on VISIBLE Homes***

The Prince George Declaration on VISIBLE Homes was developed out of the MUTN “Creating Universally Designed Healthy Sustainable Communities Conference” in April of 2009. This conference brought together 175 delegates from various professions and represented several provinces as well as the USA. Based on presentations and discussions at the conference, the delegates highlighted resolutions such as:<sup>24</sup>

- 1) All new single family homes be built to have a basic level of access (visible) and
- 2) All new multi-family homes and apartments be built to have a basic level of access (visible) throughout and that a percentage of all suites be fully universally designed or accessible and;
- 3) The local, provincial and federal levels of government work towards establishing laws, by-laws, codes and incentive programs to ensure visibility at all levels of jurisdiction.

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<sup>21</sup> Prince George Accessibility Advisory Committee. Report to Council: Annual Report 2008. February 17, 2009. . [http://www.city.pg.bc.ca/cityhall/committees/specialneeds/minutes/2009/2009\\_03\\_02\\_minutes.pdf](http://www.city.pg.bc.ca/cityhall/committees/specialneeds/minutes/2009/2009_03_02_minutes.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Measuring up the North. Creating livable, age-friendly, disability-friendly, universally designed, inclusive communities that benefit all citizens and visitors. <http://www.measureupthenorth.com/Default.aspx>.

<sup>23</sup> City of Prince George. Official Community Plan. (Chapter 6 pg 37)

<sup>24</sup> Milburn, Dan



### ***Prince George Visitable Housing Committee***

The Prince George Visitable Housing Committee is a very progressive and diverse group of people that have come together to work towards a more accessible Prince George. The committee's roles are feedback and input into the project through a panel review discussion paper, review of survey for stakeholders, and to brainstorm and guide in creating recommendations. The *Local Government Act* (LGA) Section 877. (2) has policy in regards to affordable rental and special needs housing as required content within an OCP. The project objectives assist in addressing the above mentioned LGA policy issues. These objectives are indicated in a flow chart. (Please see Appendix One)

### ***Survey Consultation methods***

City stakeholders and external stakeholders were contacted via electronic mail, or telephone, and meetings were organized to discuss various parts of the project. The first meeting took place on July 30, 2010 and focused on identifying interested stakeholders and their level of interest in the project. The second meeting took place on August 23, 2010 and was a chance for the project researchers to meet the committee and to discuss the project goals with the committee for feedback. The third meeting took place on September 23, 2010 and was a chance for the project researchers to get feedback on the draft discussion paper. The next phase of the project is creating a survey based on the discussion paper results and feedback and surveying stakeholders for results that fit with Prince George. The compilation of survey results and preparation of **draft** voluntary guidelines and/or regulations for consideration by Council.

### ***Survey Goals***

The goal of the survey serves two purposes. First and primarily, the survey identifies issues in implementing Visitable Housing regulations and guidelines from local homebuilders in Prince George. The survey also presents incentives that may influence homebuilders to adopt mandatory visitable regulations and/or voluntary visitable guidelines. Furthermore, the survey is an information tool to help raise awareness of Visitable Housing issues in Prince George.

## **GAPS AND ISSUES**

The aging population is growing in Canada and there needs to be more basic access in homes. There are a number of issues that may prevent the construction of Visitable Homes. The following is a list of these issues common in communities all over North America.

- 1) There is lack of housing stock with basic access in Canada
- 2) There are few voluntary regulations in Canada and even fewer mandatory regulations.
- 3) Given the decreasing budgets of institutionalized housing for seniors, adaptable housing makes sense.



- 4) Housing industry, planners, and designers need education on Visitable Housing
- 5) There is a lack of common terminology regarding visitability around the world
- 6) Knowledge of the costs, affordability, and buy-in, both real and perceived
- 7) Attitudes of industry, professionals, and individuals
- 8) There is a lack of education and marketing
- 9) There is a lack of awareness and support by Government<sup>25</sup>

### ***Myths for Northern Building***

There are some common myths in the North such as the costs of building a no-step entrance over a basement<sup>26</sup>. There are instances where a zero step entrance is not practical, but this is only becomes an issue in 5% of new homes. That means it is **practical to build 95%** of homes with a no-step entrance.

**The following are some examples of some myths<sup>27</sup>**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>MYTH 1</b> | A zero-step entrance works only on a flat graded lots  |
| <b>FACT 1</b> | A lot with grade (steep) is often easier than a flat lot   |
| <b>MYTH 2</b> | A zero-step entrance is feasible only when building on a concrete slab                                   |
| <b>FACT 2</b> | New home construction with a basement or crawl space does not deter a cost-effective zero-step entrance. |
| <b>MYTH 3</b> | Zero-step entrances must always be located at the front of the home                                      |
| <b>FACT 3</b> | The best location depends on the lay of the land   |

### **Is there Demand for Visitable Housing?**

- Research indicates 25% to 60% of all new homes, over the lifetime of a house, will have a resident with a long-term, severe mobility impairment
- Research further indicates that 80% of people over the age of 50 prefer to remain in their homes as long as possible<sup>28</sup>
- Realtors from a Think Tank indicate they have many clients requesting at least basic access and they cannot find houses that meet their clients' needs <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Concrete Change Measuring up the North. WEB - Zamprelli, Jim - Sannich Planning - (Laurie Reanhart – Interview – September 9,2010) - CCDS Research

<sup>26</sup> Concrete Change

<sup>27</sup> Measuring up the North. WEB

<sup>28</sup> Concrete Change

<sup>29</sup> CCDS Research



## Facilitators and Solutions

1. **Change Mindset and Attitudes** – One of the main solutions is raising awareness of Visitable Housing issues and solutions. The following are the results from several sources:
  - a. Education and training of public, professionals, and national advocacy groups
  - b. Educate people about universal design approach as a good design practice for all people
  - c. Training
  - d. Education Strategies
    - i. Target and persuade key groups
    - ii. Maintain momentum
    - iii. Training
2. **Linking Visitability** – A key strategy to help build Visitable Housing in Prince George is to link Visitability to current planning objectives and government incentive programs. For example, the City of Langford in BC amended their affordable housing program with the requirement for builders to add basic access to new housing units. The following are other examples of planning objectives and incentive programs that visitability can be linked too.
  - a. Link visitability with sustainability practices, liveable and age friendly communities initiatives, healthy communities initiatives, and other initiatives
  - b. The U.S Green Building Councils Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program has made an important step towards visitability. It recently established a Pilot Program for Neighbourhood Development that will designate a point toward a LEED rating when designers incorporate basic universal access into plans for single-family homes.<sup>30</sup> This will link the ‘social’ component to sustainability infrastructure.
  - c. Visitability requirements could be linked to granting funds or other benefits.
  - d. Link to larger Market.
3. **Development of tools and resources** – There are many tools that can be developed for municipalities and other government agencies to help encourage the development of Visitable Housing.
  - a. Broad Mandates to change Building Codes, legislation and regulation changes
  - b. Add policy to OCP
  - c. Voluntary Guidelines
  - d. Identify funding and resources
  - e. Municipal Tools
    - i. Phased Development Agreements under Section 905.1 of LGA
    - ii. Section 219 Covenants of the Land Title Act (LTA)

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<sup>30</sup> Access guide



- iii. Section 24 of the Community Charter states that a municipality may dispose of land or make improvements to land under certain circumstances
- iv. Leasing municipal land or lease housing on municipal land below market rates to non-profit groups that provide housing for people with disabilities or seniors
- v. Local Government Act Section 2 (94:95) Density Bonusing Bylaw<sup>31</sup>
- vi. Other Housing Agreements
- f. Mortgage Incentives - In the Yukon (Territorial Government) , the incentive to reduce mortgage rates by 0.75% or 1.25% exist and vary depending on the level of adaptability
- g. Networking and Coordination
  - i. Develop a networking mechanism
  - ii. Central coordination point for activities

4. **Incentives** - There are benefits for builders and other professionals to focus their efforts on constructing Visitable Homes.

- a. Opportunities Builders: Building Visitable homes used as a marketing strategy.
- b. Planners can be motivated by gaining fiscal wisdom/tax implications, sustainability, and public health<sup>32</sup>.

## FINANCIAL COSTS

One of the perceived barriers in building Visitable Housing is the cost of building. In fact, the costs are minimal and the benefits far outweigh any financial costs<sup>33</sup>. Building homes with **all** Visitable housing features saves the costs involved in renovating homes to later incorporate Visitable features. The price of renovating one Visitable feature (\$1000 to widen one doorway) to a new home is the same as building a home with all Visitable Housing features considered in the original construction (\$1000 extra). A breakdown of costs and issues associated with each costs is as follows. Although this breakdown is an example of costs in the USA, they are comparable to Canadian costs<sup>34</sup>.

- 1) Building a **no step entrance** may seem like a great cost to construction but if a no step entrance is in the plans before construction, there is minimal cost. Since all lots have to

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<sup>31</sup> Access guide

<sup>32</sup> Concrete Change Eleanor Smith Presentation - Making the case of VH

<sup>33</sup> Sannich Planning

<sup>34</sup> Concrete Change



be graded for development, grading a lot with the intention of building a no step entrance may cost anywhere from \$100-\$600 extra. A reasonable average additional cost for a no step entrance on a concrete slab is US \$100 and US \$300-\$600 over a crawl space or basement. A conservative estimate of adding a safe zero step entrance to an existing home is US \$3,300.

- 2) **Wider doors** are even less cost and estimated at US \$20 per home. In most cases, an architect does not need to be called in to change the plans and the builder can adjust the existing plans by manually drawing a minor adjustment to the doorways. Adding square footage is not necessary. A conservative average to widen each interior doorway is \$700.

### Social and Psychological Costs

There are more than financial costs to consider in creating communities with Visitable Housing. There are social and psychological consequences to people affected by a lack of Visitable Housing that impacts individuals, families, and communities. The following is a comparison of the **costs of not changing** our homes to provide basic access to the **costs of changing** our homes.

Social and Psychological Costs	
COSTS OF NO CHANGE	COSTS OF CHANGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress of finding a house with Visitable Housing to people in need.</li> <li>• Stress caused by impending danger of living in a house without basic access</li> <li>• Increased Falls</li> <li>• Inability to visit friends without basic access, isolation, depression, loneliness</li> <li>• Added work of people living in homes that work around no basic access (carrying friends and relatives, etc)</li> <li>• Being ejected from your home into an institution</li> <li>• Costs of institutionalization</li> <li>• Safety and increased injuries—difficult for responders to save lives during fires, increased likelihood of residents falling, particularly older people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An additional \$1000 to the construction costs of building a new single family or two families home.</li> <li>• It becomes easier to maintain, easier to move furniture in and out of, easier to get into and out of with a baby carriage, bicycle or cart, easier to have older friends and relatives visit and easier for anyone with difficulty moving around to live in.</li> <li>• Less falls and injuries</li> <li>• Less stress on seniors and disabled to search for accessible homes and</li> <li>• Increase well being of seniors and disabled by being able to visit family, friends and to live in an accessible home.</li> <li>• The developer/house builder is viewed in a positive light taking a proactive and leading role in the community.</li> </ul>
This chart was compiled after our research and used 'concrete change' as the major base	

## CONCLUSION

All around the world the public and governing bodies have been promoting homes that are accessible to all. The names of the programs may differ such as Lifetime Homes (UK), Adaptable Housing, or Smart Housing (Australia). However, they all uphold the premise of visitability or surpass the three basic guidelines<sup>35</sup>.

Visitable Housing is a movement towards creating inclusive communities by providing basic access to homes for persons with disabilities. Prince George is working towards making more inclusive communities and providing Visitable Housing is a big step to success for this goal. There is a growing aging population in Prince George that needs Visitable Housing and adopting mandatory regulations or voluntary guidelines encouraging the development of new single family and two family homes to be Visitable is needed. Visitability is fairly new, but it is recognized internationally, Canada is not keeping pace with the movement. This discussion paper presented information about the various costs of Visitable Housing and identified current trends and issues. This information supports the decision to make Prince George an inclusive community by making its homes Visitable.

The next phase of the Visitable Housing Project is to create and administer a survey to stakeholders. Once the surveys have been collected and analyzed; a final report with recommendations will be produced.

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<sup>35</sup> Access





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## Photo Credits

Title Page (Page 1) : Circle of people holding hands <<http://handsonblog.org/?p=1620>>

Title Page (Page 1) : Home < <http://concretechange.org/> >

Intro Page (Page 5) : Collage < <http://concretechange.org/> >

Design Page (Page 9) : Homes < <http://concretechange.org/> >

Design Page (Page 10) : Blue Prints - THE ASSIST GUIDEBOOK TO THE ACCESSIBLE HOME

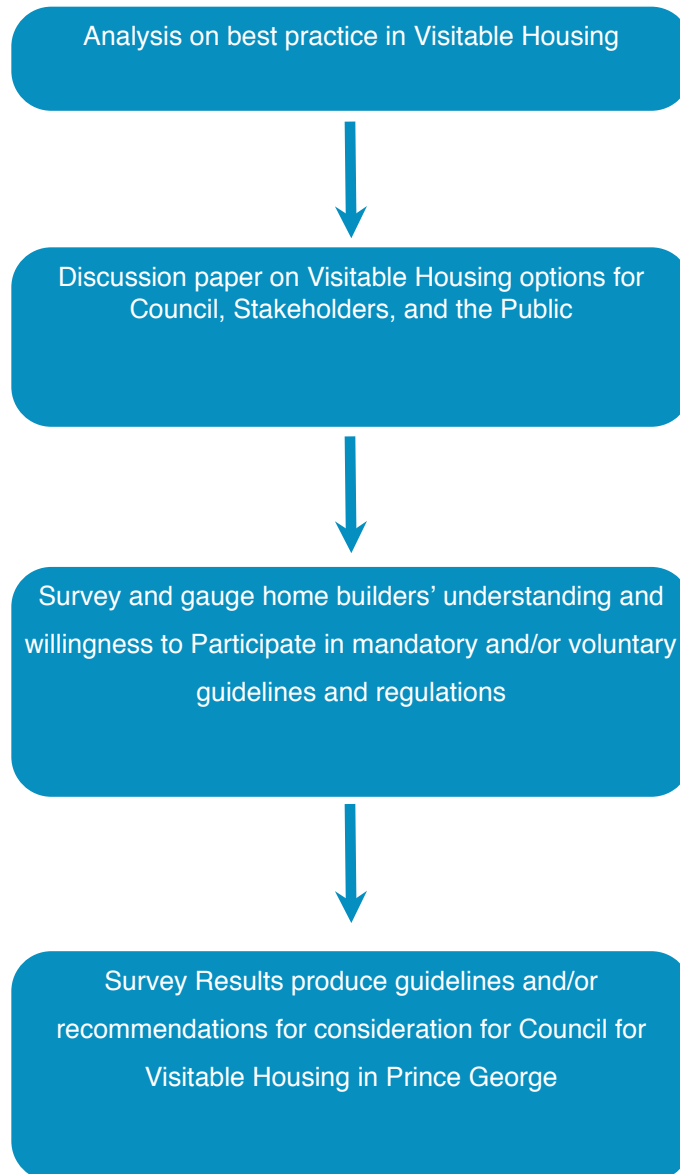
Note: This project was referenced based on Chicago Style from the "Purdue Online Writing Lab"



## Appendix One

### Prince George Visitable Housing Committee

#### Flow Chart



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# APPENDIX B

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September 2010

Dear Participant:

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, we ask that you do not put your name anywhere on the questionnaire. We do not anticipate any risks connected to the completion of this questionnaire and anticipate the benefit of having an opportunity to voice your opinion about our city. All information from the questionnaires will be transferred to electronic data files and stored permanently in the archives of the Institute for Social Research and Evaluation. No identifying information will be available anywhere on these data files. These data files may be made available to other researchers and/or used in comparison with data from previous years. Hardcopy questionnaires will be stored in locked files in the Institute for three years and then they will be shredded.

A summary of research results will be published for general use by other researchers and any other individuals that may be interested. Please contact the Institute at the location listed below if you would like to request this information. A summary of the aggregate data will be presented to city personnel for planning purposes. Any questions about the project can be directed to the Institute at the contact information listed below. Concerns about the project should be directed to the Office of Research at the University of Northern British Columbia (250-960-5820).

The success of a survey like this depends upon large numbers of people being willing to complete and return questionnaires. Although participation is strictly voluntary, your response is very important to us.

**It would be very helpful if you would complete this questionnaire and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope or mail to Tiina Watt (VHP), City of Prince George, 1100 Patricia Boulevard, Prince George, BC V2L 3V9, CANADA. Thank you!**


Sincerely,

Shannon Wagner, PhD, R. Psyc; Director Institute for Social Research and Evaluation

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1

## Section One:

**Question 1** – Please rank your current understanding of what Visitable Housing is? 1 indicating no understanding to 5 indicating Full understanding: expert *(Please check response)*

No understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Full understanding: Expert	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

## Visitable Housing

### General Definition

Visitable Housing homes are homes with 3 basic design features.

1. At least one no-step ground floor entrance
2. Adequate passage doors minimum width of 81.28cm (32 inches) and hallways minimum width of 91.44cm (32 inches) wide on the main floor to a visitable bathroom.
3. A bathroom on the main floor that allows a person using a wheelchair to enter and close the door.

**Question 2** - Would you attend an information session to learn more about Visitable Housing? *(Please check response)*

<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> Maybe	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
-----------------------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------------------	------------------------------

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1

**Question 3** - How beneficial do you think Visitable Housing would be for the following people? *(Please check response)*

	not beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	neutral	beneficial	Very beneficial
Pregnant Women					
Emergency Services (Ambulances, Firemen, etc)					
People temporarily disabled					
Moving companies					
People living in winter climate					
Seniors					
People with mobility issues					
People with permanent disabilities					

## Visitable Housing Issues

This section presents several barriers that may prevent Visitable Homes from being built and identifies potential solutions.

**Question 4** - Please rate how much you feel the following reasons prevent the construction of Visitable Features in new homes? *(Please check response)*

	not a reason at all	not really a reason	don't know	might be a reason	definitely a reason
Cost of Building Visitable Housing Features					

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1

	not a reason at all	not really a reason	don't know	might be a reason	definitely a reason
Attractive to a small percentage of the market					
Familiarity with Visitable Housing					
Extra effort to design Visitable Housing					
Extra effort to Construct Visitable Housing					
Undesirable Image of Visitable Housing					
Lack of Regulations					
Lack of Guidelines					

## Visitable Housing in Prince George

To make Visitable Housing a reality in Prince George, the City would like to hear your thoughts on the best way to make it happen in our community. The following question lists examples of incentives or tools that will help move Visitable Housing forward.

**Question 5** - What would help make **building** Visitable Homes in Prince George a reality? *(Please check response)*

	Would Not Help at All	Might Help a Little	Don't Know	Would Help Somewhat	Would Definitely Help
Mandatory Regulations					

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1



	Would Not Help at All	Might Help a Little	Don't Know	Would Help Somewhat	Would Definitely Help
Voluntary Guidelines					
More Education					
Incentives					
Permit Fees					
Fast Tracking					
Registered Certified Marketing Tool					
Greater Demand and Interest from the Public					

**Question 6** - Would you want to see the following actions taken to create more Visitable Homes in Prince George? *(Please check response)*

	Should definitely not take this action	Should probably not take this action	Don't know	Should probably take this action	Should definitely take this action
Mandatory Regulations (Bylaw)					
Voluntary Guidelines (In OCP and bylaws)					
Incentives for Home Buyers					
Incentives for Builders					

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1

**Question 7** - Would you want to see the Visitable feature of at least one no-step ground floor entrance incorporated in construction of new single family and two family homes by means of the following actions? *(Please check response)*

	Should definitely not take this action	Should probably not take this action	Don't know	Should probably take this action	Should definitely take this action
Mandatory Regulations (Bylaw)					
Voluntary Guidelines (In OCP and bylaws)					
Incentives for Home Buyers					
Incentives for Builders					

**Question 8** - Would you want to see the Visitable features of having adequate passage doors minimum width of 81.28cm (32 inches) and hallways minimum width of 91.44cm (36 inches) on the main floor that provide passage to a visitable bathroom be incorporated in construction of new single family and two family homes by means of the following actions? *(Please check response)*

	Should definitely not take this action	Should probably not take this action	Don't know	Should probably take this action	Should definitely take this action
Mandatory Regulations (Bylaw)					
Voluntary Guidelines (In OCP and bylaws)					
Incentives for Home Buyers					
Incentives for Builders					

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1

**Question 9** - Would you want to see the Visitable feature of having a bathroom, with adequate passage on the main floor that allows a person using a wheelchair to enter and close the door be incorporated in construction of new single family and two family homes by means of the following actions? *(Please check response)*

	Should definitely not take this action	Should probably not take this action	Don't know	Should probably take this action	Should definitely take this action
Mandatory Regulations (Bylaw)					
Voluntary Guidelines (In OCP and bylaws)					
Incentives for Home Buyers					
Incentives for Builders					

Please feel free to add any information on the above questions on this page. Feedback will help strengthen our analysis. Please do not put your name or any other personal information in the ideas and comments section. Thanks.

## Ideas and Comments

[illegible]

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1

*Ideas and Comments*

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***Note: Please have the questionnaire filled out and mailed/  
dropped off before 4pm October 14, 2010. Thank you.***

**Mailing Address:**

Tiina Watt, VHP  
City of Prince George  
1100 Patricia Boulevard  
Prince George  
BC V2L 3V9  
Canada

**Drop Off in Envelope Marked:**

VHP, Long Range Planning Department  
City Hall, Prince George  
1100 Patricia Boulevard

**Completion of Section One**

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1

## Section Two:

Now you have completed the formal part of the survey. Please tell us a little bit about yourself to help us understand our data better.

### Question 1 - Gender (*Please check response*)

- ☐ Male                      ☐ Female

### Question 2 - What is your Age? (*Please write in blank space*)\_\_\_\_\_

### Question 3 - Household Income Level per year: In Canadian Dollars (*Please check response*)

<input type="checkbox"/>	0-20,000 per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	20,000-50,000 per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	50,000 - 80,000 per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	80,000- 110,000 per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	110,000 - 140,000 per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	140,000 – 170,000 per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	170,000 – 200,000 per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	200,000 and above
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer Not to Answer

### Question 4 - Education Level (*Please check response*)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Some High School
<input type="checkbox"/>	High School Graduate
<input type="checkbox"/>	Trade or Vocational Degree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Some College/University
<input type="checkbox"/>	College Certificate/University Degree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer Not to Answer

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1

**Question 5** - What areas of construction are you involved in? *(Please check as many boxes as apply)*

<input type="checkbox"/>	New Home Construction
<input type="checkbox"/>	Renovations (Home)
<input type="checkbox"/>	New Commercial Construction
<input type="checkbox"/>	Renovations - (Commercial)
<input type="checkbox"/>	General Contractor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Landscaping
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sub Trade
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify):
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer Not to Answer

**Question 6** - Please indicate your primary self-identified ethnicity: *(Check one)*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Caucasian
<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian
<input type="checkbox"/>	African
<input type="checkbox"/>	East Indian
<input type="checkbox"/>	First Nations or Aboriginal
<input type="checkbox"/>	Métis
<input type="checkbox"/>	Inuit
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify):
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer Not to Answer

Note: Any comments or ideas can be added at the end of section 1

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# Visitable Housing Project

## Survey Results and Recommendations

Prince George British Columbia

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February 4, 2011

### Survey Results and Recommendations

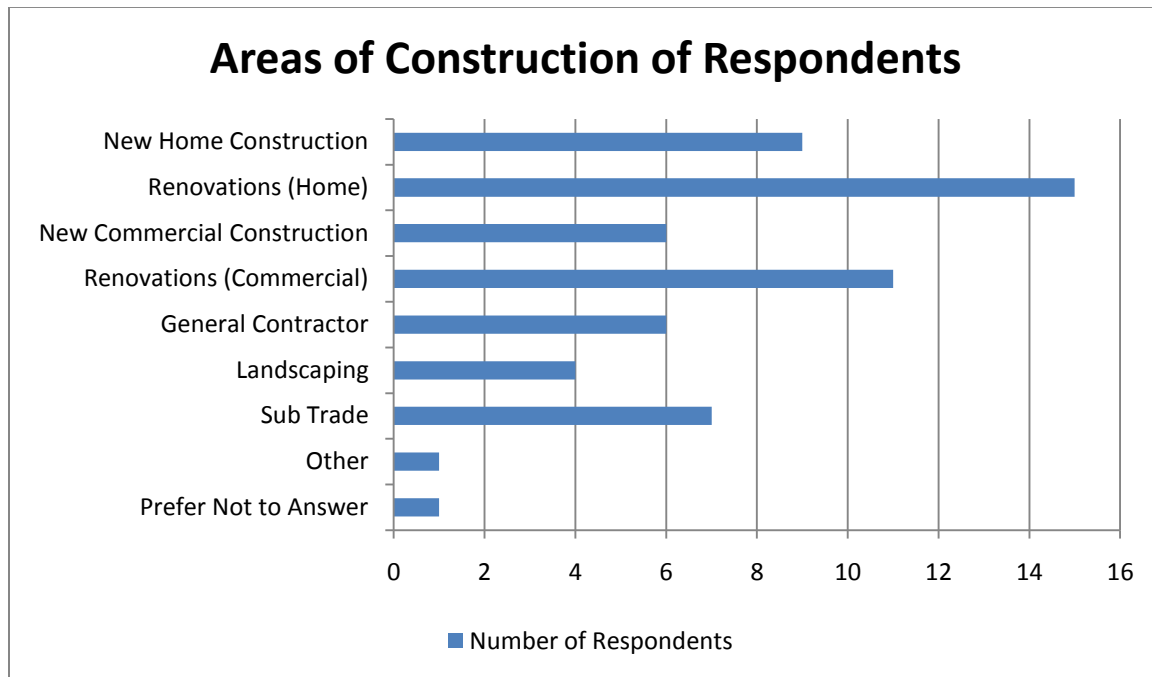
This phase of the project is to provide survey results with recommendations. The first section of this paper is demographics; the second section is the results and recommendations. The format will be as follows; analysis section (with question); chart to show the responses; and recommendations.

#### **Section One:**

The survey population consisted of 297 potential respondents of homebuilders, contractors, sub trades and others contacted through the City of Prince George business license department (full list can be found in Final Report). There were 24 out of 297 survey's (8% of survey's filled out) completed and sent back. Out of the responses there was a high rate of complete surveys. The majority of surveys were completed in full and some questions were left out in a few of the surveys.

There were a prominent percentage of male respondents (17) who were Caucasian (19). The Average age of the male and female population was 48 years of age. Only 5 out of 24 respondents did not provide their age. No respondents made under \$20,000 per household annually. There were 14 out of 22 (64%) respondents making between \$20,000 and 110,000 per household annually. With two respondents not answering and 4 preferred not to answer. The respondents could check more than one option for education. Most responses indicate an educational level of a trade or vocational degree.

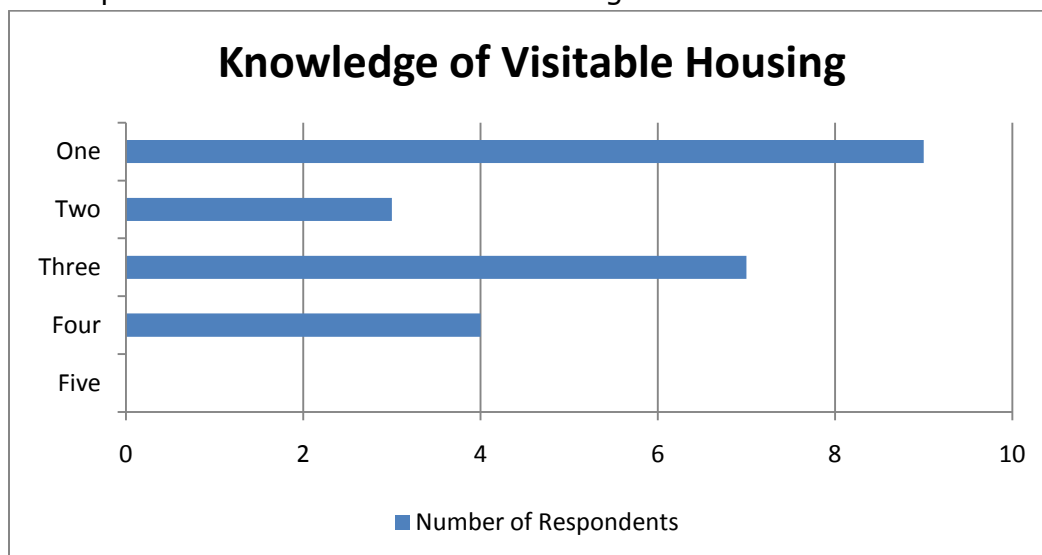
The question was asked '*What areas of construction are you involved in?*' and the respondents could check all answers that were applicable to them.



Section Two:

**Analysis:** The question was asked, '*please rank your current understanding of what Visitable Housing is?; 1 indicating no understanding to 5 indicating full understanding*'.

- 19 respondents indicated no understanding to minimal understanding of Visitable Housing.
- No responses indicated full understanding.



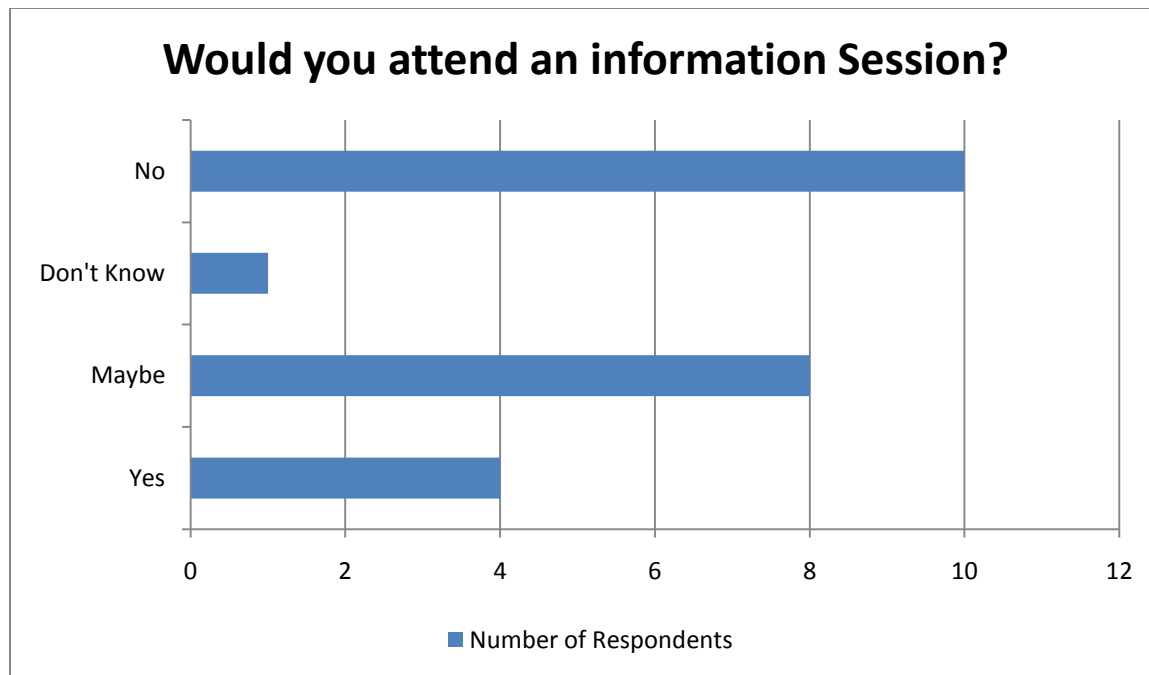
**Recommendations:**

- More information is needed to inform homebuilders.



**Analysis:** The question was asked, *'Would you attend an information session to learn more about Visitable Housing?'*.

- Approximately half of the respondents would not attend a traditional information session.



#### Recommendations:

- A flexible and creative approach has to be taken to inform the public and other stakeholders about Visitable Housing.

**Analysis:** The question was asked, *'How beneficial do you think Visitable Housing would be for the following people?'*. The question listed pregnant women, emergency services, people temporarily disabled, moving companies, people living in winter climate, seniors, people with mobility issues, and people with permanent disabilities as options.

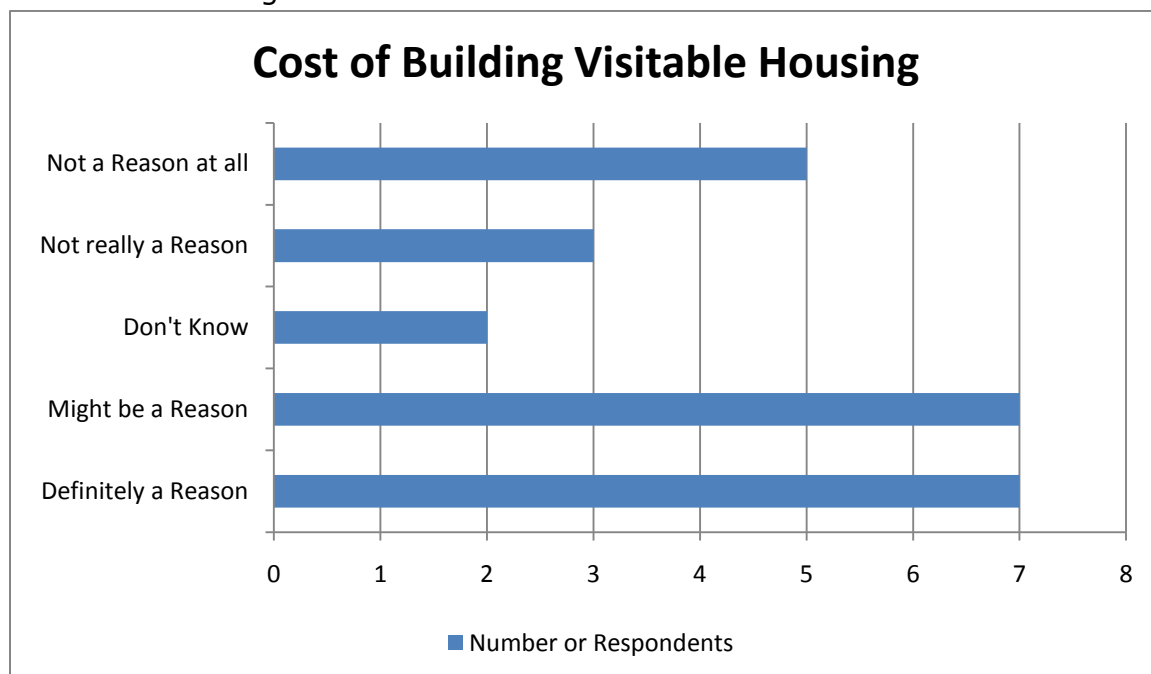
- Respondents indicate Visitable Housing is beneficial or very beneficial for seniors, people living with mobility issues, and people with permanent disabilities.
- Respondents indicate Visitable Housing is somewhat beneficial for people temporarily disabled or for emergency services.
- Respondents found Visitable Housing to be a neutral benefit to pregnant women and people living in winter climates.

#### Recommendations:

- With today's aging population and an increasing number of people with mobility issues, the need for Visitable Housing is apparent.
- Information on who benefits from Visitable Housing is needed.

**Analysis:** The question was asked, 'Please rate how much you feel the following reasons prevent the construction of Visitable Features in new homes?'. The question listed Cost of Building Visitable Housing Features, Attractive to a small percentage of the market, familiarity with Visitable Housing, Extra effort to design Visitable Housing, Extra effort to Construct Visitable Housing, Undesirable Image of Visitable Housing, Lack of Regulations, and Lack of Guidelines as options.

- The greatest contributing factors to preventing the construction of Visitable Features in new homes are the cost, non-marketable, and lack of familiarity of Visitable Housing.
- Other contributing factors of lesser importance are extra effort to design and construct a Visitable Home.
- An undesirable image, lack of regulations, and lack of guidelines were non contributing factors.

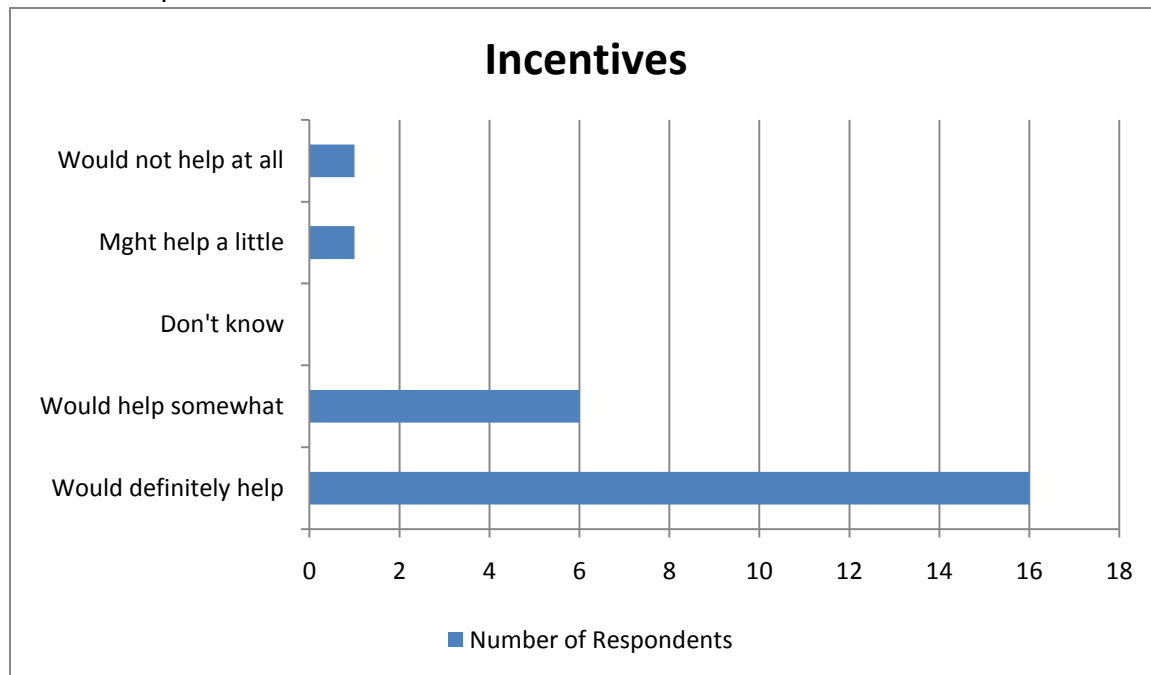


**Recommendations:**

- Further information is needed on the cost and market value of Visitable Homes.

**Analysis:** The question was asked, 'What would help make **building** Visitable Homes in Prince George a reality?'. The question listed Mandatory Regulations, Voluntary Guidelines, More Education, Incentives, Permit Fees, Fast Tracking, Registered Certified Marketing Tool, and Greater Demand and Interest from the Public as options.

- Major contributing factors are incentives, greater demand and interest from the public.



- Respondents indicated more education and fast tracking as contributing but not as important factors.
- Respondents felt that permit fees, mandatory regulations, voluntary guidelines, and a registered certified marketing tool might help.

### Recommendations:

- For Visitable Housing to move forward in Prince George there must be incentives.
- More information on the need and demand for Visitable Housing.

**Analysis:** The following questions were asked, '*Would you want to see the following actions taken to create more Visitable Homes in Prince George?* Each question listed Mandatory Regulations, Voluntary Guidelines, Incentives for Home Buyers, and Incentive for Builders as options.

1. *Would you want to see the Visitable feature of at least one no-step ground floor entrance incorporated in construction of new single family and two family homes by means of the following actions?;*
2. *Would you want to see the Visitable features of having adequate passage doors minimum width of 81.28cm (32 inches) and hallways minimum width of 91.44cm (36 inches) on the main floor that provide passage to a visitable bathroom be incorporated in construction of new single family and two family homes by means of the following actions?;*
3. *Would you want to see the Visitable feature of having a bathroom, with adequate passage on the main floor that allows a person using a wheelchair to enter and close the door be incorporated in construction of new single family and two family homes by means of the following actions?'*

- Combining the responses to questions revealed a pattern of how to advance Visitable Housing in Prince George.
- The number one action taken should be incentive for builders.
- Just over half of respondents indicated incentives for home buyers as an option.
- Respondents are open to voluntary guidelines.
- Just over half of respondents suggest stakeholders do not want mandatory regulations.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop a strategic incentives plan for home builders and home buyers
- Do not implement mandatory guidelines without further research

**Analysis of Respondents Comments:** Many of the comments indicate a lack of understanding about Visitable Housing as some comments believed it was housing for special needs or believed the costs were too great. Many respondents expressed negative attitudes about mandatory regulations.

**MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY:** Other creative educational approaches are needed such as a media strategy campaign, introduce into curriculums of direct and indirect relevant disciplines, professional development credits information sessions, and other inviting and creative educational strategies.

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# APPENDIX C

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# Prince George Visitable Housing Project Recommendations

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## Voluntary Design Guidelines

In 2010, the City of Prince George put forward draft housing objectives and policies for the Official Community Plan review based on information received from the community through the development of 'myPG' Integrated Community Sustainability Plan. A proposed policy within the **Accessibility** section of the Draft Housing Policy was to "*consider developing voluntary or mandatory guidelines for visitable housing in single family and semi-detached housing*". The Prince George Visitable Housing Project (**PGVHP**) addresses this objective by proposing Voluntary Guidelines for new single and two family homes.

**Visitable Features:** These were based on visitable housing feature definitions from other municipalities throughout North America and have been modified to suit the needs of this project. The four features are as follows:

1. A home with accessible path of travel to at least one no-step entrance to the first storey to accommodate a person with limited mobility and persons using a wheelchair.
2. Passable Interior Circulation on the first storey adequate for passage way to visitable washroom and living room.
3. Access to a first storey Washroom. A first storey washroom that a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, can enter, close the door, and use the facilities.
4. One entrance into a living room with a minimum 36" (915mm) wide clearance; thus allowing a person using a mobility device to enter and exit into the living room

The City of Prince George is considering incorporation of the **Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines (VHVDG)** into the Official Community Plan Bylaw 7281, 2001 (OCP) which is currently under review, providing an opportune time for Visitable Housing policy incorporation into the revised OCP. Below are recommended steps to ensure successful use of Voluntary Guidelines.

**STEP 1** – The current OCP includes objectives and policy for Affordable, Rental and Special Needs Housing, for example Policy 6.3 19. b. identifies that *“The City will encourage developers to make a percentage of all new housing units or lots available for affordable and/or special needs housing.”* It is recommended that this policy be maintained and expanded to include visitable housing in Objectives and Policies within the relevant Affordable, Rental and Special Needs housing section in the OCP Review currently underway. This would include the following Policy: *“Support the incorporation of, and remain active in the maintenance of, Visitable Housing Guidelines for new single and two family home construction in Prince George B.C.”*

**STEP 2** – Ensure that Visitable Housing Policies and Objectives are also included within general housing direction within the OCP review as creating a visitable home may not always be considered under the Affordable, Rental and Special Needs Housing heading, but provides direction to provide a diverse housing stock and choices. For example, the current OCP Policy 6.3 23. Seniors Housing *“The City will support a range of seniors housing throughout the city. This may include establishing partnerships with groups or individuals that can actively encourage increased seniors housing opportunities. Locations for seniors housing will be dispersed throughout existing and new neighbourhoods in the city, and are particularly supported near high amenity areas where services are nearby.”* It is recommended that policy contemplating diversity of housing types and choices be maintained and expanded to include visitable housing in Objectives and Policies within the relevant housing sections in the OCP Review currently underway utilizing the following recommended policy: *“The City may support and encourage the concept of Visitable housing for new single and two family homes constructed in Prince George”.*

**STEP 3** - It is recommended the following implementation item be considered for inclusion within the OCP *“The City of Prince George has developed northern focused Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines recommended to be monitored through a checklist of visitable features included in development applications to proponents for information”.* This can include rezoning, development permit, and building permit applications and included within general internal procedures for review and advising (Informational Circulars). Identification of verified Visitable Home construction should be established through the Building Permit Application process to facilitate monitoring.

**STEP 4** – It is recommended the following implementation item also be considered for inclusion within the OCP “*The City considers incorporation of Visitable Housing features within an Amenity Contribution Policy and any incentives packages contemplated by the City.*”

**STEP 5** – The proposed VHVDG 01 checklist of design features should be a supplement to the OCP.

**STEP 6** - The proposed VHVDG 01 checklist should be referenced to and/or incorporated into a future Sustainability Checklist implementation for development applications considered by the City.

**STEP 7** – The following Visitable Housing Guideline should be considered for incorporation into the Residential Development Permit Area Guidelines within the City of Prince George Zoning Bylaw No. 7850, 2007 Section 8.5 for designated areas for comprehensive duplex dwelling areas, or comprehensive strata developments to apply to single and two family dwellings to be included as informational purposes only: “*Basic Accessibility design through the use of Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines are encouraged within comprehensive duplex dwelling areas, or comprehensive single family strata developments. This is for informational purposes only and is a voluntary guideline*”.

The **Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines** (VHVDG 01) document consists of the five visitable design features. It will read as follows:

The Prince George Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines suggest design features that would provide greater accessibility in first storey circulation and first storey amenities in single family and two-family homes beyond the requirements of the BC Building Code. Use of the visitable design guidelines is voluntary.

#### **DWELLING ACCESS**

**A home with accessible path of travel to at least one no-step entrance to the first storey to accommodate a person with limited mobility and persons using a wheelchair.**

- ✓ A path of travel with a gentle grade (maximum 1:20 or 5%) from the street, sidewalk, back lane, or the homes parking space to a first storey accessible entrance.
- ✓ The entrance may be located at the front, side, rear, or through the garage of the home.



- ✓ The path of travel shall be firm, stable, and slip resistant.
- ✓ The path of travel shall be a minimum of 36" (915mm) in width (preferred 48" (1220mm)).
- ✓ No steps shall occur along this path of travel.
- ✓ A minimum 36" (915mm) clear width of the entrance door.
- ✓ A no or low profile threshold at the door. Raised thresholds of 1/4" (6mm) or less do not require any special requirements.
- ✓ Thresholds over 1/4" (6mm) to a maximum of 1/2" (13mm) must be beveled at a maximum slope of 1:2 (50%).

## **CIRCULATION**

**Passable Interior Circulation on the first storey adequate for passage way to visitable washroom and living room.**

- ✓ Clear passage throughout with a minimum 36" (915mm) (preferred 48" (1220mm)) clear width to access first storey washroom and living-room.

## **DOORS AND DOORWAYS**

**A home with door openings on the first storey to accommodate a person with limited mobility and persons using a wheelchair.**

- ✓ Interior doorways – minimum 32" (810mm) (preferred 33 1/2" (850mm)) clear width.

## **WASHROOM**

**Access to a first storey Washroom.** A first storey washroom that a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, can enter, close the door, and use the facilities.

- ✓ This would require a 5'-0" (1520mm) turning circle in front of the toilet with the washroom door not crossing the turning circle while being closed or opened.
- ✓ Clear space under wall-hung fixtures can be included in the 5'-0" (1520mm) requirement.
- ✓ The washroom must have at a minimum one sink and one toilet.

## **FIRST STOREY LIVING ROOM**

**Access to a first storey living room allowing a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, to enter and use space.**

- ✓ One entrance into a living room with a minimum 36" (915mm) clearance; thus allowing a person using a mobility device to enter and exit into the living room.
- ✓ The living room should have enough space to allow the person using a mobility device to adequately move through the space. This would require an allotted 5'-0" (1520mm) turning circle within the living room.

## Mandatory Regulations

Mandatory regulation features would provide better visitable home accessibility in single family and two-family homes beyond what is required by the BC Building Code. Broadly applied mandatory regulations may be a possible course of action for the City of Prince George in the future; however, it is recommended that the City consider regulating its own land sales at this time to provide a leadership role. Any future consideration of broadly applied mandatory regulations should be dependent on the monitoring of the Visitable Housing Project and other market indicators or successes in Visitable Housing at the currently recommended Voluntary Guideline level and City acquisition considerations identified below. It is recommended the following policies be considered within the Official Community Plan review:

- City land sales for residential development of market-rate single and two-family homes should require 15% to be Visitable Housing through a covenant under Section 219 of the *Land Title Act*. The selection of 15% is correlated to the percentage of B.C. residents with a disability according to Statistics Canada in 2006.
- City land sales for residential development of non-market single and two-family homes require 100% to be Visitable Housing.

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The 'Prince George Visitable Housing Project' received financial assistance from Affordability and Choice Today (ACT), a housing regulatory reform initiative of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (administrator), Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (funder), the Canadian Home Builders' Association, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.

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# APPENDIX D

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# Visitable Housing Project



For the City of Prince George British Columbia

## What is Visitable Housing?

Visitable housing is a simple yet powerful concept for new home construction. One broadly used base definition of Visitable Housing is, 'a home with one no step entrance, adequate main floor passage doors, and main floor bathroom'.

### Connecting Community



With Visitable Infrastructure

## City Of Prince George Visitable Housing Project

The City of Prince George in partnership with Affordability and Choice Today (ACT), has taken the positive step towards incorporating 'Visitable Housing' values into the infrastructure of Prince George. The scope of the Prince George Visitable Housing project had three main steps:

- 1) A discussion paper on Visitable Housing and visitable options - how these options pertain to the City of Prince George at a local level.
- 2) Survey stakeholders - Survey population that consisted of Prince George home builders.
- 3) Created recommendations for guidelines with appropriate next steps.

## City of Prince George Design Objectives

The Prince George Visitable Housing Voluntary Design Guidelines suggest design features that would provide better home access, first storey circulation, and first storey amenities accessibility in single family and two-family homes beyond that is required by the BC Building Code. Use of the guidelines is voluntary.

# Voluntary Design Guidelines

## Dwelling access

A home with accessible path of travel to at least one no-step entrance to the first storey to accommodate a person with limited mobility and persons using a wheelchair.

- ✓ A path of travel with a gentle grade (maximum 1:20 or 5%) from the street, sidewalk, back lane, or the homes parking space to a first storey accessible entrance.
- ✓ The entrance may be located at the front, side, rear, or through the garage of the home. The path of travel shall be firm, stable, and slip resistant.
- ✓ The path of travel shall be a minimum of 36" (915mm) in width (preferred 48" (1220mm)).
- ✓ No steps shall occur along this path of travel.
- ✓ A minimum 36" (915mm) clear width of the entrance door.
- ✓ A no or low profile threshold at the door. Raised thresholds of 1/4" (6mm) or less do not require any special requirements.
- ✓ Thresholds over 1/4" (6mm) to a maximum of 1/2" (13mm) must be beveled at a maximum slope of 1:2 (50%).

## Circulation

Passable Interior Circulation on the first storey adequate for passage way to visitable washroom and living room.

- ✓ Clear passage throughout with a minimum 36" (915mm) (preferred 48" (1220mm)) clear width to access first storey washroom and living-room.

## Doors and doorways

A home with door openings on the first storey to accommodate a person with limited mobility and persons using a wheelchair.

- ✓ Interior doorways – minimum 32" (810mm) (preferred 33 1/2" (850mm)) clear width.

## Washroom

Access to a first storey washroom. A first storey washroom that a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, can enter, close the door, and use the facilities.

- ✓ This would require a 5'-0" (1520mm) turning circle in front of the toilet with the washroom door not crossing the turning circle while being closed or opened.
- ✓ Clear space under wall-hung fixtures can be included in the 5'-0" (1520mm) requirement.
- ✓ The washroom must have at a minimum one sink and one toilet.

## First storey living room

Access to a first storey living room allowing a person using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, to enter and use space.

- ✓ One entrance into a living room with a minimum 36" (915mm) clearance; thus allowing a person using a mobility device to enter and exist into the living room.
- ✓ The living room should have enough space to allow the person using a mobility device to adequately move through the space.
- ✓ this would require an allotted 5'-0" (1520mm) turning circle within the living room.

The 'Prince George Visitable Housing Project' received financial assistance from Affordability and Choice Today (ACT), a housing regulatory reform initiative of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (administrator), Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (funder), the Canadian Home Builders' Association, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.