



*It's YOUR Future... Make sure it's senior-friendly!*

### **Housing Breakout Session:**

***It's more than just a roof over our head! What are the components of livable homes and communities?***

**Facilitator: Richard Duncan, Executive Director, Housing Works-Universal Design Institute**

**Council on Aging Vision for *Housing*:** Appropriate, affordable, quality housing that accommodates aging-in-place for older adults as they transition through different stages of the aging process. Availability of various housing types that support differing levels of independence including:

- Single and multi-family homes;
- Assisted living, shared housing, and group homes;
- Nursing homes and continuing care retirement communities.

Other features to facilitate aging-in-place would include:

- Choices among certified and affordable home modification contractors and maintenance services;
- Local housing agencies facilitating access to subsidized home services;
- Universal design incorporated into the planning; building and/or remodeling of homes;
- Tax relief for older homeowners.

**Current Situation in Charlotte-Mecklenburg:** There are many agencies providing subsidies for the elderly or disabled. However, there is currently no comprehensive housing policy to accommodate aging-in-place options.

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### **Annual Conference Housing Breakout Session: Notes**

#### **Current Trends and Benefits of Universal Design:**

- It is common to see many huge houses on tiny lots.
- Many homeowners add ramps when needed. However, it is important to keep in mind that ramps added on later do not add to the value of the house.

- Getting into the front door is one of the main challenges for older adults and people with disabilities. A new trend, the Universal Entrance, is considered a step-free method.
- Everyone can benefit from a step-free entrance, including, older adults, people with disabilities, a happy shopper, a mover.
- Oversized doors are also a great benefit to the Universal Home Design concept.
- The creation of a gradual incline for a step-free entrance is easier to use and can blend in with the landscaping.
- When installing exterior hand rails, they should be sturdy and rounded so they form to the hand rather than the usual square handrails.
- Adjustable shelving in closets is a nice feature and can be re-adjusted as a person's needs change (i.e. shelves can be lowered as range of motion declines).
- Cabinet inserts are another nice feature to Universal Home Design.  
For example: In bathrooms, a cabinet insert can be used as a cabinet and then if the resident becomes wheelchair bound, the insert can be removed to allow room for the wheelchair to pull up under the cabinet.
- Side hinge windows are recommended in lieu of double hung windows that are harder to open. Side hinge windows can be opened with a crank or you could even add a motor.
- Curb-less showers are another feature of Universal Home Design which improves accessibility and can make for easier bathing.
- It is also important to have key function areas of the house on the main level (i.e. bedroom, full bath, etc.)
- Invisible features can be added when building a house, such as blocking in bathrooms, which would allow for sturdy handrails to be added later wherever they were needed.
- A raised height dishwasher is another design feature. This feature works hand-in-hand with a front loading washer and dryer on a pedestal.
- **In summary, Universal Design adds ease of use to a home, convenience, safety, independence, and market appeal.**

### **Typical Questions from Participants to Mr. Duncan:**

#### **Q. Do you have water issues with a no step entrance?**

A. Yes, however, a roof overhang can be built over the entrance to alleviate this issue.

#### **Q. Should we convince builders to build by Universal Design standards?**

A. AARP has been advocating that Universal Design standards should be viewed as a cultural issue. Universal Design does not simply benefit the elderly or disabled; but the community as a whole.

**Q. How much would these Universal Design modifications cost?**

A. It depends. To make a door wider when a house is built adds about \$200 to the cost. To make a door wider after a house is built costs about \$1,500.

The lesson is: Build with the Universal Design concept in mind to avoid making needed modifications in the future.

**Additional Housing Breakout Session Resources**

- To view Richard Duncan's Universal Home Design PowerPoint, click [here](#).
- Handout: [Universal Design in Housing](#).
- Handout: [Creating Stepless Entrances in Multifamily Housing](#).