

VISITABILITY

By: Sharon Langer

I LOVE THIS WORD, “VISITABILITY,” and I am hoping that it will become the next buzz word for the idea that universal design of buildings is not just good, but great.

There is a growing (slowly growing but still growing) trend in this country to change construction practices so that virtually all new homes and apartments are built accessible. What does that mean? It is very simple:

1. Every home or apartment must have one zero step entrance
2. All doors are 32 inches wide so that a wheelchair can get through (most doors are that anyway)
3. There is one bathroom on the main floor that is wheelchair accessible

The spirit of this movement is what I find the most important, that “IT IS SIMPLY UNWISE TO BUILD NEW HOMES OR APARTMENTS WITH BARRIERS... GIVEN HOW EASY IT IS TO BUILD THEM WITHOUT THOSE BARRIERS.” We build so well these days that a building could last 100 years, so why not construct buildings that don’t need to be retrofitted for our elderly or disabled population at an added expense, but simply build them accessible in the first place?”

The harsh effects of barriers, such as isolation suffered by a person with disabilities who can’t visit friends and family, are forcing people to choose to live in an institution because accessible housing is not readily available. It makes no sense to block people out when it is cost effective to let people in.

Representative Jan Schakowsky introduced federal legislation, repeatedly, that would have required any new home built with federal dollars to be built this way. Unfortunately, after years of trying, the bill still has not passed.

There are lots of little things that make big differences, and I believe that VISITABILITY will be one of them.

So if you believe in VISITABILITY, send an email to your representatives.

Thanks, Sharon