

Lifetime Home Survey

©BuilderFish.com

updated January 19, 2012



This assessment combats “Peter Pan Housing”—homes built as if the residents never change. Whether building new or remodeling, we’re passionate about helping clients live better by planning, designing and constructing features which emphasize energy efficiency, convenience, comfort, safety/control and enjoyment.

Ideally your home is where you make happy memories, not an obstacle course or hassle. Review completely inside and outside your entire property boundary. Make “lifetime design” a priority if you’re building a “last” or dream home to support being active the rest of your life no matter what happens.

[BuilderFish®](#) recommends and practices Universal (lifespan) Design, a home “usable by most” regardless of someone’s age, condition or abilities. The house accommodates every life stage and most circumstances. Simply, **UD = EZ (convenient/efficient) to the greatest extent** , a socially sustainable design which includes energy efficiency and conservation.

Adopt this mindset as you begin to tour your home:

Think family: Imagine and anticipate the children and adults who might live, own, rent or visit. People come in all shapes, sizes, and abilities. Don’t forget pets and how you will care for them as you both age or as family life changes.

Consider the long haul: What are your family’s current needs, resources, budget, and health? What’s your family history? What changes are planned? What’s on the wish list?

Be efficient: Think not only of saving money on utility bills but also conserving your own personal effort by reducing when you must bend, stoop, stretch or reach. Position outlets, switches and fixtures at point-of-use. Consider automating lights and appliances.

Remember “life happens”: Universal Design isn’t about inability/disability, more like ANY-ability, so plan for “what if” by ensuring you can care for yourself and family members throughout an accident, injury or illness. Make your property accessible inside and outside.

Do not confuse ADA or nursing homes: The Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines do not apply to private residences, only public and commercial spaces. Universal Design done right is invisible, so don’t worry about your home looking like a hospital room. How often do you notice a wider doorway or hallway? (When you’re moving furniture, otherwise you likely wouldn’t.)

Give yourself a break: Don't suffer paralysis by over analysis, no house can be universally perfect because life changes in unexpected ways; however, you can still prepare for most situations. What follows suggest a range of options and alternatives. Your home may already have some of these features or you may only be able to achieve "better" but not "ideal". Don't let perfect be the enemy of good.

Don't get overwhelmed. If you're not sure where to begin, start with access into the home then improve the bathrooms, kitchen and master bedroom in that order. If your budget is tight, review your yard or areas of the home for inexpensive fixes (i.e. simply removing or rearranging obstacles is free) or replace fixtures and knobs as money allows. Primarily, take action somewhere first and you'll be better off than the day before. Correcting ONE thing is the beginning of making your home livable for a lifetime.

Grab a tape measure: These are whole house general guidelines, your preferred custom solution may vary. So much about Universal (lifetime) Design is merely positioning, removing, raising/lowering or widening. You will achieve vast improvement simply by adhering to these core measurements:

- 36 inches: minimum width of an accessible, continuous route, path, sidewalk or hallway
- 42 to 48 inches: preferred clearance for hallways (48" VA's Specially Adapted Housing*)
- 32 inches: minimum clearance of open doorways (i.e. with the door on its hinges)
- 36 inches: 3'-0" door (pronounced "Three-Oh") preferred to allow 34-inch clear passage
- 5 X 5 feet: 60-inch square, clear space for standard wheelchair in all areas where turning required (inside/outside main entry, at landings and within bathrooms/kitchen)
- 28 to 36 inches: finished tabletop or countertop heights for accessibility and easy reach
- 27 to 29 inches: knee space clearance measured from finished floor to bottom of desk, table, countertop, cooktop or sink for someone seated
- 18 to 48 inches: minimum to maximum height for controls, outlets, switches, shelves (i.e. nothing lower than 18 inches nor higher than 48 inches)
- 1:12 ratio: maximum slope of ramps (1 inch of rise per 12 inches in length)
- 1:20 ratio: maximum slope (angle, pitch) of walkway grading (1 inch rise per 20 inches in length, also known as a "walking ramp", doesn't require railing or curbs)

Learn more about socially sustainable design and see examples at the [BuilderFish blog](#) and [BuilderFish.com](#).

***Note**: SAH is the Department of Veterans Affairs [Specially Adapted Housing](#) grant for service disabled veterans and the program construction guidelines.