Aging-In-Place Design Checklists

Are you a builder or remodeling contractor with older adult clients? Are you a consumer seeking to modify an existing home for aging in place or build a new home to meet your needs over the long term? If so, check out our Aging-In-Place Design Checklists. They contain features you may want to consider for your next new construction or renovation project.

Exterior

- Low-maintenance exterior (vinyl, brick)
- Low-maintenance shrubs and plants
- Deck, patio or balcony surfaces are no more than ½ inch below interior floor level if made of wood

Overall Floor Plan

- Main living on a single story, including full bath
- No steps between rooms/areas on the same level
- 5-foot by 5-foot clear/turn space in living area, kitchen, a bedroom and a bathroom

Hallways

- Minimum of 36 inches wide, wider preferred
- Well lit

Entry

- Accessible path of travel to the home
- At least one no-step entry with a cover
- Sensor light at exterior no-step entry focusing on the front-door lock
- There needs to be 32 inches of clear width, which requires a 36-inch door
- Non-slip flooring in foyer
- Entry door sidelight or high/low peep hole viewer; sidelight should provide both privacy and safety.
- Doorbell in accessible location
- Surface to place packages on when opening door

Thresholds

- Flush preferable
- Exterior maximum of ½ inch beveled
- Interior maximum of ¼ inch

Interior Doors

- There needs to be 32 inches of clear width, which requires a 36-inch door
- Levered door hardware

Windows

- Plenty of windows for natural light
- Lowered windows or taller windows with lower sill height
- Low maintenance exterior and interior finishes
- Easy to operate hardware

Garage or Carport

- Covered carports and boarding spaces
- Wider than average carports to accommodate lifts on vans
- Door heights may need to be 9 feet to accommodate some raised roof vans
- 5-foot minimum access aisle between accessible van and car in garage
- If code requires floor to be several inches below entrance to house for fume protection, can slope entire floor from front to back to eliminate need for ramp or step
- Ramp to doorway if needed
- Handrail if steps

Faucets

- Lever handles or pedal-controlled
- Thermostatic or anti-scald controls
- Pressure balanced faucets

Kitchen and Laundry

Counters

- Wall support and provision for adjustable and/or varied height counters and removable base cabinets
- Upper wall cabinetry - 3 inches lower than conventional height
- Accented stripes on edge of countertops to provide visual orientation to the workspace
- Counter space for dish landing adjacent to or opposite all appliances
- Base cabinet with roll out trays and lazy susans

- Pull-down shelving
- Glass-front cabinet doors
- Open shelving for easy access to frequently used items

Appliances

- Easy to read controls
- Washing machine and dryer raised 12 to 15 inches above floor
- Front loading laundry machines
- Microwave oven at counter height or in wall
- Side-by-side refrigerator/freezer
- Side-swing or wall oven
- Raised dishwasher with pushbutton controls
- Electric cook top with level burners for safety in transferring between the burners, front controls and downdraft feature to pull heat away from user; light to indicate when surface is hot

Miscellaneous

- 30-inch by 48-inch clear space at appliances or 60-inch diameter clear space for turns
- Multi-level work areas to accommodate cooks of different heights
- Open under-counter seated work areas
- Placement of task lighting in appropriate work areas
- Loop handles for easy grip and pull
- Pull-out spray faucet; levered handles
- In multi-story homes, laundry chute or laundry facilities in master bedroom

Bathroom

- Wall support and provision for adjustable and/or varied height counters and removable base cabinets
- Contrasting color edge border at countertops
- At least one wheelchair maneuverable bath on main level with 60-inch turning radius or acceptable T-turn space and 36-inch by 36-inch or 30-inch by 48-inch clear space
- Bracing in walls around tub, shower, shower seat and toilet for installation of grab bars to support 250 - 300 pounds
- If stand-up shower is used in main bath, it is curbless and minimum of 36 inches wide
- Bathtub - lower for easier access
- Fold down seat in the shower
- Adjustable/ handheld showerheads, 6-foot hose
- Tub/Shower controls offset from center
- Shower stall with built-in antibacterial protection
- Light in shower stall
- Toilet 2 inches higher than standard toilet (17 to 19 inches) or height-adjustable
- Design of the toilet paper holder allows rolls to be changed with one hand
- Wall-hung sink with knee space and panel to protect user from pipes
- Slip-resistant flooring in bathroom and shower

Stairways, Lifts and Elevators

- Adequate hand rails on both sides of stairway, 1 ¼-inch diameter
- Increased visibility of stairs through contrast strip on top and bottom stairs, color contrast between treads and risers on stairs and use of lighting
- Multi-story homes may provide either pre-framed shaft (ie. stacked closets) for future elevator, or stairway width must be minimum of 4 feet to allow space for lift
- Residential elevator or lift

Ramps

- Slope no greater than 1 inch rise for each 12 inches in length, adequate handrails
- 5-foot landing provided at entrance
- 2-inch curbs for safety

Storage

- Adjustable closet rods and shelves
- Lighting in closets
- Easy open doors that do not obstruct access

Electrical, Lighting, Safety and Security

- Light switches by each entrance to halls and rooms

- Light receptacles with at least 2 bulbs in vital places (exits, bathroom)
- Light switches, thermostats and other environmental controls placed in accessible locations no higher than 48 inches from floor
- Electrical outlets 15 inches on center from floor; may need to be closer than 12 feet apart
- Clear access space of 30 inches by 48 inches in front of switches and controls
- Rocker or touch light switches
- Audible and visual strobe light system to indicate when the doorbell, telephone or smoke or CO2 detectors have been activated
- High-tech security/intercom system that can be monitored, with the heating, air conditioning and lighting, from any TV in the house
- Easy-to-see and read thermostats
- Pre-programmed thermostats
- Flashing porch light or 911 switch
- Direct wired to police, fire, and EMS (as option)
- Home wired for security
- Home wired for computers

Flooring

- Smooth, non-glare, slip-resistant surfaces, interior and exterior
- If carpeted, use low (less than ½ inch high pile) density, with firm pad
- Color/texture contrast to indicate change in surface levels

Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning

- HVAC should be designed so filters are easily accessible
- Energy efficient units
- Windows that can be opened for cross ventilation, fresh air

Energy Efficient Features

- In-line framing with 2 by 6 studs spaced 24-inch on center
- Air-barrier installation and sealing of duct work with mastic
- Reduced-size air conditioning units with gas furnaces
- Mechanical fresh air ventilation, installation of air returns in all bedrooms and use of carbon monoxide detectors
- Installation of energy efficient windows with Low-E glass

Reduced Maintenance/Convenience Features

- Easy to clean surfaces
- Central vacuum
- Built-in pet feeding system
- Built-in recycling system
- Video phones
- Intercom system

Other Ideas

- Separate apartment for rental income or future caregiver
- Flex room that can used as a nursery or playroom when the children are young and as a home office later; if combined with a full bath, room could also be used for an aging parent/aging in place