A U S T I N C I T Y C O U N C I L

AGENDA



Thursday, June 5, 2008

Public Hearings and Possible Actions **Item No. 77**
RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL ACTION

Subject: Conduct a public hearing and consider an ordinance amending City Code Chapter 5-1 (Housing Discrimination), the 2006 International Residential Code, and the 2005 Electrical Code to require all new single-family homes and duplexes to comply with certain accessibility or “visitability” standards now applicable only to publicly funded housing.

Fiscal Note: There is no unanticipated fiscal impact. A fiscal note is not required.

For More Information: Leon Barba, 974-7254

Boards and Commission Action: Recommended by the Austin Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities. No recommendation from the Electrical Board. Scheduled for review by the Building and Fire Code Board of Appeals on June 4th.

The City’s Visitability Ordinance, codified at City Code Chapter 5-1 (Housing Discrimination), provides a level of accessibility for persons with disabilities who visit new single-family homes, duplexes, and triplexes built with City and/or federal assistance. Staff experience implementing the Visitability Ordinance in the S.M.A.R.T. Housing™ context demonstrates that, with some advance planning, new homes can be made visitable for people with disabilities with a minimal investment.

City staff recommends adopting Visitability Ordinance standards for all new single-family homes and two-family dwellings (duplexes), regardless of whether they are publicly funded. These standards, which have been required for City-assisted homes for nearly ten years, would be incorporated as amendments to the 2006 International Residential Code and the 2005 Electrical Code.

The proposed amendments to the Residential Code will include the following visitability requirements:

• Minimum door width of 32 inches for at least one first floor entry
• Minimum door width of 30 inches for all first floor doors
• Lever handle hardware on all first floor doors
• Blocking behind the bath and toilet in one first floor bathroom so that grab bars could be installed in the future

The proposed amendments to the Electrical Code include the following visitability requirements:

• Maximum height of 48 inches for switches, thermostats, and electrical disconnects
• Minimum height of 15 inches for electrical receptacles and plugs

The proposed amendments to the 2006 International Residential Code would retain all of the exceptions for no-step entry and ramps based on topography that are contained in the Visitability Ordinance. The Building Official would continue to review all exception requests at the building plan submittal stage. Appeals of decisions on exceptions would follow the standard appeal provisions of the technical codes. The Watershed Protection and Development Review Department would perform compliance reviews and inspections as it currently does for the Visitability Ordinance. There is no projected fiscal impact.

City staff recommends an effective date of January 1, 2009 for the new amendments. This will allow builders and design professionals more than six months to submit pending plans under current regulations. All single-family and duplex plans submitted after January 1, 2009 would be subject to the visitability amendments. The current Visitability Ordinance would be repealed effective December 31, 2008.