

MEMO

Date: September 3, 2021
To: HOFA Co-Chairs
From: Enterprise Advisors on behalf of the workgroup's cochairs
Re: Final: Universal Design Workgroup Recommendation

Introduction

The Housing Opportunities for All Workgroup has explored and discussed a universal design policy in Prince George's County, based on members' input to engage with this policy matter at their September 2020 meeting. Since then, through a series of online engagements with the Housing Opportunities for All Workgroup, they have built consensus around the following universal design recommendation.

Summary: Revised recommendation based on feedback via the shared document

1. **Policy structure (mandatory or voluntary)** – Workgroup members expressed that a universal design approach should be mandatory for a portion of publicly assisted projects.¹ Privately (non-publicly assisted projects) should be incentivized to incorporate universal design features. Workgroup members expressed the need for a universal design policy to include an educational and outreach component between the builder and general public to understand the intended benefits from universal design.
2. **Applicability** – Workgroup members indicated that universal design should cover a share of new units in a development, rather than all new units. Universal design should be applied across the residential housing types (single-family detached homes, townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes and multifamily buildings), with a larger majority focused on applying it to single-family detached homes and multifamily homes. Workgroup members expressed that infill sites should be excluded from a universal design policy.

Workgroup members noted that for multifamily buildings, in the developments where elevators are not an ADA requirement,² the applicability of universal design should focus on ground floor units. Generally, responses reflect that a universal design policy should have a special consideration around the topography of a development site and around townhome development, as certain design features could be impractical.

3. **Waiver process** – Workgroup members said that a universal design policy should include exemptions around selected design features that make development cost prohibitive or create unbuildable circumstances. It was suggested that this exemption should be explicitly stated in the legislation and include a waiver process to obtain it. The legislation should define

¹ Universal design features go beyond the accessible design features required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. For more information visit this [link](#).

² The 2010 ADA standards require multifamily building above three stories to include elevators. For more information visit this [link](#).

what development or topographic conditions exempt conformance with certain universal design criteria. Exemptions to these features and the conditions affecting them should be informed through engagement with local practitioners including architects, developers, homebuilders, universal design experts and general contractors. It was also noted that the decision on a waiver process should be completed within a certain time and as part of the planning review process to enable public input to avoid additional uncertainty later in the development process.