



AUSTIN MAYOR'S COMMITTEE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Dear Mr. Haught and Commissioners of the Building and Fire Code Board of Appeals:

My name is Ron Lucey. I am a citizen with a disability and vice chair of the Austin Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities. I'm submitting this statement in favor of including the International Building Code amendments to the City of Austin Residential Building Code and Electrical Code that apply to Visitability standards for the construction of new homes.

The Mayor's Committee is on record as fully supporting Visitability in residential construction since my tenure with the committee began in the mid 1990s. In 2008, the committee was asked by our former Mayor Pro Tem, Betty Dunkerly, to develop and propose ordinance changes to the Residential Building Code to include all visitability standards. At that time, due to pressure from the Austin Home Builders Association, only a few of the easiest visitability standards were adopted by the City Council at that time.

In 2012, Austin stakeholders with disabilities asked the Mayor's Committee to once again support these changes. The Mayor's Committee negotiated in good faith with representatives of the Home Builders Association on a balanced reasonable approach to these standards including the most important standard, the inclusion of a no-step entrance into newly constructed homes. We agree that due to topographical challenges not every newly constructed home could easily and affordably include a no step entrance. We agree there should be a reasonable variance process to grant exceptions to the no-step entrance in these situations. We also agree that an extended transition - implementation period should be considered when adopting these visitability standards to allow Austin home builders time to implement these changes into their building plans. We agree that implementation of a no step entrance is a flexible standard that could be met through any of several entrances into a home including the garage or front entrance.

We do NOT agree with allowing a single stakeholder organization to once again prevent progress on this issue for the thousands of Austin residents who will build and purchase a new home and later find they have an essential and unplanned need for visitability to their home for themselves, a family member, a neighbor, or guest, or to simply age in place with reasonable access to their home. Visitability takes away nothing from the enjoyment of a new home for all home owners while adding and ensuring that Austin residents with disabilities can enter a home with dignity and equal access. I've witnessed the hardship that was caused to my wife's aging parents who live in an older home without a no-step entrance. The inclusion of a no-step entrance must be viewed as both an accessibility concern and life-safety issue to ensure fair and equal access to housing for all Austin residents. Please do the right thing for Austin and vote to recommend the inclusion of a no-step entrance into Austin's residential building code.

Respectfully,

Ron Lucey, Vice Chair, Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities
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