

Frequently Asked Questions

About the Universal Design Ordinance

1. What is Universal Design?

Universal Design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design¹. In laymen's terms, and as it relates to the proposed ordinance, it is the design of housing to allow anyone to access and live in a new home.

2. How are universal design features reviewed and approved in advance? Will the model subject to the ordinance need to have minimum structural features to accommodate a request for universal design features?

The universal design features shall be reviewed and approved prior to the issuance of any building permits for a development.

The base model subject to the ordinance shall not be required to have minimum structural features (e.g. no step entrance and wide hallways). However a different version of that model that can incorporate all the features outlined in the ordinance will need to be approved in our plan check stage prior to issuance of building permits.

3. Why does the ordinance only apply to 20 units or more?

Projects of 20 units or more would have greater economies of scale and the greatest potential to handle any additional design requirements related to new options this ordinance may create, as well as additional site design flexibility.

4. Will everyone be able view the placards in the model home if it is not made accessible?

State building code requires that all sales rooms, including model homes be accessible.

5. What is the process/criteria for determining whether a project is exempt from this ordinance? Who makes the determination?

The Building Official convenes a committee (consisting of plan check staff) to review any universal design features that could be exempted from this ordinance. The Building Official would make the final determination prior to issuing any building permits for the development. The applicant can appeal the committee's decision to an appeals board, consistent with Chapter 2.84 of City Code.

6. What constitutes an "unreasonable delay"?

There are a variety of circumstances that can be considered a "delay". The building official retains the authority to determine what a delay is on a case by case basis rather than give a specific amount of time.

¹ The Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University

7. Can the City require developments to build these features?

State law governing the model ordinance requires that our local ordinance must be “substantially the same” as the model ordinance. Therefore, the City cannot require that universal design features are mandatory to install.

8. What features are offered for individuals with hearing or visual impairments?

One feature that is offered by the ordinance is to provide conduit for the future wiring of assistive technologies (including those for individuals with hearing or visual impairments) in all exterior walls. It is less costly to have conduit placed in the wall during construction of the home versus post-construction installation.

Additionally, conduit, as opposed to specific wiring, would provide greater flexibility to install future assistive technologies, including those for individuals with hearing and visual impairments.

9. Why is the ordinance not applied to all models in a subdivision?

Single family homes are not commonly built with no-step entries or accessible exterior routes. The minimum slope required for these pathways could create challenges in site design and construction. Smaller lots may not have enough square footage to allow adequate sloping of exterior pathways and entryways.