
NEWS ON TAP

The NEWS ON TAP Newsletter is part of OHCD's Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program (TAP) concerning issues related to housing for persons with disabilities in the City of Philadelphia. *December 2002*

A Day to Think Outside the Box

By Peggy Robertson

Thinking “outside of the box” was the activity du jour for a group of about thirty Philadelphia architects, policymakers, advocates and people with disabilities. On Thursday, September 19th 2002, under the Technical Assistance Project (TAP) sponsored by the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), a charrette was held in the Community Room of the Brentwood Apartments at 4130 Parkside Avenue in the Parkside section of Philadelphia.

The day began with opening remarks from Scott Wilds of OHCD. He encouraged everyone to think creative thoughts about how to make row homes accessible, which was the problem to be addressed during the charrette. Diana Myers, Project Director for TAP followed, explaining that the purpose of the charrette is to respond to what can be done in Philadelphia to make row homes accessible.

A charrette is an intensive work session designed to resolve a problem or issue – in this case how to make row homes accessible. The charrette calls attention to the specific issue and dramatizes the need for public attention to resolve the issue. A charrette is a

participatory problem-solving process in which all possible approaches to a question are sought in order to achieve a democratically-derived consensus.

Bob Thomas, Architect with Campbell Thomas & Co. Architects, then outlined the activities that the participants would engage in for the afternoon. Mr. Thomas explained that there is not a wealth of information available on making housing accessible in older cities such as Philadelphia, and he challenged everyone to brainstorm innovative approaches and strategies that could result in developing economically feasible solutions to a tough city problem. He asked everyone to keep in mind the major barriers that people with disabilities encounter in homes that aren't accessible – exterior access, inadequate vertical circulation, narrow doorways and the small kitchens and bathrooms.

He then invited everyone to take a walking tour of the Parkside neighborhood to see some typical construction designs used in making row homes accessible. The first building of the tour was the Brentwood Apartments, which is a totally accessible five-story building. Located in the Parkside National Historic District, this German Baroque Revival structure, originally six homes, is part of a row of grand structures standing across

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Bob Thomas points out building features during the walking tour

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from Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park. In danger of collapse after years of neglect, the building was rehabilitated into 43 affordable, accessible housing units using historic and low income housing tax credits. The entrance to the building is at ground level and that leads into the lower floor. An elevator was installed to provide accessibility to the second floor where a walkway with a clear cover was built. The walkway serves as a bridge out to a porch that extends the length of the building. The porch is level with the second floor apartments for accessible exterior entry. The elevator provides access to all other floors.

The next stop on the tour was the Marlton Avenue

Apartments that are also located in the Parkside National Historic District. These six severely deteriorated three story German Baroque Revival structures have been rehabilitated into an affordable rental project. The interiors of the six buildings are arranged into three apartment buildings, which also include offices and a community meeting room at the first floor and laundry facilities in the basement. A lift was installed that is accessible to the front porch of the building and a ramp was built in the back of the building to provide an accessible back entry into all of the units on the first floor. The reason that two lifts were installed rather than an elevator is that they cost a total of \$45,000 whereas an

elevator would have cost \$150,000. Designs for these units also include fire alarms, strobe lights and a bell system for people with hearing and visual impairments. Also viewed was the rehabilitation of 14 units on Belmont Avenue, 11 of which are accessible.

At the end of the walking tour everyone reassembled in the community room of the Brentwood Apartments. Mr. Thomas explained that the main purpose of the charrette was to get a lot of different thinkers together to review the problems rapidly and come up with alternative solutions. He then divided the group into three teams. Each team was charged with brainstorming innovative design solutions to one of three different scenarios of typical Philadelphia homes. The goal was to make the homes fully accessible for people with disabilities. Within a specified time limit, the participants were asked to work in teams to intensely reach resolutions to their problems and to create architectural sketches illustrating potential solutions. After the designs were completed, everyone was asked to reconvene and present their plans to the rest of the group.

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The first row home scenario was a Brewery Town end-of-row home with 16 feet wide by 44 feet deep dimensions, a raised front porch, and a basement entry below grade.

The group came up with several recommendations to make this end-of-row home accessible. Their first recommendation for getting into the front door was to install a wheelchair lift by cutting into the porch thereby maintaining a consistent street wall. They also suggested creating an accessible powder room on the first floor off the back of the house. To have enough space for entry, the powder room would be combined with a mud room with folding doors to ensure privacy. The only trade off with this scenario is that the kitchen would be squeezed in terms of space. A chair lift would be installed on the stairway to provide access to the second floor, which would have a fully accessible bathroom and laundry facilities. All of the doors in the home would be retrofitted to the correct size – 36 inches wide. An exterior lift was not considered because the cost was thought to be too prohibitive, ranging from \$18,000 to \$25,000.

The second row home scenario was a Kensington row home with 14 feet wide by 40 feet deep dimensions. It was a middle-of-the-row home surrounded by occupied housing with no bathroom on the first floor, no front porch, and 3 – 4 steps up to a stoop with the last step into the house.

The biggest challenge this group faced was the entrance. There was not enough space to install a ramp so they proposed a platform lift. They made the assumption that there was 8 feet of clearance on the sidewalk in front. The original blue print showed that an addition had been added to the back of the house and this space was used for an accessible bathroom. An L-shaped kitchen was designed next to the dining/living area and an entrance to the kitchen was added and enlarged to include laundry facilities. The suggestion was made to install a hanging dining table in order to have more floor space on the first floor. A stair glide was installed to get up to the second floor. It was necessary to widen the stairway and the hallway on the second floor, and the bathroom was made accessible.

This group came up with another highly creative “off

the wall” idea. The living space in the home was flipped upside down. The second floor bedroom and bathroom would both be accessible. The first floor would basically remain the same with perhaps a small bedroom for a caregiver. In order to get into the home, a covered balcony was attached to the front of the house and a lift device with enhanced lighting and key-access for security purposes would be installed to go from street level to a second floor entrance. The second floor consisted of a sitting room area with an efficiency kitchen where the front bedroom used to be. The balcony from the second floor, which is in the front of the house, allows the residents to partake in community life.

The third row home scenario was a semi-detached West Philadelphia twin home with house dimensions of 16 feet wide and 60 feet deep and lot dimensions of 22 feet wide by 80 - 100 feet deep. It is raised 3 – 6 feet above the street with alleys between the unattached homes.

The group decided to preserve the historic integrity of the front of the home by ramping the back of the house. The scenario

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assumed that there were two bays on the side of the home. The first bay that is most visible from the street was left unaltered. The second bay was removed to allow construction of an exterior ramp running along the side of the house to a landing at the rear, making use of the existing back door. The rear landing also had steps toward the back yard. The inside space was redesigned, moving the kitchen into the dining room space. A bedroom and accessible bathroom were configured where the kitchen used to be and a back hallway allowed access to the outside. By moving the kitchen further to the front of the home, there was a lot of room for turning and the living/eating area was visible from the kitchen. A stair lift was installed to get up to the second floor where minor configuration of the hallway was needed in order to have room for turning and clearance to the bedroom and bathroom doors.

The group said that if there was joint ownership of the twins, the possibility was opened up to install a ramp in the front of the home starting from the neighbor's side. The ramp, which would include two landings, would go to the porch and to the front door. This would allow

for visibility to the front yard as well as a stronger sense of being a part of the neighborhood.

All of the groups were immediately faced with the biggest obstacle – entrance into the home, or exterior access. Because of the space issues, ramping was not always possible and the most common solution was to install a platform lift. Another common solution was installing a chair glide or chair lift on the stairway to get from the first to the second floor in order to solve the vertical circulation problem. The groups came up with different ideas for adding accessible bathrooms and kitchens on the first floor and in some cases dramatically changed the floor plans. Each group came up with some unique and innovative ideas. Aside

from the physical barriers that had to be overcome, many of the participants also took into consideration the importance of providing a sense of neighborhood and community for the row home residents.

The charrette proved to be more than a productive exercise. The participants created schematic images that represent different design solutions for making Philadelphia row homes accessible. In addition, the participants represented those stakeholders, design professionals and city planners who can present a call to action and ultimately implement a plan for future development. The charrette marked the beginning of making accessible row homes a reality as opposed to a problem needing a solution.

Participants during the charrette

Innovative Design Solutions

By Peggy Robertson

On October 30th, 2002, the annual OHCD-sponsored Forum entitled *Innovative Design Solutions* was held at Philadelphia's Hampton Inn. Over 60 architects, developers, builders, disability advocates and policy makers gathered to hear about actual and proposed designs for making Row Homes in Philadelphia accessible and to learn the "ABC's of Real-Life Accessible Housing".

Dainette Mintz, Director of Special Needs Housing with the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), welcomed everyone to the Forum. Ms. Mintz said, "This forum is somewhat of a tradition in Philadelphia and is especially exciting because it is a follow-up to the charrette that we held last month. During the charrette we were trying to find some ideas to incorporate into the design of making row homes accessible in Philadelphia. Today we will hear what those ideas are, as well as some of the actual designs that were used for modifications of row homes in Philadelphia." Ms. Mintz also noted that guest speaker Susan M. Duncan, R.N., Designer and Founder of **ADaptations inc.**® would follow with a presentation of

real-life designs and features that have been used to make homes accessible.

Diana T. Myers, President of Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. and Project Director for TAP, the Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program sponsored by OHCD, thanked everyone for attending the forum. She explained how the program, which began in 1998, keeps getting more exciting and interesting every year. Ms. Myers talked about some of the special projects and resources that will be available through TAP. "A new publication, the *Philly Primer*, will soon be available that includes resources and housing options in Philadelphia for people with disabilities. In addition, TAP is developing an Affirmative Marketing Plan, a model to help developers and property owners affirmatively market accessible housing units to people with disabilities."

Ms. Myers then introduced the program for the day. "When thinking about the challenges that home modifications present we sometimes think it might be easier just to do new construction. However, the charrette we held in September was an attempt to meet those

challenges. The group, which included the right mix of close to 30 people, brainstormed innovative solutions for making row homes accessible. Today we will hear the ideas presented at the charrette as well as the local and national perspectives on some exciting and innovative design solutions."

The first presenter was Robert Cassway, AIA, an architect with Cassway Albert, Ltd., a firm specializing in subsidized housing. He discussed actual designs he used for modifying row homes in Philadelphia. Mr. Cassway became involved with the Philadelphia Housing Authority in the early 1990's at which time he worked on the renovation of row homes for the Raymond Rosen Project. In addition, Mr. Cassway's firm was selected from a competition to work on the Francisville Project with the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority. Mr. Cassway described how he had to redesign his original drawings in the middle of the project due to changes in the accessibility codes.

In most of Mr. Cassway's renovations wheelchair lifts

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were installed to provide access from the sidewalk to the exterior entrance. Mr. Cassway also noted that he uses L-shaped kitchens to allow for maximum flexibility for people with disabilities. In the home he renovated at 1010 Green Street, both floors had to be made accessible. So he widened the stairs to install a chair lift and opened up the kitchen to make room for the second floor.

Following Mr. Cassway's presentation, the proposed designs that were completed at the charrette were introduced. These designs are discussed in detail in the article entitled "*A Day to Think Outside the Box*" on page 1 of this Newsletter. Kurt Raymond of Cicada Architects talked about a typical Brewery Town row

house, Wendy Bennett, Architect with the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority described plans for a typical Kensington row house and Jean McCoubrey, Architect with Runyan and Associates and Whittier Dow with the Housing Consortium for Disabled Individuals reported on a typical West Philadelphia semi-detached row house.

Diana Myers thanked all of the speakers for their excellent presentations and recognized their efforts. "What our speakers have done today has been a total volunteer effort. They all went above and beyond what any of us expected. They deserve special thanks for their time and expertise." Ms. Myers then introduced the final speaker for the day, Susan Duncan.

Ms. Duncan is founder of **ADaptations inc®**, a consulting service for professionals and consumers seeking information about accessible environments for the aging population and people with disabilities. The company offers a full range of services including consulting, accessible interior design services, educational workshops and videos, design tools, teaching materials, client assessment tools and **ADaptations**-recommended product lists. What is unique

Susan Duncan, Keynote Speaker

about Ms. Duncan is that she has combined her background in health care with expertise in accessible design. This has given her a complete perspective on the real-life, everyday housing needs of people with disabilities.

Ms. Duncan began by commenting, "I am very impressed with the activities and efforts taking place in Philadelphia to make row homes accessible. There is a lot to be said about innovation. I am a firm believer that form follows function and that it is critical to find real life solutions. I started out as a nurse and then went to Design School. I understand what the barriers can be for people with disabilities living in their home."

Ms. Duncan explained that when she begins a project for

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Jean McCoubrey, a presenter at the forum

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a person with a disability, she starts with a 20 page assessment to analyze the client's needs. This assessment takes into consideration the physical, sensory and cognitive challenges faced by the client. "I always encourage my clients to be proactive instead of reactive. I also make sure that the interior designs of a home take into account those who will assist the person using a wheelchair. I do a complete description of the client's activities. I then assess the general site, the front and back door entries, the hallways and inside doors, the stairs, the bathrooms, the kitchen, and other details such as access to where the mail is delivered."

Ms. Duncan then showed a series of slides that illustrate the real-life solutions she uses to make a home accessible. She advised, "If you can go through everything in your home with the "closed-fist" system you will discover some of the features that cause obstacles for people with disabilities. One example of removing those obstacles would be to replace doors knobs and handles with levers." Ms. Duncan presented several other features she uses to allow for accessibility and increased mobility. These products include:

✓ **Off-Set Hinge** – This takes

the thickness out of a door and stacks it behind the door jamb to increase the clear width opening by 1 - 1 ½".

✓ **¾" – 5/8" Plywood** – This should be installed during construction in bathrooms to add grab bars where needed.

✓ **In-Wall Commode** – The water tank is installed in the wall and can add about 6" of clearance in front of the commode, which is great for tight spaces.

✓ **Diagonal Tiles** – Ideally 12" tiles should be installed on the diagonal on bathroom floors so that wheelchair wheels do not get stuck in the grout joints.

✓ **Wall-Hung Lavatory** – This provides space underneath the sink for a person in a wheel chair and can include a towel rack and some counter space.

✓ **Thermostatically and Pressure Balanced Controlled Shower Valve** – This valve prevents people from burning themselves.

✓ **Open-Ended Toilet Paper Holder** – This allows for easy installation of toilet paper rolls.

✓ **Contrasting Counter and Floor Colors** – This allows for people to discern between the countertop space and the floor.

✓ **Side-Hinged Oven** – The oven door opens from the side. Placing a cutting board under the oven allows for even greater safety.

✓ **Cutting/Bread Boards** -

These boards are located in a variety of kitchen areas to provide variable height work spaces instead of changing a countertop.

These are only a few of the products that add to the design elements in making a home accessible. Ms. Duncan added that it is always important to be able to project into the future the needs of the client. "With my nursing background I have the ability to think ahead as to where the progression of the disease/disability process might go. This allows me to anticipate features in the home that may not be needed at the present but will be needed as time goes by." Because of Ms. Duncan's expertise and forward thinking, she has developed innovative design solutions that not only meet the present needs of people with disabilities and the aging population, but their future needs as well

The products Ms. Duncan described have been very beneficial to people with disabilities and the aging population. They are functional, economical and aesthetically pleasing. To learn more about the services provided by Ms. Duncan, visit her website at www.adaptationsinc.com.

Visiting a Universal Design Demonstration Home

By Peggy Robertson

Directly following the Forum, Susan M. Duncan, R.N., Designer and Founder of **ADaptations inc.**®, Dainette Mintz, Director of Special Needs Housing with the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development, Diana Myers, President of Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. and Peggy Robertson, Editor of the *News On Tap* Newsletter took a trip to Atlantic City, NJ for a tour of the Universal Design Demonstration Home. This “state of the art” home is a unique and multi-faceted project of the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA). This project, which was done in partnership with AARP and the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, demonstrates the importance of Universal Design in both new construction and remodeling. Their goal was to create safe, user-friendly designs for people of all ages and abilities, allowing all to live in their homes for a lifetime.

The building is designed to deliberately respect, value and accommodate the broadest spectrum of human ability, as well as encompass the full human life cycle, from birth to death. Sometimes referred to as

“life span design” or “transgenerational design”, the demonstration home goes beyond the accessible, adaptable and barrier-free design concepts of the past by eliminating the need for special features. Individual spaces for people of limited mobility, which are often specialized in appearance and more expensive than standard design and construction, are replaced by universal design features.

Design features include smooth, stepless entries for ease of access; a home elevator and chair lift; extra-wide doors and hallways with easy-to-grasp, functional hardware; a convenient user-friendly kitchen with sitting workplaces, specialized cabinets and appliances; bathrooms designed for maximum usability including curbless showers; and a state of the art security and communications system throughout the home.

The building has had three different purposes. In the Spring of 2002 it served as a demonstration home open for tours showcasing the Universal Design concept. In July and August, the home was used to raise funds for the RNS Cancer & Heart Fund’s annual Show House

at the Shore, and beginning in November it became the newest home of Gilda’s Club of South Jersey.

The principles of Universal Design apply to all spaces, features, and aspects of a house, and create a home that is usable by and marketable to people of all ages and abilities. Although many of the features can be costly, most of them can be adapted to affordable housing. Some features of universally designed homes are adjustable to meet particular needs, or needs that change as family members age, yet allow the home to remain marketable. Universal Design has the unique quality that when done well, it is invisible. The photographs illustrate some of the Universal Design Features used in the home.



*Clockwise from the top left: The wheelchair lift comes from the back parking lot up to the back patio which has a no-step entrance into the kitchen;
An example of a raised combination washing machine and dryer; The bathroom with 12" diagonal tiles and an open-ended toilet paper holder;
An example of a side-hinged oven with a pull out cutting board underneath.*



WHAT IS A CHARRETTE?

A charrette is a meeting to resolve a problem or issue. It is a participatory problem-solving process to search for all possible approaches to a question through consensus. Within a specified time limit, participants work together intensely to reach a resolution. There are three main parts to a charrette:

Exploration and Issue Identification: Stakeholders and design professionals meet to explore and discuss issues and problems that the stakeholders feel are important.

Design: Professionals create a few different schematic images to represent numerous design solutions that take into consideration the issues that the stakeholders have discussed. The charrette produces visible results and is often used early in a planning process to provide useful ideas and perspectives from concerned interest groups.

Call to Action / Implementation Plan: A development document summarizes the vision and is adopted by stakeholders as a guide for present and future developments.

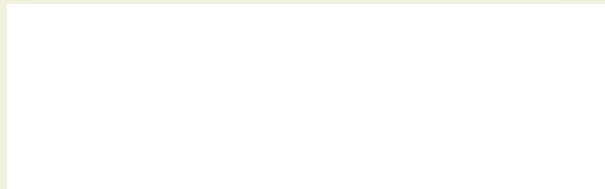
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