



July 8, 2020

Statement from the Truro Commission on Disabilities:

As the members of the Truro Commission on Disabilities, it is our responsibility to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life in the community. It is also our responsibility to advise and assist municipal officials to ensure compliance with federal and state disability laws. With that in mind, we have prepared two fact sheets: Universal Design and Visitability.

In considering the development of new housing in the Town of Truro such as the Cloverleaf Project, we want to stress the need to create living spaces that will meet the needs of our citizens now and into the future. We are an aging population and with that comes an increased risk of accidents, illness and the onset of disabilities.

Younger people are not immune to disability or injury either. A temporary disability caused by a broken leg or joint replacement is just as limiting as a permanent one. Just over one quarter of people who are twenty years old today will become disabled before they retire. Accidents are NOT usually the culprit. Back injuries, cancer, heart disease and other illnesses cause the majority of long-term absences.

The Commission on Disabilities has long been a proponent of creating living spaces that use Universal Design principles. This enables older adults to age in their homes and communities and allows people with disabilities to remain involved in family and community life. It is often referred to as “aging in place”. Universal design elements minimize the need for home modifications and enhances functionality, independence and safety for everyone.

Mr. Malone and his staff have used the term “visitability” in relation to some of the units in the proposed Cloverleaf Project, but they have not offered specific criteria that will meet this definition. In general, visitable units should provide:

1. no-step entry
2. bathroom on the first floor
3. switches and outlets at easily reachable heights

4. wide hallways and doors (minimum 32")
5. lever door handles and faucets
6. wood blocking installed flush with stud edges of bathroom walls to facilitate the installation of grab bars

Mr. Malone's architect described using plywood as a temporary ramp into visitable units that have stairs. This is totally unacceptable and unsafe. We recommend that entry steps to the Cloverleaf units be replaced with landscape-integrated walkways, as was done in the remodeling of Edgewood Farm by the Truro Center for the Arts.

We trust that the members of the ZBA will consider the potential accessibility needs of all of us and will make the specific requirements of "visitability" listed above a condition of giving relief to this project.

The Commission on Disabilities is also concerned that the coronavirus pandemic has significant new implications for the health and safety for all Truro's residents, and in particular for future Cloverleaf residents. As stated in Chuck Steinman's statement to the ZBA, "Given the high percentage of deaths in congregate retirement communities and nursing facilities, redesign of the apartment building must be taken seriously." We agree that it would be far more beneficial to all if the pre-pandemic design of Building #21 be changed to decrease the number of units overall and increase the number of accessible units in the development.

We encourage the ZBA to properly evaluate these concerns before approving this project. The desire of the developer to move forward quickly so that funding could be secured in August is understandable but not in the best interests of Truro's citizens.



Universal Design Factsheet

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."

Universal design means simply designing all products, buildings and exterior spaces to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible. Universal design is not a design style, but an orientation to design, based on the following premises:

- Disability is not a special condition of a few;
- It is ordinary and affects most of us for some part of our lives;
- If a design works well for people with disabilities, it works better for everyone;
- Usability and aesthetics are mutually compatible.

Some examples of "universal design" include:

- Installing standard electrical receptacles higher than usual above the floor so they are in easy reach of everyone;
- Selecting wider doors,
- Making flat entrances
- Installing handles for doors and drawers that require no gripping or twisting to operate -- such as louver or loop handles;
- storage spaces within reach of both short and tall people.

*Source: The Center for an Accessible Society

<http://www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/universaldesign/>



Visitability Factsheet

Unlike universal design, which can be applied to a variety of products and environments, the notion of “visitability” is focused exclusively on housing. A visitable home has a main level that is easy to enter and exit. The three key features are at least one no-step entrance, wide interior doors, and at least a half bathroom on the main level.

Visitability differs from both full accessibility and universal design. The goal of visitability is to provide a few basic accessibility features, to ensure that, over the short term, a person with mobility limitations can use and visit the homes of friends and family and that, over the long term, few barriers interfere with adapting the home for long-term use by a person with such limitations. These features have been described as those most crucial for a person returning home from the hospital after experiencing a severe mobility impairment like a broken leg or hip replacement. **Full accessibility** provides enough additional features to support long-term use by people with mobility limitations. **Universal design** provides an even wider array of features that improve usability, safety, and health for a more diverse group of people and abilities.

A visitable home is marked by three core architectural conditions:

- One zero-step entrance at the front, back, or side of the house, depending on site conditions
- Doorways that provide thirty-two inches of clearance
- At least a half bath on the main floor

Sources:

AARP Public Policy Institute, “Increasing Home Access: Designing for Visitability”
https://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008_14_access.pdf

Expanding Implementation of Universal Design and Visitability Features in the Housing Stock
<https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2017/06/expanding-implementation-of-universal-design-and-visitability-features-in-the-housing-stock.pdf>