

UNIVERSAL DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR AGE-RESTRICTED ADULT HOUSING IN HOWARD COUNTY

The Howard County Zoning Regulations allow for “active adult housing” as either a conditional use in residential zoning districts or as a permitted use in the Planned Senior Community, Planned Office Research, Community Center Transition, and Residential Institutional zoning districts. Age-restricted developments must be appropriately designed for adults at least 55 years of age. Site improvements must ensure accessible routes between parking, dwelling units and common areas. Individual dwellings must incorporate universal design features to be adaptable for residents with mobility and functional limitations that often result from aging.

Design standards for site accessibility and usable common areas have been established for multi-family housing by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Fair Housing Act of 1988. While recognized standards for individual units for older adults have not been established, Universal Design is an evolving concept that provides some guidance.

Accordingly, the Department of Planning and Zoning met with several senior housing developers, representatives of the Homes for Life Coalition of Howard County, the Office on Aging and the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits to discuss minimum requirements. Divergent views were expressed regarding the features that should be required vs. optional. Features vary considerably in cost, relevance for different users, and adaptability to different sites and project types. Developers chief concerns were that the current market doesn't perceive a need for most universal design features since the oldest boomers are still relatively young and aren't focused on how their needs may change over time. Concern was also expressed about increasing the cost of senior housing if many universal design features are required rather than optional.

These guidelines reflect a middle position focusing on requiring those features that are relatively inexpensive if part of initial construction, but would require major renovation to retrofit in the future. Items that are either relatively less expensive to retrofit in the future are listed as desirable or optional.

Required

- for multi-family apartment or condo developments, an accessible path between parking, dwelling units, and common areas that meet ADA standards
- for single family detached and attached developments, a “no-step” access to the front door entrance to all dwelling units and community buildings. if a no-step front entrance is not feasible, an alternate no-step side or garage entry to the first floor may be approved. (a no-step entrance is desirable, but not required at other entrances)
- 36” wide front door with exterior lighting at the entrance (exterior doors shall be provided with an artificial light source located in the immediate vicinity of the exterior door; the illumination of the exterior light shall be controlled from inside the dwelling unit. exception: lights that are continuously illuminated or automatically controlled.)

- all interior doorways at least 32" clear width in the open position (2/10 doors or a 36" is preferable)
- 36" wide fully accessible route must connect through out the first floor of the dwelling unit. The maximum vertical floor level change is ¼" inch, except when a tapered threshold is used, the maximum height is ½" inch. (40-42" is preferable)
- complete living area including master bedroom & bath on first level floor (or elevator access if multi-story apartments)
- lever handles on interior and exterior doors
- clear floor space of 30" x 48" inches centered on the appliance or fixture shall be provided at each fixture in the kitchen. floor spaces can overlap.(fair housing act)
- reinforced walls to allow for the later installation of grab bars around the toilet, tub, and shower stall.
- maneuvering space within the bathroom to permit a person using a mobility aid to enter the room, close and reopen the door, with a clear floor space of 30" x 48" outside of the door swing. In addition a clear floor space of 30" x 48" should be provided at each fixture and centered on each fixture. the 30" x 48" floor spaces can overlap each other. (note: this is a requirement in the fair housing act guidelines)
- wall mounted light switches, electrical outlets, or environmental controls shall be mounted for a reaching range of minimum 15" off the floor and maximum 48" above the floor.

Desirable

- Low maintenance exterior materials
- Covered main entry
- Entry door approach with 18"-24" of clearance at side adjacent to handle
- Smooth transitions between rooms (vertical threshold of 2" or less)
- Slip resistant flooring
- Maximize accessible path between main living rooms (preferably 38-42")
- Lever handles on kitchen and bathroom sinks, plus shower
- Anti scald devices on all plumbing fixtures
- 5' turning radius or T turn in kitchen and first floor bathroom
- Parallel and forward approach maneuvering space in front of appliances and plumbing fixtures
- Main electrical breaker box located on the first floor
- Switches, doorbells, thermostats, and breaker boxes should be located no more than 48" above the floor; electrical receptacles should be at least 15" above the floor
- Stacking of closets large enough to accommodate future installation of an elevator
- Reinforcing in shower stalls to permit future installation of a wall-hung bench seat.

Custom Options

- Security system
- Visual ID of visitors

- Visual smoke detectors
- Handrails on both sides of exterior and interior stairs
- Task lighting in kitchen, bath and other work spaces
- Rocker light switches
- Lighting in closets and pantry
- Closet rods adjustable from 3' to 5'6"
- Slip resistant flooring in kitchen and bath
- Multi-level or adjustable kitchen countertops and work spaces
- Pull-out shelves for kitchen base cabinets
- Front mounted controls on stove
- Installation of grab bars in bathroom
- Hand held showerhead in shower
- Curbless shower