



Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities

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Inclusive Homes-Affordable/Accessible Housing A Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities Position Paper

In the late 1990's, England was experiencing a shortage of houses accessible to persons with disabilities. As a solution, England added Section "M" to its building code amidst concern that these new standards would bring the nation's building construction industry to an end. Section "M" applied some basic barrier free building standards for all new housing in the United Kingdom and it provided for exemptions on building lots where those standards would be too expensive or impossible to meet. Today, less than 10 years later, building new houses to basic barrier free standards, as outlined in Section "M", is just the way it is done in England. When Section "M" is mentioned, the word used to describe the standard is VISITABLE because the houses are visitable by people with disabilities who use wheelchairs and walkers and other mobility aids.

We ask you to remember that word, **V I S I T A B L E**.

A house built to the visitable standard would include the following requirements:

- One of those entrances is built at grade, perhaps with a gentle slope providing ready access to persons using wheelchairs, walkers and even mothers with baby carriages.
- A washroom on the main floor that is fully accessible and designed to meet the needs of an individual utilizing a wheelchair.
- 36" wide doors.
- A more non-visible aspect of a "visitable" building is the plywood placed behind the wallboard surrounding the tub and toilet for someone who may need to install a grab bar or two for extra support. This will prevent the heavy expense of tearing at walls if support bars become necessary.
- Minor changes such as lowering light switches, raising floor plugs and providing lever door handles have also been added to make a house "visitable".

Canada is now facing the very same problem that England faced in the 1990's. Where Nova Scotia has the highest numbers of persons with disabilities, it has become almost impossible to locate appropriate housing near employment or close to transit routes. For many, finding an appropriate place to live takes several months. The idea of actually being able to visit with friends and relatives in their homes is just a dream we do not expect to come true. Groups around the province are receiving an increase in the number of calls seeking help locating

accessible, affordable housing that will allow these individuals to continue living within their communities. Caring for patients at Rehab Centers and similar facilities while others seek almost non-existent housing is a tremendous strain on tax dollars, medical rehabilitation staff time, and resources. By age 65, fifty percent of Nova Scotians will have a mobility disability or the beginnings of one. These disabilities tend to worsen as age progresses forcing our seniors out of their own homes and into expensive government supported facilities, adding extra costs to tax payers.

NSLEO's first recommendation is that the Nova Scotia government recognize that one quarter of persons with disabilities live in poverty and are therefore, most in need. Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities fully supports the goals that you are working towards with the Kendrick Report Coalition and the Affordable Housing Association; however we are asking that you keep the word "visitable" in mind when approving the designs for public affordable housing. Building to the "visitable" standard will create affordable public housing for people with disabilities.

In 1989, the Nova Scotia Legislature passed the 'Architects Act' which empowered and gave authority to the Association of Architects and its members. The authority in this particular act included the right and duty to approve the design of all buildings and construction where the value exceeded \$60,000. This Act recognizes that the (member) architects have a duty to exercise their authority in the public's interest. The Architects have been ignoring this right and duty when it comes to houses. NSLEO believes that this is due to the mixed message our Legislature is sending in Section "C" of its Nova Scotia Building Code Regulations.

Section "C" 3.8 (1) of the Nova Scotia Building Code Regulation dealing with Barrier-Free Design states that:

- (1) The requirements of this section apply to all *buildings*, except
 - (a) Houses, including semi-detached, duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, row houses, boarding houses, and rooming houses.

This exception for houses is identical to the National Building Code. This was included because framers of the code thought it might be too onerous or expensive to require home builders to adhere to these building code provisions that were meant to regulate commercial buildings.

By comparison, "visitability", the housing design standard which NSLEO seeks, adds almost nothing to the construction cost of new houses – much less than \$1000 in most cases.

NSLEO is now asking all parties of the Legislature to pass a joint motion, regulation or some suitable legislation based on the following.

The Legislature of Nova Scotia recognizes and takes note of:

- a) The growing need for and the extreme shortage of suitable housing for Nova Scotians with mobility disabilities is an unacceptable burden and contrary to the public good;
- b) The exception from Barrier-Free Design codes for houses found in Section “C” 3.8 (1) of Nova Scotia’s Building Code Regulations which perhaps has contributed to this present problem;
- c) The Architects Act of 1989, wherein this legislature empowered members of the Nova Scotia Architects Association to approve the architecture in the public interest of all construction with a value of \$60,000 or greater;

And in response, the legislature passes this motion, directing the Nova Scotia Architects Association:

- a) To research principles of universal design and define a standard of “visitability” that is appropriate for housing in Nova Scotia and in the public interest of Nova Scotians.
- b) To enforce section 45 (1) of the Architects Act to ensure that all new houses which are exempt from Barrier-Free Design codes by Section “C” 3.8 (1) of the Nova Scotia Building Code Regulations.
 - i. meet the Association’s defined standard of visitability in the public interest.
 - ii. grant partial exemptions from the standard, where an architect confirms that the site presents unusual difficulties, such as certain lots on flood plains where “worst case scenario” cost estimates are not relevant to the average costs.

Respectfully submitted in October 2006 by Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities

Appendix A

NSLEO had a Halifax architect confirm the figures in the following cost estimates which were made for, and compiled by, an American organization, *Concrete Change* also found on its website.

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Cost Data for Features Required in Federally Funded New Construction By the Inclusive Home Design Act HR 2353 -- June 2003

Item 1 – A ZERO-STEP ENTRANCE on an accessible route that does not contain any steps or any door threshold that exceeds one-half inch in height, and is located on a continuous unobstructed path from the accessible entrance door to the public street or the driveway which serves the unit. At no point may this route exceed a slope steeper than 1:12. The cross-slope of this route must be no greater than 2% and the width no less than 36 inches.

EXCEPTION: The requirement for a zero-step entrance is waived if such an entrance “would be severely impractical because of the terrain or unusual physical limitations of the site of the dwelling unit.”

Added average costs of zero-step entrances:

A. When building on a concrete slab.

When the lot is graded with access in mind, a zero-step entrance can be achieved from the porch or stoop into the dwelling by grading the earth and pouring the porch or stoop at a sufficient height. A zero-step entrance onto the porch or stoop can be achieved by grading the earth and pouring the sidewalk in such a way that the sidewalk rises to meet the porch without a step.

Average added cost: **\$0 to \$75 with an overall average of \$25**

(Unusual terrain such as a grade below a local flood plain might receive exemption from the zero-step entry requirement).

B. When building with a crawl space or basement.

Average added cost per dwelling when grading the lot and positioning the house for the most advantageous, cost-effective entry point: **\$100 to \$1000 with an overall average of \$500**
(based on deducting the cost of the steps which the zero-step entrance replaces)

C. One ADA threshold providing rise of ½ inch at the door of the zero-step entrance.

Average added cost per dwelling **\$8.**

Why are the average costs for a zero-step entrance so moderate?

1. The bill allows for the zero-step entrance to be located at whatever entry point is most advantageous: front, side, back or from an attached garage or carport.
2. The figures refer to new construction, where the builder has the opportunity to site the home deliberately and grade the earth for the most advantageous entry.
3. The bill waives the requirement for a zero-step entry on sites that present usual difficulties, such as certain lots on flood plains, so “worst case scenario” cost estimates are not relevant to the average costs.

Item 2 --All interior passage doors, including bathroom doors, on the main level are a minimum of 2'10", providing a minimum of 32" clear passage space.

Average added cost per dwelling, assuming five interior passage doors on the main level **\$25.**

Item 3 – All environmental controls such as electrical sockets, light switches, and thermostats at reachable heights.

Average added cost per dwelling **\$0.**

Item 4 – A. At least one indoor room of at least 70 square feet on the main level.

Average added cost per dwelling **\$0** (Assuming builder uses typical plan).

B. At least one useable bathroom containing, at minimum, a toilet and sink on the main level with a 30” x 48” rectangle of clear space at each of those fixtures that is not encroached on by the swing of the bathroom door. These clear space areas may overlap.

Note: To achieve this clear space in a small bathroom or powder room without adding square footage, the bathroom door may be hinged to swing outward, or a pocket door may be used.

Average added cost per dwelling **\$0** (Assuming builder uses typical plan).

C. Bathroom walls reinforced at designated locations to permit later installation of grab bars if desired. (Grab bars themselves are not required.)

Note: Lumber from the scrap pile may be used for this purpose.

Average added cost per dwelling: **\$40** (materials and labour).

TOTAL AVERAGES:

ADDED COST PER DWELLING ON A CONCRETE SLAB

$$\$25 + \$8 + \$25 + \$40 = \mathbf{\$98}$$

ADDED COST PER DWELLING WITH A BASEMENT OR CRAWL SPACE

$$\$500 + \$8 + \$25 + \$40 = \mathbf{\$573}$$

Available to corroborate these cost figures:

Dr. Ed Steinfeld, Professor of Architecture, Department of Architecture,
State University of New York, Buffalo NY

Harold Dean Kiewel, AIA, CSI, CCS Registered Architect (MN & WI) Arch. Specifier,
Minneapolis MN

Louis Tenenbaum, Independent Living Strategist, Potomac, MD

Information compiled by Eleanor Smith, Concrete Change, Atlanta, GA.
<http://www.concretechange.org/hb2353costsheet.pdf>