

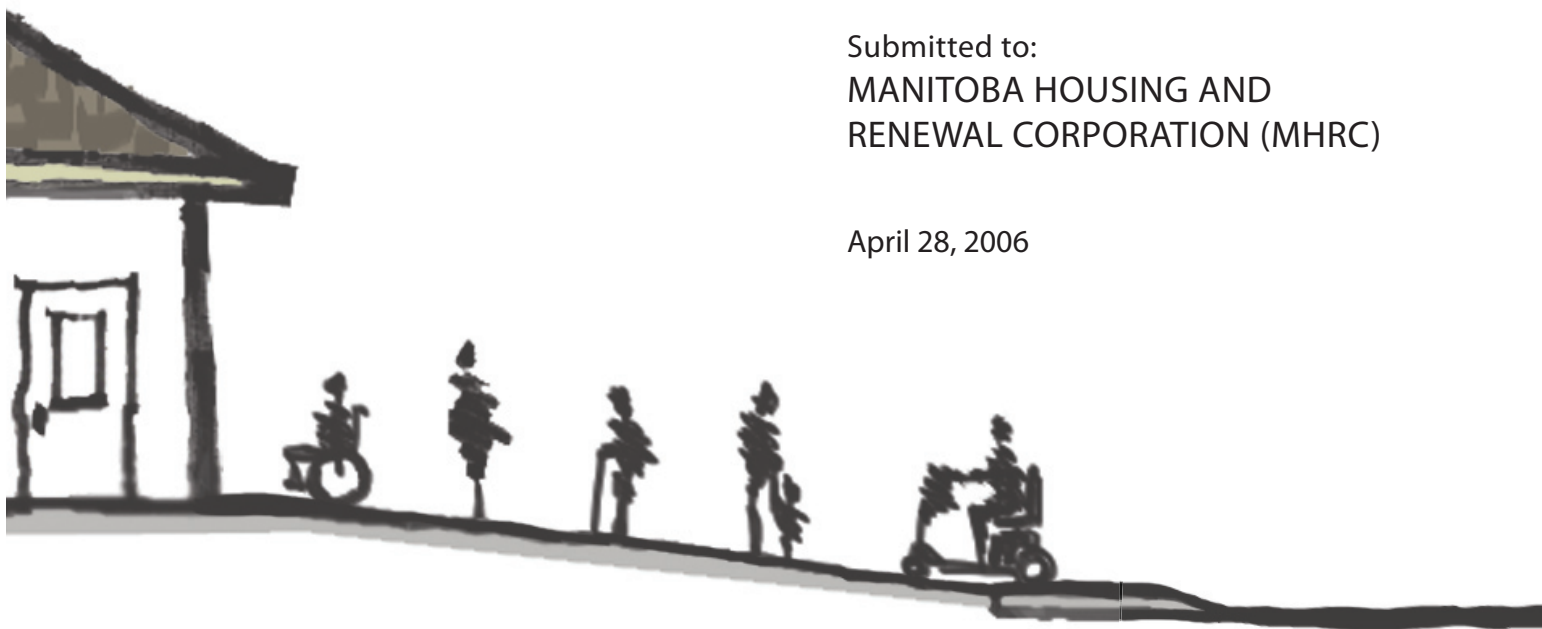
Visitable Housing

Community Building Through Visitable & Adaptable Housing

A BACKGROUND REPORT WITH DRAFT
POLICIES, IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES
AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Submitted to:
MANITOBA HOUSING AND
RENEWAL CORPORATION (MHRC)

April 28, 2006

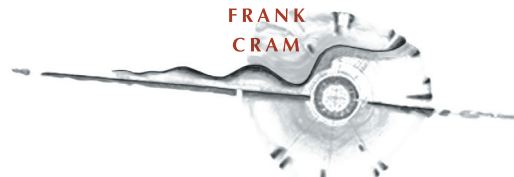


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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 Report Objectives	3
1.2 The VISIBLE Housing Concept	3
1.3 What VISIBLE Housing Is Not	5
1.4 Dimensions & Metric Conversion	6
2. Terminology and Definitions	7
3. Design Requirements	9
3.1 Basic VISIBILITY	9
3.2 Enhanced VISIBILITY	13
3.3 Adaptable Housing	15
4. Overcoming Obstacles	17
5. Recommendations	21
5.1 Draft Policy Recommendations	21
5.2 Recommended Initiatives	24
5.3 Recommended Programs	27
6. Implementation Strategies	29
6.1 Strategic Directions	29
6.2 Implementation Priorities	30
7. Educational Materials	33

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Discussion and Review of Definitions
- Appendix 2: Principles of Universal Design
- Appendix 3: Canadian Programs and Initiatives
- Appendix 4: Existing Programs and Legislative Efforts in the U.S.
- Appendix 5: What is Happening Outside the U.S.
- Appendix 6: Sample Policies and Programs
- Appendix 7: Consultation Notes
- Appendix 8: Costs
- Appendix 9: Links and Sources

1. Introduction

1.1 Report Objectives

This report was commissioned by Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (MHRC) to provide tools and strategies to advance the implementation of visitable housing in the province of Manitoba. It includes draft policy recommendations, design guidelines, educational materials, and implementation strategies. This report is based on research into programs and initiatives from across North America and the world and includes consultation findings with local stakeholders, including builders, developers, regulators, and advocacy groups. The recommendations and materials presented in this report are tailored to suit the Manitoba marketplace. The intent of this study was to provide MHRC with a realistic starting point for this initiative, in keeping with the pragmatic origins and current trends of the visitability movement.

In order to attain a full and accurate understanding of the concepts put forth in this report, it should be read in its entirety. We encourage the reader to avoid reading and excerpting information out of context, as this may remove vital qualifiers and cross-references.

1.2 The Visitable Housing Concept

Visitability is a movement aimed at changing housing construction practices so that providing a basic level of access becomes the norm. Eleanor Smith of Atlanta, Georgia, is often cited as its founder, but Sweden has had a visitable housing standard in place since 1976 – a decade before Eleanor formed the movement’s principal advocacy group, Concrete Change.

In a visitable home, basic access is achieved through the incorporation of a few carefully selected features that make life easier for everyone. Providing basic access in all housing has obvious and significant benefit to those with mobility impairments, but also serves families pushing strollers, furniture movers, renovators shuttling equipment and supplies, and residents with temporary injuries. The concept has been adopted by a number of housing agencies and governments around the world and is beginning to shape policy in Canada.

Visitability is one of a range of programs and approaches to improve access in homes. Figure 1 illustrates where visitability fits into the spectrum.

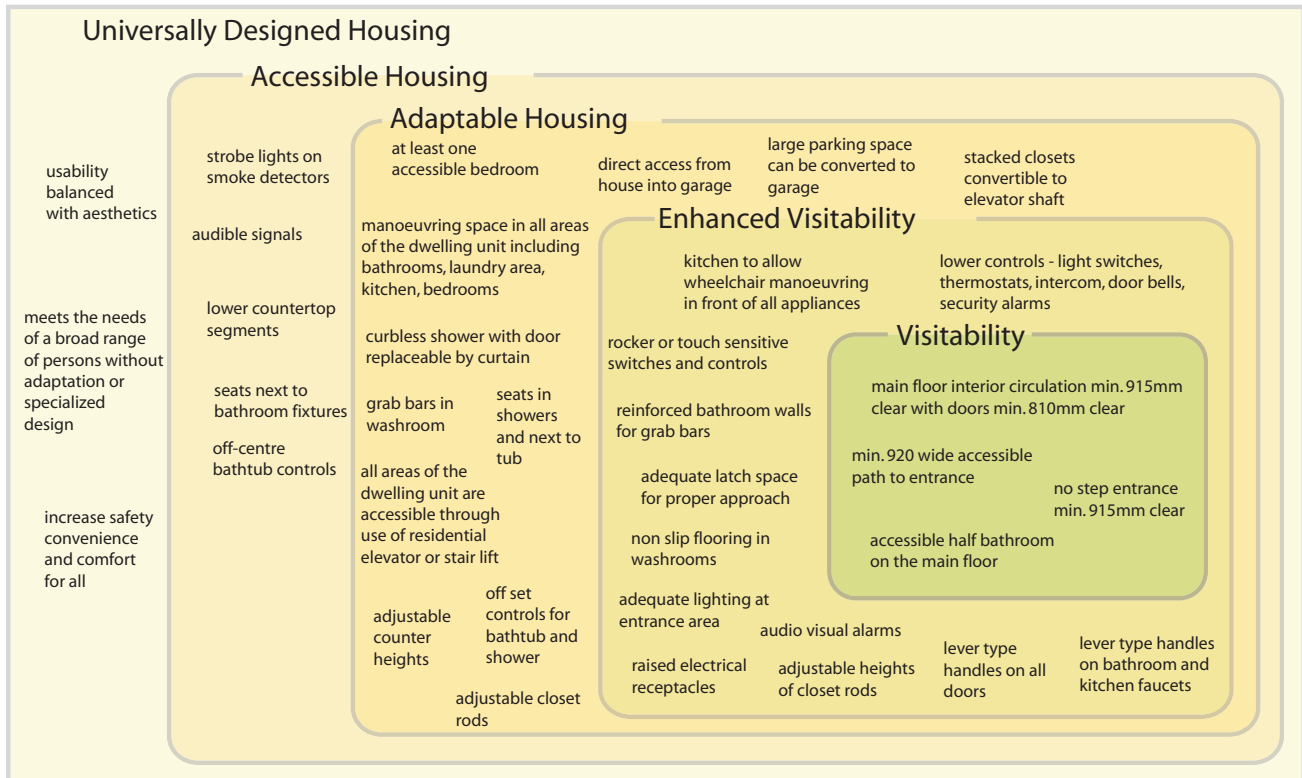


Figure 1. The relationship of various levels of residential accessibility, showing some of the features or key concepts included in each level.

While the other approaches offer designers and builders a multitude¹ of options, visitability's list of typical requirements is intentionally brief:

- an accessible route to at least one entrance;
- a no-step entry with generous landing area;
- passable main floor doors and hallways; and
- a main floor bathroom that can be accessed by a person using a wheelchair.

There are numerous benefits to the concept of visitability – these are detailed in some of the excellent resources listed in Appendix 9. One of the key benefits, distinguishing it from other approaches is its role in *community building*: helping to integrate persons with mobility impairments into the social fabric of their neighbourhoods. "Although less than the ideal of a universally designed home, visitability is actually universal design practiced through community and neighborhood planning.

¹ The Australian Standard 4299 – Adaptable Housing (1995) (AS 4299) lists 119 essential and desirable features. See Appendix 1.

It ensures that a basic level of accessibility will be provided in all housing, and, it opens opportunities for participation in community life.² For this to happen, visitable homes must themselves become part of the neighbourhood fabric, a commonplace addition to the catalogue of housing types that comprise our communities, and an appealing choice for able-bodied consumers.

Figure 1 demonstrates two critical points:

1. Of all approaches to improve residential accessibility, visitability affords the most basic, “no-frills” level of access;
2. Within this small bubble there is little room to negotiate. These features are the essential, minimal requirements. Among other jurisdictions with visitable housing policies and initiatives, there is broad agreement on this bare minimum. They can be considered prerequisites for all levels of residential access.

The great insight of visitability lies in cutting through the multitude of universal and accessible design *possibilities* based on current standards, guidelines, and evolving best practices, and delivering in their place a clear, modest, manageable, firm set of *requirements*. This was done not because advocates want less or think the features listed in Figure 1’s outer bubbles are not important, but to get more houses with improved access built.

Visitability is an *action plan*. It is a call to quit talking and start building inclusive communities.

1.3 What Visitability is Not

1. **Visitable homes are not fully accessible dwelling units.**

Additional renovations are typically required to serve the long-term needs of a resident with a disability. However, visitable features provide an essential foundation for such renovations.

2. **A visitable dwelling unit is not a universally designed home.**

It does not seek to address the needs of the broadest possible range of abilities, but targets mobility impairment specifically. However, visitability follows the principles of universal design in that no step entrances and more spacious circulation areas make life easier for the able-bodied, as well as persons with disabilities.

3. **Visitable features do not apply to the upper floors or the basement.**

Improved access is limited to the main floor.

² Truesdale & Steinfeld, (2002, pp. 8-9), quoted in “Visitability as an Approach to Inclusive Housing Design and Community Development: A Look at its Emergence, Growth, and Challenges,” by Jordana L. Maisel, Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA), Buffalo, NY, June 2005.

2. Terminology and Definitions

We offer the following terms and definitions as the basis for the remaining discussion and policy recommendations. Background on the origin and selection of these terms is provided in Appendix 1.

Basic Visitability:	A person with a mobility impairment can enter safely, manoeuvre independently, and participate in activities in the main living spaces of the home, including use of a washroom with a sink and toilet.
Enhanced Visitability:	This includes all the features of <i>Basic Visitability</i> , plus a few enhancements that improve safety, usability, comfort, and flexibility. These enhancements are typically low cost and have minimal spatial requirements.
Adaptable Housing:	This includes all the features of <i>Enhanced Visitability</i> , with additional features and allocation of spaces to ease the renovation process and help accommodate residents' changing needs and abilities.
Accessible Housing:	The term "Accessible" used in the context of the following policies means housing that is ready for immediate occupancy by a person with a physical disability. This is housing that has been initially designed or modified to suite the particular requirements or functional abilities of the occupant. It allows full access to all levels of the house and use by the occupant.
Universally Designed Housing:	Dwelling units that meet the broadest possible range of needs for persons of any age, stature, or level of functional ability without the need for adaptation. It is based on a set of design principles such as flexibility, intuitive use, and accommodating differences. Universally Designed Housing does not form part of the following policies and implementation strategies, but the underlying principles are relevant. See Appendix 2 for further information on the principles of universal design.
Substantial Renovation:	A renovation that includes the reconstruction of interior living space, and has a value greater than \$40,000 or 75% of the assessed value of the property, whichever is greater.
Multi-Unit:	Multi-family housing consisting of four or more units

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3. Design Requirements

This section provides detailed requirements for basic visitability, enhanced visitability, and adaptable housing. Further detail and explanation of these requirements can be found in CSA B651-04 "Accessible Design for the Built Environment," *ACCESS: A Guide to Accessible Design for Designers, Builders, Facility Owners and Managers* and other resources listed in Appendix 9.

3.1 Basic Visitability

Applicability

Basic Visitability requirements should apply to all newly constructed and substantially renovated dwelling units in the province of Manitoba.

Mandatory Requirements

Basic Visitability has four mandatory requirements:

1. An Accessible Path of Travel

Performance Criteria:

- A path of travel with a gentle grade (maximum 1:20 or 5%) from the street, sidewalk, back lane, or the dwelling unit's parking space to an accessible entrance into the dwelling unit. This dwelling unit's entrance may be located at the front, side, rear, or through the garage of the home. In certain situations, in order to gain access into the dwelling unit, a ramp³ may be required;
- The path of travel shall be firm, stable, and slip resistant;
- The path of travel shall be a minimum of 915mm [36"] in width (preferred 1220mm [48"]);
- The cross slope of the path of travel to be at a maximum of 1:50 or 2%;
- No steps shall occur along this path of travel; and
- No drop off or slopes over 1:20 shall occur along the edge of the path of travel or a curb of at least 75mm in height shall be provided.

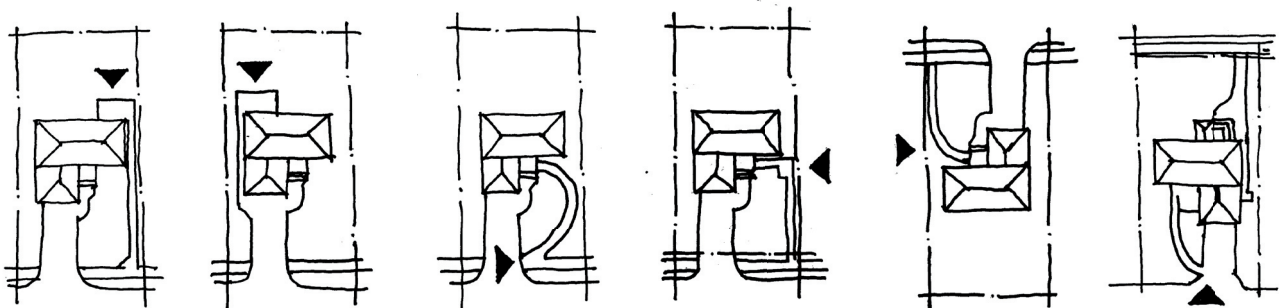


Figure 2. Accessible Path of Travel

³ A ramp may be used in existing situations where the elevation of the floor above grade is too great to be accessed a gently sloped walkway alone.

2. A No-Step Entrance Area

Performance Criteria:

- An exterior landing entrance area with a minimum clear area of 1525 by 1525mm [5'0" x 5'0"] (preferred 2285 by 2285mm [7'6" x 7'6"]);
- A landing area that is firm, stable, and slip resistant;
- A landing area that has a slope in any direction of no more than 1:50 (2%);
- A no-step entrance at the entrance door;
- A minimum 915mm [36"] clear width of the entrance door;
- A no or low profile threshold at the door. Raised thresholds of 6mm [1/4"] or less do not require any special requirements. Thresholds over 6mm to a maximum of 13mm [1/2"] must be beveled at a maximum slope of 1:2 (50%). Less steep is recommended. Thresholds over 13mm must be ramped similar to those requirements of curb ramps as outlined in the references below.

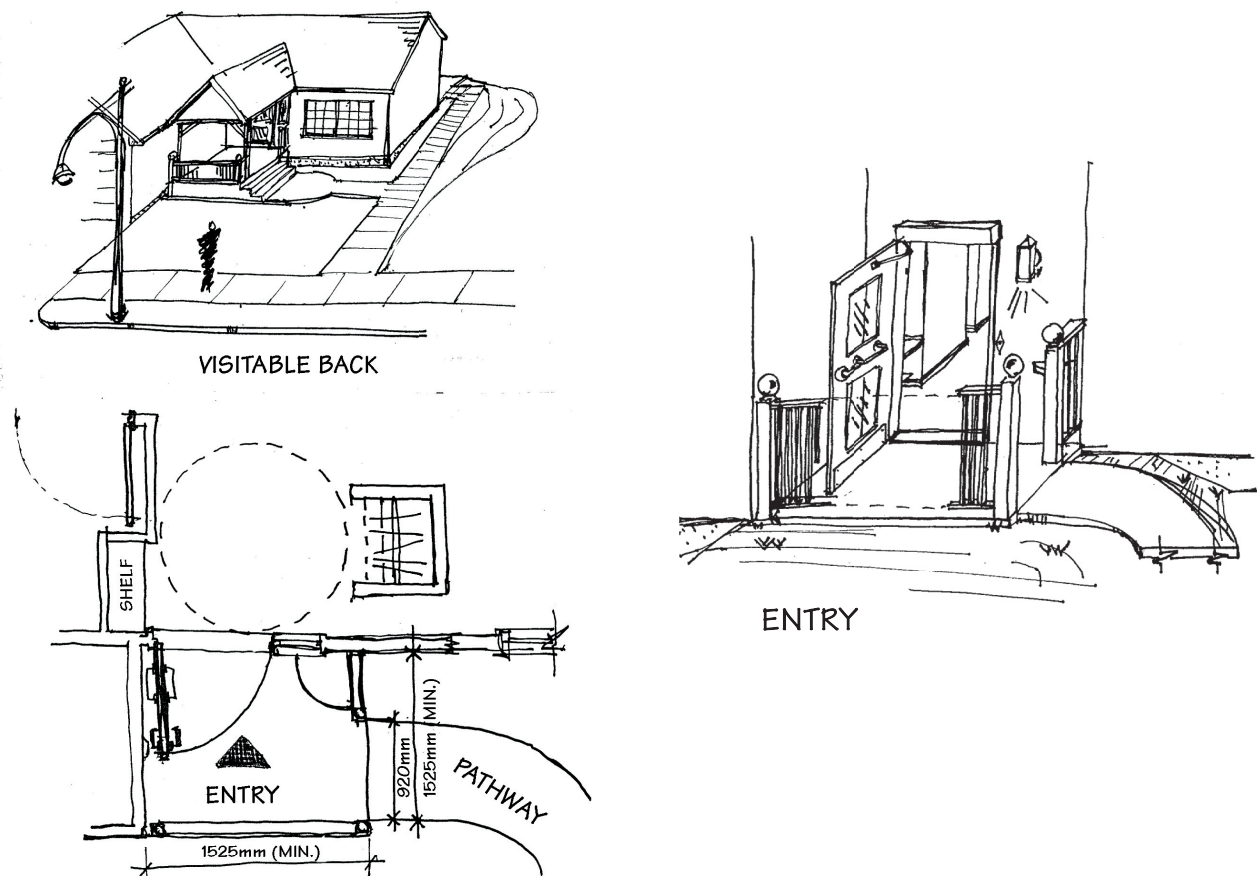


Figure 3. No-step Entrance Area

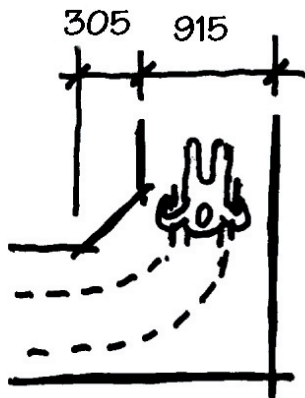
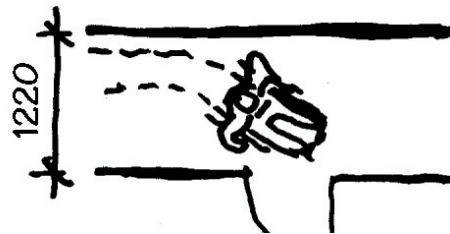
3. Passable Interior Circulation on the Main Floor

Performance Criteria

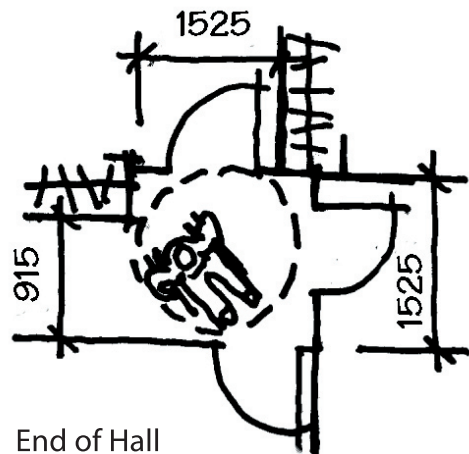
- Interior doorways – minimum 810mm [32"] (preferred 850mm [34"]) clear width;
- Clear passage throughout with a minimum 915mm [36"] (preferred 1220mm [48"]) clear width to access all main floor activity areas, including the washroom. Where a turn is required by a person using a wheelchair to access various rooms on the main floor (sitting, dining, entertaining and the washroom), the clear width of a passageway should be at least 1350mm [53"].



Straight



Corner



End of Hall

Figure 4. Passable Interior Circulation on the Main Floor

4. Access to a Main Floor Washroom

Performance Criteria

- A main floor 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 1525mm [5'0"] 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 1525mm [5'0"] requirement.
- The washroom must have at a minimum one sink and one toilet.

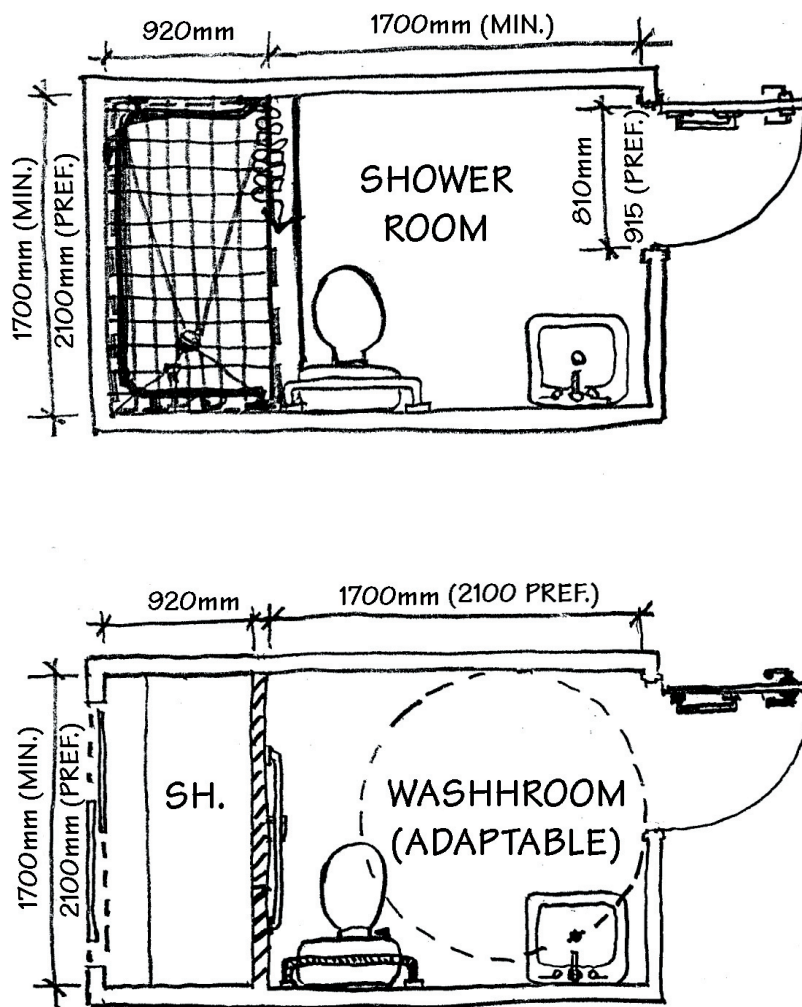


Figure 5. Access to a Main Floor Washroom

3.2 Enhanced Visitability

Applicability

Enhanced Visitability requirements should apply to all newly constructed and substantially renovated dwelling units funded by MHRC. In addition, on-going maintenance and repair work on existing public housing should upgrade to *Enhanced Visitability* standards wherever feasible.

Mandatory Requirements

Enhanced Visitability has five mandatory requirements:

1. An Accessible Path of Travel

Performance Criteria:

- Meet the requirements for *Basic Visitability*.

2. An Enhanced No-Step Entrance Area

Performance Criteria

- Meet the requirements for *Basic Visitability*, plus:
- Minimum 610mm [24"] wide area next to the latch side of the entrance door on the pull side of the door and a minimum 305mm on the latch side of the entrance door on the push side of the door;
- Where door bells or intercom systems are used, these controls shall be located no higher than 1220mm [48"] above grade;
- The entrance area landing and entrance door shall be well lighted to a level of at least 200 lux.; and
- Door hardware, such as handles, pulls, latches and locks should be operable with one hand and mounted no higher than 915mm [36"] from the finished floor. Operation of door openers, handles, or locks should not require fine manual dexterity, such as grasping, pinching or twisting. Return lever locksets are recommended.

3. Enhanced Interior Circulation on the Main Floor

Performance Criteria

- Meet the requirements for *Basic Visitability*, plus:
- Minimum 610mm [24"] wide area next to the latch side of a door on the pull side of the door and a minimum 305mm [12"] on the latch side of the door on the push side of a door;
- Raised electrical outlets (455mm [18"] minimum to center line above finished floor level);
- Controls such as light switches, security controls, intercoms, and thermostats to be located at a maximum of 1220mm [48"] above the finished floor level;
- Return lever lock sets on all doors in the dwelling unit; and
- An electrical receptacle located above the dwelling unit's entrance door (for future electronic controls).

4. Access to an Enhanced Main Floor Washroom

Performance Criteria

- Meet the requirements for *Basic Visitability*, plus:
- At least one properly located grab bar;
- Wall reinforcement for future grab bar installation;
- Lever type faucets; and
- Non-slip flooring.

5. Kitchen Enhancements

Performance Criteria

- Lever type kitchen faucets; and
- Clear floor space of at least 765 by 1220mm [30" x 48"] in front of each of the appliances, sink, and work counters and with a minimum clearance between counters and all opposing cabinets of at least 1525mm [5'0"].

3.3 Adaptable Housing

Applicability

Adaptable Housing requirements should apply to a minimum of 20% of all units in publicly-funded multi-unit housing projects. The percentage may vary to a higher level depending on the identified need in the specific location and should be based on projected demographics to accommodate an aging population and persons with disabilities.

Mandatory Requirements

Adaptable Housing has the following mandatory requirements:

1. An Accessible Path of Travel

Performance Criteria

- Meet the requirements for *Enhanced Visitability*, plus:
- Parking areas with lighting positioned to illuminate ground conditions and vehicle doors on both sides of the vehicle. Motion activated lighting is preferred at these locations.

2. An Enhanced No-Step Entrance Area

Performance Criteria

- Meet the requirements for *Enhanced Visitability*, plus:
- Exterior entrances with lighting positioned to illuminate ground conditions, the key hole and visitors' faces. Motion activated lighting is preferred at these locations.

3. Enhanced Interior Circulation on the Main Floor

Performance Criteria

- Meet the requirements for *Enhanced Visitability*, plus:

4. Access to an Adaptable Main Floor Washroom

Performance Criteria

- Meet the requirements for *Enhanced Visitability*, plus:
- Allow adaptation for an accessible tub or shower;
- Lever type handles on all tub and shower controls;
- Shower controls with temperature regulated anti-scald units;
- Shower heads mounted on a height adjustable bracket that may be removable from the bracket for hand held showering;
- A washroom that has transfer space beside the toilet of at least 915mm [36"] between the toilet rim and a vanity or an adjacent wall;
- A knock out cabinet below the vanity sink; and
- Offset and insulated drain and hot water pipes below the sink;

5. Access to an Adaptable Kitchen

Performance Criteria

- Meet the requirements for *Enhanced Visitability*, plus:
- A knock out cabinet below the kitchen sink;
- Offset and insulated drain and hot water pipes below the sink;
- Upper kitchen cabinets that adjustable in height;
- Designated task lighting in kitchen including at stove or cook top and other work surfaces;

6. Other Areas of the Home

- “D” pulls with a minimum finger space of 25mm [1”] on all cabinetry and pocket doors;
- Maneuvering space in bedrooms of at least 1525 by 1525mm [5’0” x 5’0”] beside and in front of potential locations for beds and in front of all clothes closets;
- Lower windows that allow a seated person to easily view out;
- Low thresholds at entrances to balconies (where provided);
- A canopy over each of the dwelling unit’s entrances; and
- A 1520mm [5’0”] turnaround circle in front of laundry appliances.

7. Additional performance criteria applying to multi-level dwelling units

- A bedroom on the main floor level or an area on the main floor level that may be converted into a bedroom;
- The main floor washroom and washrooms on other levels can be made fully accessible either by adding specific washroom features or through renovations in order to easily increase the space in the washrooms;
- Three-way switches located at the top and bottom of stairwells;
- Handrails on both sides of all stairwells;
- Blocking in the stairwell walls to allow for the future installation of a stair lift;
- Blocking in the wall at the top and bottom of a set of stairs to allow for the future installation of security gates;
- Stairwells with a clear width of at least 1070mm [42”] that is sufficient to install a future stair lift; and
- Vertically aligned spaces (ideally closets) on each level of a dwelling unit, with a minimum interior dimension of 1525 by 1525mm [5’0” x 5’0”] to provide for a variety of home elevator models.

4. Overcoming Obstacles

Through the course of our research and consultations, a number of recurring issues emerged which we consider the primary obstacles to visitability in Manitoba. They are listed here in generally descending order of importance, with some proposed solutions. These solutions form the basis for the recommended policies, initiatives, and programs.

1. Cost

Locally and in other jurisdictions, anxiety over the cost of visitability is one of the main barriers to its adoption by home builders. Speculative features that add to the cost of a unit are risky. In the affordable housing sector, even minute cost increases are a threat.

Solutions

Replace cost anxiety with facts by tracking additional costs in publicly funded visitable units, and providing this information to private sector builders. For affordable housing, visitability regulations must be accompanied by subsidies to cover any additional costs. See Appendix 8 and Recommended Programs 2 through 8.

2. Getting to the Door

Several trends in new single family detached housing design and construction make a well-integrated, accessible route to an entrance difficult to achieve. These include the desire for large basement windows, (driven by the demand for more livable basements and the convenience of loading drywall directly into the basement through the larger openings) and the trend toward long homes on shallow lots with the drainage directed either to the front or back (not split). City representatives also noted that there are some regulations that impede the provision of a no-step entry – specifically, that ramps require a lot of paperwork and sometimes a neighbourhood lobbying effort, and split drainage is discouraged in some cases due to concerns about blockage in rear yard drainage courses.

Solutions

Encourage lot grading plans with split drainage to reduce the grade differential between site and finished floor. Basements should have at least one quadrant without windows, to allow earthwork against the building in support of an accessible walkway and entry area. Lot size and shape and house siting on the lot should support an accessible walkway to an entrance, and developer's engineering consultants should have a provisional accessible route in mind when laying out the lots and designing the lot grades. Consumers should be made aware of the trade-offs (in terms of lost flexibility and shortened period-of-use, and

smaller market for re-sale) when they are selecting houses with high main floors and steep lots. Refer to Initiatives 1 and 2, and 3.

3. Infringing on Freedoms

Many jurisdictions in the United States have experienced opposition and even court challenges based on the idea that mandating visitability infringes on the right to design, build or buy the kind of homes we want.⁶ Manitoba developers did not express their reservations as an issue of freedom, but some saw visitability as restrictive and not reflective of the realities of the housing market.

Solutions

Use the market rather than regulation to drive change in privately-funded housing. Target consumers with a promotional campaign; consumers will become aware of the benefits of visitable housing, demand will increase, and builders/developers will meet the demand. See Initiatives 1 and 2.

4 Lack of Consumer Interest and Demand

Though our aging population and growing number of people with disabilities suggest a growing market for visitable housing, our consultations indicate this has not had a significant impact on tract building practices. Two developers reported they are getting more requests for improved accessibility features, but this still represent a very small portion of the market. In the current highly competitive market, speculative builders are reluctant to provide features that add even minimal cost without a clear consumer demand.

Solutions

Launch a multi- media public awareness campaign, using a professionally-designed identity package to disseminate information about visitability and its benefits. See Initiatives 1 and 2.

⁶ Jordana Maisel, "Visitability as an Approach to Inclusive Housing Design and Community Development: A Look at its Emergence, Growth, and Challenges," Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA), Buffalo, NY, June 2005, p. 27.

5. Adopting Innovation

Incorporating visitable features means changing the way houses are designed, approved, constructed and marketed. The changes are purposely minimal, but visitability is still a new way of thinking about housing that will encounter resistance simply because it is new. This is exacerbated by the current pace of housing construction in Manitoba. Housing starts in the capital region of Manitoba and Brandon reached a 30-year high in March, 2006, up 17% from the previous year.⁷ Builders are scrambling to keep up with this growth, and have neither the interest nor the resources to retool their production methods to include new ideas.

Solutions

Keep the requirements for visitability simple and easy to understand. Provide various incentives to builders: publicity may be as desirable an incentive as financial assistance, as it can help differentiate one builder from another in this competitive market. Sponsor demonstration projects that will show how the requirements for visitability are modest and almost invisible. See Initiative 2.

6. Ramp Aesthetics

Most of the visitable features are aesthetically neutral, though wider hallways (or the elimination of hallways) was considered by one developer a positive selling point. Ramps, however, are often unsightly and poorly integrated into the design of the house and lot. There have been cases in Winnipeg where neighbours petitioned against a ramp on aesthetic grounds. Ramps also contradict the principal of seamless integration of visitability into the neighbourhood – visitable homes with ramps are visually distinct from the surrounding homes, and reinforce the notion that this is specialty housing. There is also some concern that homes with obvious accessibility features become targets for crime.

Solution

Ramps should not be the default solution for an accessible route to the entrance. Sloping walkways are the preferred option, providing a more attractive and useful means of access, blending well into the neighbourhood. Sloping walkway access requires foresight in the design of the home and the lot grading. For renovations, ramps should be professionally designed and be treated as an amenity – expanded landings can be deck and play spaces, railings can support planters. Ramps should enclose and define outdoor living spaces rather than bisecting them, and they should be constructed of materials that complement the exterior of the house. Refer to the Educational Materials section for other design considerations for ramps.

⁷ Winnipeg Free Press, April 11, 2006.

7. Ambiguity and Confusion over Requirements, Purpose

There is some danger in trying to do too many things with a set of policies. Visitability is very specific in its goals, but most jurisdictions have tinkered with the three requirements, adding other no-cost or low-cost features to improve general accessibility. This is not necessarily bad – the modifications to suit local situations appear to have helped the movement to spread. However, adding features erodes the essential simplicity of the concept, and begins to blur the lines between visitability (minimal, precise built-in basic home access) and adaptable homes (flexible, imprecise opportunities for adaptations, suiting aging in place and a range of disabilities). As the purpose and the requirements become less clear, the marketability is diminished, affecting support at the political and consumer ends of the spectrum.

Solutions

Keep it simple. If the Design Requirements section and the division of *Basic Visitability*, *Enhanced Visitability* and *Adaptable Housing* is creating confusion, eliminate the enhancements and revise policies to meet *Basic Visitability* alone. It is commonly held in the U.S. that consumer acceptance of *Basic Visitability* will inevitably lead to enhancements being offered through market forces in the next generation of housing.⁸

⁸ IDEA, p. 16.

5. Recommendations

Based on our research, the following recommendations are proposed for MHRC's consideration. They are divided into three types: draft policies (rules and regulations) initiatives (introductory steps) and programs (ongoing systems of services). Each type includes recommendations related to public and privately-funded housing, single and, multi-family housing, and renovations. Refer to the Implementation Strategy section for discussion of priorities.

5.1 Draft Policy Recommendations

These policy recommendations consist of draft regulations governing the application of Basic Visitable, Enhanced Visitable, Adaptable and Accessible housing requirements. They refer primarily to public housing, though Draft Policy 2 refers to private developments on Provincial land.

1. All new housing projects or substantial renovations to housing projects constructed with MHRC assistance shall comply with the requirements for *Enhanced Visitability* listed under Section 3.2. This includes buildings converted to housing, and all multi-unit or other types of housing (single family, duplex, triplex for example).

2. Private residential developments on lands owned by the Province shall incorporate *Basic Visitability* in some units. In the short term, for current projects under consideration, the requirements would be limited to various areas or bays of the development. These could be used as show homes illustrating how visitable housing may be incorporated into any housing development. Visitable units distributed through the neighbourhood are preferable to the creation of a visitable enclave. The quantity and location of the visitable units can be negotiated based on site constraints. In the longer term, it is recommended that all housing developed on lands owned or leased from the Province of Manitoba be required to incorporate *Basic Visitability* features where feasible (*i.e.* in all cases where the exemptions listed in Draft Policy 7 do not apply).

3. In addition to the requirements of Draft Policy 1, at least 20%⁴ of all units in a publicly-funded housing project, multi-unit or otherwise, shall incorporate the requirements for *Adaptable Housing* listed under Section 3.3 to better meet future needs of their occupants.

⁴This proportion is based on accessible public housing targets established by British Columbia Housing Corporation for 2005-2006 and upper ranges as noted by various Alberta advocacy groups. In areas with a higher than average proportion of elderly and mobility impaired residents, this figure should be adjusted accordingly.

4. Where MHRC provides funding for the development of new multi-unit housing projects, in addition to *Enhanced Visitability* requirements, multi-unit housing projects shall also have all common areas and common rooms fully *Accessible*. This shall be in accordance with at least the relevant and current sections of the Manitoba Building Code, and where not specific, to the requirements of the Canadian Standard CSA B651-04 "Accessible design for the built environment". This includes: common entrance lobby and vestibule areas, public sitting/waiting areas, meeting rooms, hallways, elevators and elevator lobby areas, patio areas, common laundry rooms, common garbage room areas, and public/common washrooms. In all cases the most stringent requirements shall apply.

5. Renovate and upgrade all public housing owned or managed by MHRC to incorporate *Basic Visitability* features. *Enhanced Visitable* features shall be incorporated where feasible. This process will be guided by an inventory and action plan described under Initiative 6 below.

6. During any ongoing maintenance to properties owned or managed by the Province, the properties will be upgraded to *Basic Visitability* where feasible. For example, when replacing broken round doorknobs, replace with lever type handles; where sidewalk slabs are heaving, investigate regrading to create a no step entrance.

7. Exemptions to *Enhanced Visitability* or *Adaptable Housing* mandatory requirements should only be allowed if specific conditions are met. Even if one or more of the mandatory features cannot be accommodated, the other mandatory features shall still be incorporated into the dwelling unit. The following may be considered the grounds for exemption on specific features:

Accessible Path Of Travel Exemptions:

- There is no driveway serving the unit, and there is no alley or other roadway capable of providing vehicular access to the rear of the dwelling unit;
- In the case of an existing dwelling unit, the finished floor elevation of the home is too high to be accessed by a ramp of maximum slope 1:12 to the front, side, or rear of the dwelling unit;

- In the case of an existing dwelling unit, there is not adequate space on site to allow for a gently sloped path to a dwelling unit entrance and the incorporation of an appropriate ramp to an entrance of the dwelling unit is not feasible;

Interior Main Floor Circulation Exemptions:

- In the case of an existing dwelling unit, where substantial renovations are to occur, the interior layout and existing dimensions limit the incorporation of some *Basic* and *Enhanced Visitable* features;

General Exemptions:

- In the case of an existing dwelling unit, where substantial renovations are to occur, the cost to upgrade/renovate to meet the Enhanced Visitability requirements will cause an “undue hardship” on the owner;
- In the case of an existing dwelling unit, where substantial renovations are to occur, there are technical or spatial situations in the unit that do not allow incorporation of Enhanced Visitability features.

8. MHRC shall withhold funds and approvals from projects that fail to comply with the requirements of Draft Policies 1-6 until those requirements are met. This policy will be enforced through the building inspection process in consultation with MHRC’s Visitability Consultant.

5.2 Recommended Initiatives

These initiatives focus on research, advocacy and education to advance the application of visitability in public and private housing.

1. Commission an ‘identity package’ to market visitability. Specifically, a marketing specialist should be consulted to identify alternates to the terms ‘Enhanced Visitability’ and ‘Adaptable Housing’, and to develop an identity package (including a logo, graphics colour scheme, etc.) to make the education and advocacy programs more effective.

2. Launch an awareness campaign to educate Manitoba housing stakeholders about the benefits of visitability. This would be aimed at consumers, renovators, design professionals, homebuilders, non-profit groups, municipalities, community groups and developers. The campaign might include the following elements:

- a visitability consultant or other central point of contact to offer assistance and answer questions.
- educational seminars and workshops throughout the province on to encourage understanding and application of visitability.
- a presentation to the Manitoba Home Builders’ Association Technical Resource Committee on the visitability benefits. The presentation should include accurate information about the projected need and costs of including visitable features.
- a Manitoba-oriented web site to offer broader access to information and design tools, as well as MHRC policies and updates related to visitability.
- a detailed and up-to-date list of voluntary best practices for Enhanced VISIBLE and Adaptable Housing to be used as part of an ongoing education program for all housing in Manitoba.
- participation in popular events such as the Manitoba Home Expressions Show to reach a consumers interested in buying and renovating.
- an Affordable VISIBLE Housing Design Contest, sponsored by MHRC in partnership with others such as the Manitoba Homebuilders Association or the Manitoba Association of Architects. Prizes should be awarded in several categories – student design, single family, renovation, multi-family – at a well-publicized event.

3. Foster partnerships with other groups and agencies to share resources and workload in the advocacy efforts. Several groups have offered to assist with the visitable campaign, including the Manitoba Access Issues Office Winnipeg's Access Advisory Committee, the Manitoba Association of Architects, and the Manitoba Real Estate Board. Other groups like the Manitoba Association of Landscape Architects, Manitoba Professional Planners Institute, Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and the Manitoba Homebuilders Association should be approached to join in a formal partnership modeled on the 'Smart Home' program in Queensland, Australia.⁵

4. Support the efforts of advocacy groups lobbying for the inclusion of visitability requirements in the National Building Code of Canada and the Manitoba Building Code.

5. Consult with and encourage home mortgage and insurance providers to offer discounts to consumers who renovate, build, or purchase *Enhanced Visitable, Adaptable or Accessible Housing*. These discounts would be based on improved resale value and safety (e.g. eliminating exterior stairs and providing good clearance for furniture moves will reduce the number of accidents).

⁵ A number of government agencies, professional associations and builders have signed on to a Smart Housing Partnership Agreement to collectively promote more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable housing design. Visitability is one of the cornerstones of Smart Housing. For more information see www.housing.qld.gov.au/initiatives/smarthousing/index.htm

6. Study the feasibility of developing and maintaining a voluntary housing registry and/or labeling program to identify *Basic Visitable, Enhanced Visitable, Adaptable, and Accessible* dwelling units in the province. The scope of the study would include:

- processes to identify dwelling units in the public, private, non-profit, and cooperative sectors that are Visitable, Enhanced Visitable, Adaptable, and Accessible;
- identifying a suitable body to operate and maintain the registry (either community group, a private organization, or a government department);
- identifying appropriate database, security, and privacy requirements;
- financing and operating budgets;
- recommending potential certification processes for marketing purposes; and
- a publicity strategy for the registry.

7. Develop a renovation action plan for public housing units managed by the Manitoba Housing Authority (MHA). This plan would assess all units within the MHA portfolio and determine the level of effort required to meet the requirements of *Basic Visitability, Enhanced Visitability, or Adaptable Housing*. Based on the findings and resident needs, the plan will establish short and long term renovation priorities and budgets.

8. Encourage all schools, colleges, or universities that teach courses on housing, design, community planning, public health, occupational health and safety, occupational therapy and physiotherapy to include in their curriculum the concepts of *Basic Visitable, Enhanced Visitable, Adaptable, Accessible, and Universally Designed Housing*.

5.3 Recommended Programs

These programs provide a range of incentives to assist in the adoption and application of visitability in public and privately-funded housing.

1. Promote acceptance of *Basic Visitability* and *Enhanced Visitability* in private and public housing through modifications to existing programs. This will be more efficient and cost effective than developing new programs.

2. Develop programs to assist qualified low income persons, on a rent-to-own basis, to renovate or build new *Enhanced Visitable* dwelling units.

3. Work with rural municipalities throughout Manitoba to provide land in a long-term lease arrangement, and/or with other incentives to assist in the development of *Visitable, Enhanced Visitable, or Adaptable Housing*.

4. Encourage government partners to continue renovation programs that support the modification of homes for persons with disabilities, and consider changes to the eligibility criteria in order to make the programs available to more people. These programs include the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program for the Disabled (RRAP-D) and Home Adaptations for Seniors Independence (HASI). The intent would be to encourage the introduction of *Basic Visitable, Enhanced Visitable, and Adaptable* features to a wider targeted segment of the population.

5. Encourage government partners to institute renovation programs that assist in modifying homes for persons who may not have a current major disability. These persons may wish to renovate their homes to avoid a forced move if their abilities are impaired with age.

6. Consider assistance for non-profit and cooperative private sponsors who operate housing, to assist in upgrading/adapting the housing units to *Basic Visitable, Enhanced Visitable, or Adaptable* standards.

7. Consider introducing a series of short term incentives to encourage the incorporation of visitable features into any new housing (single family, duplex, triplex, and townhouses for example) that is developed in Manitoba. These incentives could take the form of:

- One-time small capital grants to assist with incorporating *Basic Visitable* and *Enhanced Visitable* features in existing housing stock during renovations to encourage builders and assist with the additional costs.
- One-time small capital grants to assist with incorporating *Basic Visitable* and *Enhanced Visitable* features in the new housing stock being developed to encourage builders and assist with any additional costs.
- Partner with other federal and municipal partners to provide other incentives to encourage more housing to be built with *Basic Visitable* and *Enhanced Visitable* features, such as density bonuses, property tax exemptions or grants.

8. Consider developing a new renovation program for private non-profit or co-op housing providers to assist in the cost of implementing *Basic Visitable, Enhanced Visitable, Adaptable, or Accessible* design features in existing affordable housing.

6. Implementation Strategies

6.1 Strategic Directions

Stakeholder consultations and our review of other jurisdictions clearly indicated that a successful implementation strategy must blend advocacy, incentives and regulation and tailor the timing and emphasis to each sector. Regulation should come first in publicly-funded projects, while the process for privately-funded housing should start with advocacy and incentives – information, seminars, design contests, awards, tours of visitable homes, etc. In all cases, building public and developer awareness is the essential top priority. For this reason, an investment in creating a high quality public campaign is the next logical step for the MHRC, so the terminology and ‘the look’ are compelling and consistent. The time-consuming process of advocating revisions to the National Building Code and Manitoba Building Code should run parallel to this. By the time visitability Code revisions are ready for submission, there should be a number of publicly-funded examples and good public awareness of the principles and benefits of visitability to support acceptance of the revisions.

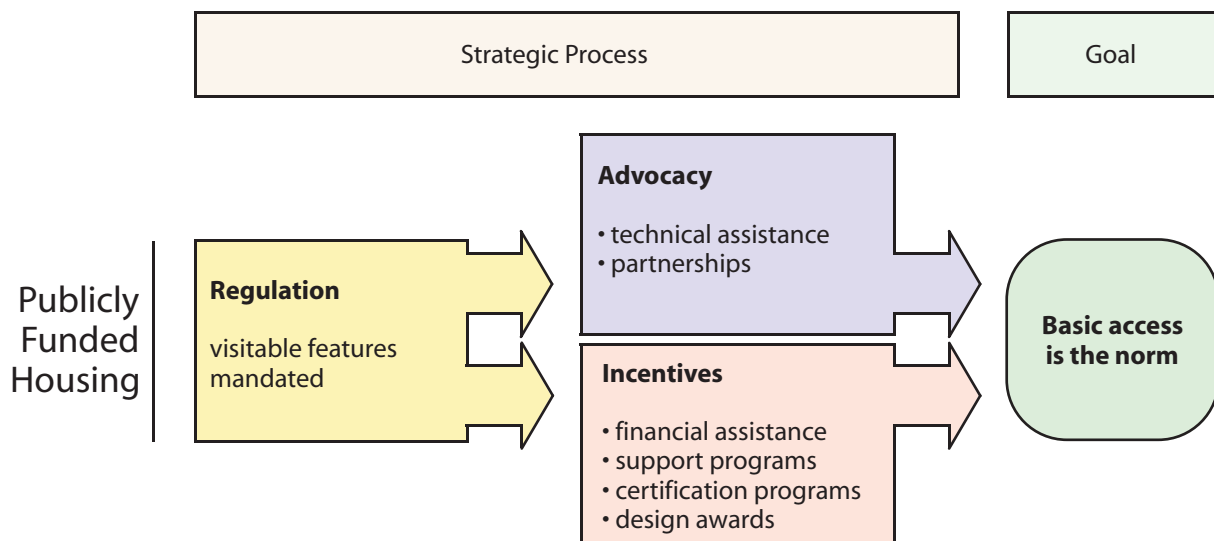


Figure 6. General implementation strategy for publicly funded housing. Regulation precedes advocacy and incentives.

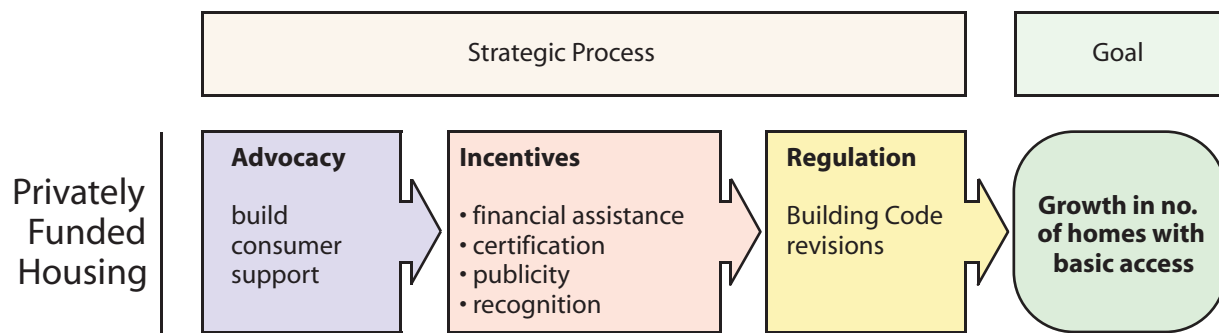


Figure 7. General implementation strategy for privately funded housing. Advocacy and incentives pave the way for regulation.

Throughout this period, it is vital to keep up communication with the municipalities, to ensure that they do not, through changes in their by-laws, allow or inadvertently encourage residential lot configurations and drainage patterns that complicate the provision no-step entrances.

Why target the Building Code as the primary regulatory instrument? One central reason is it gives a level playing field – all builders in the province will be playing by the same rules. It also avoids the mammoth task of lobbying all municipalities, and the confusing local variations in requirements that would inevitably result.

6.2 Implementation Priorities

The draft policies, initiatives and programs in the next section describe 24 distinct actions to promote visitability. These actions generally fit within six categories: research, education/advocacy, consumer incentives, builder incentives, regulations and enforcement. The following chart (Figure 8) shows for each policy the type of action, the housing sectors affected, and its priority. Note that all are to be implemented within five years – that is the approximate date of the next Building Code revision.

If budget limitations will not allow all policies to be enacted within that timeframe, it is recommended that rather than deferring or slowing down the process, the number of actions be reduced. The five year timeframe should remain intact.

We encourage the MHRC, when selecting which policies to enact, to pay attention to the categories as well as the priorities, and attempt to maintain a blend of policies across the full range from research to enforcement. This will equip the agency with a variety of tools to affect change.

Figure 8.
Implementation Actions and Priorities

Type of Action						Sector		Priority		
research	education/advocacy	consumer incentives	builder incentives	regulations	enforcement	publicly-funded	privately-funded	high	medium	low

POLICIES

1	enhanced visitability mandatory for all MHRC funded housing				✓		✓		✓		
2	portion of all privately developed housing on Provincial lands to be visitable				✓			✓			
3	Twenty percent of public housing to include adaptable features				✓		✓		✓		
4	multi-unit public projects to have fully accessible common areas				✓		✓		✓		
5	existing public housing to be renovated to enhanced visitable standard				✓		✓		✓		
6	public housing maintenance and repair to upgrade to enhanced visitable features				✓		✓		✓		
7	specific situations will be exempt				✓		✓		✓		
8	non-compliant projects will have funding withheld					✓	✓		✓		

INITIATIVES

1	hire marketing consultant to 'tune up' logo, terminology, and communications strategies related to visitability/adaptability		✓					✓			
2	institute public education campaign, provide central point of contact, web site, pamphlets, best practices list, host rural seminars, design competition, home expressions show		✓					✓		✓	
3	foster 'Smart Housing' type partnerships with other agencies and associations to collectively promote visitability		✓					✓		✓	
4	support changes to the Manitoba and National Building Code to require basic visitable features in housing		✓				✓	✓	✓		
5	encourage mortgage and insurance providers to offer discounts to those who build, purchase, or renovate visitable/adaptable homes		✓					✓		✓	
6	private and public housing registries	✓					✓	✓			✓
7	public housing renovation assessment and action plan	✓	✓				✓				✓
8	promote inclusion of visitable concepts to be part of the curriculum in public health and design programs		✓					✓			✓

Type of Action						Sector		Priority		
research	education/advocacy	consumer incentives	builder incentives	regulations	enforcement	publicly-funded	privately-funded	high	medium	low

PROGRAMS

1	review and identify existing MHRC programs that can be expanded to support visitability/adaptability	✓					✓	✓		✓	
2	low income rent-to-own visitable home program			✓			✓				✓
3	offer long-term leases or other incentives to rural municipalities to promote visitability/adaptability			✓			✓	✓			✓
4	broaden eligibility of current renovation programs			✓			✓	✓			✓
5	programs to support renovations that allow aging in place			✓			✓	✓			✓
6	financial assistance to private housing sponsors to upgrade accessibility			✓				✓			✓
7	MHRC to partner with other institutions to provide short term grants, tax breaks and other incentives to new privately-funded visitable housing			✓	✓			✓			✓
8	programs to support visitable/adaptable renovations to existing private, non-profit & coop housing			✓	✓			✓			✓

7. Education Materials

In order to maintain momentum in the campaign for visitable housing, the following educational materials have been provided for MHRC use. As indicated in Recommended Initiative 1, a marketing professional should review these materials and the terms “Basic Visitable”, “Enhanced Visitable” and “Adaptable Housing” and advise how they can be ‘tuned up’ to deliver a more compelling message to target markets.

The educational materials have been designed to be easily adapted to a number of media: web, PowerPoint, pamphlet, pdf, and poster. A sample web page adaptation is also provided to illustrate how this might work. It is important that the web page conforms to the “Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0”⁶ prepared by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI).

The production and distribution of posters can be an effective promotional tool - The Greater Vancouver Regional District, for example, produced a series of well-designed posters promoting stormwater source control techniques as part of the design guidelines they commissioned in 2005. The posters have proven a popular and durable resource, effective in that the messages are on display, rather than filed on a shelf or computer desktop. They received a design award from the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects in 2005. To launch MHRC’s visitable campaign, we suggest that a small mailing of posters to select stakeholders: the Manitoba Association of Architects, the Manitoba Home Builders Association, The City of Winnipeg Access Advisory Committee, the Manitoba Real Estate Association, etc. Digital artwork for the posters is included on the CD accompanying this report.

⁶ <http://www.w3.org/1999/WAI-WEBCONTENT-19990505/>