

Vermont Housing Finance Agency

Universal Design Policy

12/6/2018

Universal design is an approach to design that works to ensure products and buildings can be used by virtually everyone, regardless of their level of ability or disability. The term "universal design" was coined by the late Ronald L. Mace, a fellow of the American Institute of Architects. "The universal design concept increases the supply of usable housing by including universal features in as many houses as possible," he said, "and allows people to remain in their homes as long as they like."

Recognizing that Vermont communities and housing developments tend to be small, and that in many communities there are few rental opportunities and there may only be one or two affordable housing developments, VHFA will strive to make all funded projects physically accessible to all current and future occupants, no matter what stage of their life. We want our residents to be able to age or remain in place through any temporary or permanent disability and to be able to be an active member of their community and to be visited by their friends and neighbors.

Vermont has rules around "adaptable" and "visitable" housing, but many of the rules do not apply to smaller buildings, and may not require a toilet facility or accessible entrance on the first floor. Nationally, a home is considered fully visitable when it meets at least three basic requirements:

- One zero-step entrance and an accessible entrance pathway;
- Doors with 32 inches of clear passage space (which is required in Vermont);
- One useable bathroom on the main floor.

The intent of VHFA's Universal Design policy is to attempt to meet the national standards for visitability for all funded units and add additional functional amenities.

VHFA requires that all projects and units meet the Vermont Access Rules for being "adaptable" and "visitable". This predominantly affects residential buildings with 1-3 units, that otherwise would not be considered a "covered multifamily dwelling unit", and some buildings with historic habilitation that may be asking for a waiver from the Vermont Access Rules.

In addition all projects shall attempt to provide as many elements of "Universal Design" as possible and shall indicate what they are able to provide on the attached checklist.

A modified Vermont Access Rules Annex V. Table for Adaptable and Visitable [Act 88] Dwelling Units is included in this policy as follows.

Qualified Allocation Plan Universal Design

Vermont Access Rules and Adaptable & VISIBLE Standards for Dwellings can be found at:
http://firesafety.vermont.gov/sites/firesafety/files/files/rules/dfs_rules_accessammended-current.pdf

QAP Modified - Vermont Access Rules Annex V. Table for Adaptable and VISIBLE [Act 88] Dwelling Units

[Black = required by Vermont law. Red = additional standards for LIHTC applicants.]

Use	Adaptable	Visible [Act 88]	Accessible Entrance	Notes
four or more dwelling units served by an elevator	all units		all units	any altered elements, spaces or features in existing construction must be adaptable
four or more dwelling units not served by an elevator	all ground floor units	all other units	all ground floor units	any altered elements, spaces or features in existing construction must be adaptable
four or more dwelling units, not served by an elevator, with units that contain more than one story	all single floor units; <u>QAP Standard:</u> the primary level of a multi-story unit shall contain access to a bathroom or powder room* where possible	all units	5 % or at least one unit (meeting the state accessibility standards); <u>QAP Standard:</u> all other ground floor entrances shall be accessible where possible*	<u>QAP Standard:</u> * provide an explanation of why unit entrances or toilet facilities cannot be made adaptable or added for more unit functionality; what modifications will be made to accommodate persons using walkers or canes
three or less dwelling units	<u>QAP Standard:</u> all ground floor units	all units	<u>QAP Standard:</u> all ground floor units	
<u>QAP Standard:</u> three or less dwelling units, with units that contain more than one story	<u>QAP Standard:</u> all single floor units; the primary level of a multi-story unit shall contain access to a bathroom or powder room* where possible	all units	<u>QAP Standard:</u> all other ground floor entrances shall be accessible where possible*	<u>QAP Standard:</u> * provide an explanation of why unit entrance or toilet facilities cannot be made adaptable or added for more unit functionality; what modifications will be made to accommodate persons using walkers or canes

- Complete the attached check list on universal design features and indicate to which units they apply and rational for not considering the option

Universal Design Checklist (adapted from AARP Livable Communities Checklists)

It is the intent of this checklist to provide guidance on elements of Universal Design that can be added to provide additional functionality for residents and visitors of funded units. These design elements would be offered in addition to what is already required by state and federal law.

	Number of units in the project with these options	Variance explanation. Can items be easily added?
General Elements		
36-inch-wide entry door with lever-style handle		
Adequate non-glare lighting inside and outside entries		
Easy-touch, rocker-style light switches at top and bottom of stairs, 42 inches off floor		
Electrical outlets 18 inches off the floor		
Low pile or hard non-slip surface flooring		
D-shaped or pull-style cabinet and drawer handles		
Entrances & Exits to Building and Unit Checklist		
Accessible path into building and unit from accessible parking spaces		
At least one no-step entry into the building and unit with ADA threshold doorway		
Ample and level maneuvering room in entryway		
Covered entrance to protect from inclement weather		

Lighted doorbell at an easily reachable height		
High-visibility unit numbers		
Slip-resistant walkways and entryways		
At least one entrance must accommodate persons with walkers		
Stairways & Halls Checklist (Common Areas Only)		
Handrails on both sides of interior and exterior steps/stairs		
Deep stair treads, to accommodate entire foot (12" with 1" nosing) in non-elevator buildings		
Den & Living Room Checklist		
36-inch-wide doors for easy access, or pocket doors		
Kitchen Checklist		
Clear counter space next to sink and all appliances		
Non-glare task lighting over sink, stove, and work areas		
Anti-scald faucet with lever-style handle or limits on hot water temperature		
D-shaped or pull-style cabinet and drawer handles		

Provide space for an ADA refrigerator		
Designated space for easy-access and removable recyclables, trash and compost to ensure barrier free space.		
Front-loading washer and dryer, stacked or on raised platform to reduce bending, with accessible controls on front		
Bedroom Checklist		
Avoid bi-fold or accordion closet doors, which can be difficult to open and close		
Bathroom Checklist		
Lever handle, anti-scald faucets on sink, bathtub, and shower		
Low threshold walk-in or roll-in shower with minimum dimensions 5 feet by 3 feet (4 feet preferred) or ADA bathtub with a seat		
Hand-held, adjustable- height showerhead with easily operable controls		
Toilet centered 18 inches from any side wall, tub, or cabinet		
Grab bars or wall- blocking for future installation in tub, shower and grabbars at visitable toilet		
Countertops with rounded edges		
Towel bars, soap and toothbrush holders 48 inches off floor		

Senior Housing	Number of units in the project with these options	Variance explanation. Can items be easily added?
Flush transitions or ADA accessible transition strips between flooring types & non-slip flooring		
5-ft roll in showers in the majority of residential units		
Automatic door openers at main building entrances (to lobbies or common areas)		
5 x 3-ft accessible turning radius in all bathrooms		
Removable cabinets for accessibility		
Handrails on both sides of corridors (common areas)		
5-ft wide corridors (common areas)		