Visitability in Social and Affordable Housing Developments in Kingston, Ontario

Practice, Challenges, Impacts, and Policies

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A Master’s Report submitted to the School of Urban and Regional Planning in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Urban and Regional Planning.
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Executive Summary

In 1982, people with disabilities were included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since then, there has been a lot of progress to ensure equal access to many areas of life however; housing has continued to be constructed to be inaccessible to many.

This report discusses visitability, as a means to provide basic accessibility into new housing developments and to build more inclusive communities. The key features of visitable housing are defined as zero-step entrances, wider doors and hallways, and larger bathrooms (with a five-foot turning radius) on the same level as the zero-step entrance.

The purpose of this report is to illustrate how visitability features have been applied in new rental housing developments, the impacts and challenges, and the need for broader policies on housing accessibility.

The research questions addressed in this report are:

1. To what extent have visitability standards been incorporated in new social/affordable housing developments in the City of Kingston in the past five to ten years?
2. What were the challenges in implementing visitability in these new affordable housing developments?
3. What were the impacts of visitability on project costs and housing affordability for residents?
4. Is a visitability policy (or standard) feasible for new social/affordable housing developments in the City of Kingston?

The three main research methods in this report are: a literature review, document review, and key informant interviews. Three case studies of visitable social/affordable housing developments were chosen, which allowed for an in-depth understanding of visitable housing development in Kingston, Ontario’s social/affordable developments. The three case studies chosen in this study were:

- 233 Queen Mary Road, Kingston, Ontario
- 40 Cliff Crescent, Kingston, Ontario
- 35 Lyons Street, Kingston, Ontario

Visitability is a fairly new concept in Canada, so there were not many examples of visitable social/affordable housing developments in Kingston, so all developments that had visitable features that had been started or completed within the last five years were studied for this report.

This report showed that it is possible to provide 100% of units in a building with visitable features in social/affordable housing developments. Key findings include:
• These buildings have different levels of visitability ranging from 27% of units – 100% of units being visitable.
• The inclusion of additional accessibility features beyond the three standard visitability features
  o Many of the projects included additional features like power door operators and zero-step showers
• The cost of visitability could not be found within this study due to the way costing is done, however there is a general sense that the cost of visitability is quite low
• There were many challenges in making visitable housing, namely, the size and space requirements, zero-step balconies, and sloped sites.
  o Some of these challenges were also identified within the literature review as being issues in other municipalities.

Regardless of the challenges that were faced in developing these visitable housing developments, it is important to note that they were completed or are under construction, meaning that it is possible for social/affordable housing developments to be built to visitability standards.

These findings raise a broader question of whether a visitability policy should be implemented to encourage increased visitable housing stock and led to general recommendations which include:

**Recommendation 1: Implementing a mandatory visitability policy for social/affordable housing**

The research found that in other municipalities the most successful way to implement visitable housing is to make it a mandatory requirement.

**Recommendation 2: Creating buildings that are fully visitable (100% visitability)**

There are different levels of visitability that were implemented within the buildings that were studied. By providing a visitable building, it works to include everyone within the building, since anyone can visit any unit, so they can visit their neighbours and visitors can visit anyone within the building.

**Recommendation 3: Looking at promoting visitable housing in private housing developments**

This research demonstrated that it is possible to build visitable housing in social/affordable developments. These developments typically have the tightest budgets with less room to provide additional features for tenants compared to the private sector. If social/affordable developments are able to incorporate visitability even with their small budgets, private developments should also be able to incorporate these features, given their larger budgets.
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Report

Accessible housing is a basic need for all Canadians and a particular challenge for adults and children with disabilities as well as for an aging population that prefers to remain independent in their homes. In 2010 Canada ratified the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which states in Article 9 that persons with disabilities should be enabled to live independently and that:

“States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others...These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to: ...housing” (UNCRPD, 2006).

This report discusses the concept of basic accessibility known as visitability as a means to improve housing access in Canada’s housing stock. Visitability features in new housing developments can help ensure access to housing for all Canadians, regardless of their ability level. Visitability was pioneered in the US in the 1990s; advocates of visitability note the value of more inclusive communities and the benefits of building new homes to be accessible to everyone.

The key features of visitable housing are defined as zero-step entrances, wider doors and hallways, and larger bathrooms (with a five-foot turning radius) on the same level. In Ontario, the Ontario Building Code (OBC) requires a minimum of 15% of units in new multi-unit residential buildings be visitable to provide access to everyone. Other design enhancements may be included and developers may provide fully-visitables buildings for 100% of the units.

The purpose of this report is to illustrate how the visitability features have been applied in new rental housing developments, the impacts and challenges, and the need for broader policies on housing accessibility.

1.2 Policy Context

The policy rationales for accessible housing have been well-documented in the literature for some time. These include:

- **Improving housing access for people with disabilities:**
  - 14% of Canadians over 15 and nearly 5% of children self-reported having a disability (Statistics Canada, 2016);
  - These people should have access to housing and be able to visit friends and family, which visitability would enable.
• **Aging population and aging-in-place:**
  
o Canada’s population is aging, and the prevalence of disability increases with age (Statistics Canada, 2016);
  o Visitable housing can allow older adults to age-in-place more and allow them to continue to live independently.

• **Social inclusion and quality of life:**
  
o Currently most housing stock does not allow some people to access: community meetings at a neighbour’s house, a neighbour’s door to ask for sugar or eggs, visiting a friend’s house for a game of cards;
  o This is isolating and does not allow all of the community to interact with one another (Lewis, 2009).

### 1.3 Research Design and Research Questions

This report used three research methods: literature review, document review, and key informant interviews. These three methods were used to ensure the research findings were robust. Three case studies were chosen in Kingston, Ontario. All three case studies were of social/affordable housing developments. The focus of the research is on social/affordable housing units because of their budgetary constraints, which would demonstrate that even among projects with the most limited budgets, visitable buildings could be achieved.

The research questions addressed in this report are:

- To what extent have visitability standards been incorporated in new social/affordable housing developments in the City of Kingston in the past five to ten years?
- What were the challenges in implementing visitability in these new affordable housing developments?
- What were the impacts of visitability on project costs and housing affordability for residents?
- Is a visitability policy (or standard) feasible for new social/affordable housing developments in the City of Kingston?

### 1.4 Scope of the Report

This study will focus on visitability in selected examples of social and affordable housing developments in Kingston, Ontario within the last five to ten years. With the resources available for this master’s report, this research draws on the available literature on visitability in housing, key informant interviews and the on-line information related to the selected housing projects. The
reports focus on the City of Kingston’s newer social/affordable housing developments was based on the following rationale:

- More ready access to project information for housing developments with funding from government programs and the City of Kingston;
- Ability to contact people in the local community who are knowledgeable about the housing developments; and
- Increased likelihood of information on more recent housing developments.

The study did not include private housing developments as access to the required information was not easily acquirable. There was also an assumption made that since social/affordable housing developments have more limited budgets than private housing developments, it would be more valuable to see how/if the assumed added costs of visitability would affect the social/affordable housing developments. This way, one could assume that if a social/affordable housing development can provide visitable features, a private housing development should also be able to provide the same features, since budget would not be as limiting a factor in private development.

1.5 Key Terms

**Accessible Housing:** Accessible housing exists on a continuum. Visitable housing is a basic form of accessible housing which only provides a few accessibility features. An accessible home would provide more features than visitability and is normally designed based on an individual’s specific needs. Accessible housing would look to make every room within a home accessible, so that someone with a disability could comfortably live in their home and perform any activities of daily living.

**Visitability:** Designing and building homes with basic accessibility features that provide access to one level of a home for anyone to visit. The three key features are:
- Zero-step entrance
- Wider doorways and hallways
- A larger bathroom (minimum 5’ (1500mm) turn circle) (Canadian Centre on Disability Studies [CCDS], n.d; MMAH, 2016).

The intent of visitability is to make a small change to all housing to make it possible for someone with a disability to visit someone else’s home. While visitable features could help someone with a disability to live in their home, it is likely that more modifications would be required such as an accessible kitchen.
The main goal of visitability is not to allow a person with a disability to live in a visitable home, rather to be able to allow anyone to visit a home. These features may also be helpful for young families with strollers, temporary disabilities such as using crutches after breaking a leg, and for older adults who want to age-in-place. So while, visitability will not provide all the necessary features for a person with a disability to live in one of these homes. Visitability will help a lot of people and allow anyone to visit someone’s house and will provide basic accessibility features to new housing stock.

**Aging-in-place**: The concept that older adults remain in their homes and/or communities as they grow older, instead of being placed into segregated retirement communities (Bookman, 2008).

**Ontario Building Code**: Sets the minimum standards for construction of buildings to ensure that they are safe for Ontarians (MMAH, 2016). The barrier-free design section within the OBC provides an exemption for housing, except for requiring 15% of units within all new multi-unit residential buildings to be visitable, and to provide visual alarms in corridors (MMAH, 2016).

The building code also requires all multi-residential buildings to have an accessible main entrance and wider entrance doorways into all units on floors that an elevator serves. So for visitability in multi-residential buildings, it is interior doorways within the unit where the wider doors would apply, since the code already covers 100% of entrance doors.

**Social/Affordable Housing**: Rental housing that is subsidized by various levels of government and provides lower rents for lower and moderate income for individuals, families, and seniors.

### 1.6 Outline of Report

The report contains six chapters. A brief outline of each chapter is noted below:

1. Chapter 1 provides background information regarding visitability, states the purpose of the report, and outlines the research questions;
2. Chapter 2 outlines the methods used in obtaining data and discusses how it will be analyzed;
3. Chapter 3 summarizes previous research about visitability and highlights some of the issues and successes with implementing visitability;
4. Chapter 4 outlines three case studies of visitable social housing within Kingston, Ontario;
5. Chapter 5 presents key findings from the case studies;
6. Chapter 6 concludes the paper with an overall assessment of the research, how it relates to the original research questions and outlines next steps for research on the topic and recommendations for the City of Kingston.
2.0 Methods

Two qualitative research methods were used to obtain data for this research report. The research methods included:

- Literature and Document Review; and
- Case Study Analysis using online research, site visits, and key informant interviews.

Data was gathered from multiple sources to corroborate findings and increase the reliability of the conclusions from the study (Yin, 2009).

2.1 Literature and Document Review

Academic literature was the foundation for this report. The majority of academic literature surrounding visitable housing is from the United States, and there are few academic sources that focus on visitability in Canada. To provide more insight into the Canadian context professional reports, online documents, policy documents and key informant interviews were reviewed in addition to the academic literature.

The document review provided background and supplementary information during case study analysis. City council minutes and reports, news articles, organizational reports and other information available to the general public were reviewed and used during the research for each case study. In addition to the publicly available documents, the architectural drawings were reviewed for each case study, which were provided by key informants.

2.2 Case Study Analysis

A case study method was used to examine visitable housing developments in their real world contexts. This method involved selection of examples for in-depth analysis of how visitability standards and designs were used, the challenges encountered and the lessons learned.

The case study research involved selection of both a geographic area and specific housing projects with visitability design. With the limited resources available for the research and to facilitate on-site visits and interviews, Kingston, Ontario was selected as the geographic area.

2.2.1 Selection Criteria for Housing Developments

Within the Kingston area, background research showed that visitable housing developments have been undertaken in the social/affordable housing sector. These examples go beyond the minimum Building Code requirements for 15% of units within buildings to be visitable. Some of these buildings are fully-visitabile (that is, 100% visitability). No comparable private housing developments with full visitability were identified.
Therefore, the key criteria for case studies were as follows:

- Full visitability and higher than minimum code requirements for visitable housing;
- Projects completed within the past five years or under construction at the time of the research;
- Willingness of housing developers to participate in the research; and,
- Availability of information on the projects.

Only three specific projects were identified that met these criteria, namely

- 233 Queen Mary Road, Kingston, Ontario
- 40 Cliff Crescent, Kingston, Ontario
- 35 Lyons Street, Kingston, Ontario.

The first two projects were developed by the Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation, the largest social housing provider in the City of Kingston. The third project was developed by a large community-based housing agency serving people with mental health and addictions issues. Therefore, all three case study projects are examples of visitability in social and affordable housing.

Using three case studies allowed for in-depth understanding of each of the social/affordable housing developments in Kingston, Ontario. Furthermore, choosing multiple cases makes the research findings more robust and reliable since it provides a broader basis for exploring the phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

### 2.3 Key Informant Interviews

Information was obtained from key informants from the different cases. These key informants included architects, property managers and non-profit housing agency directors. Four interviews were conducted in total. Two of the key informants worked on two of the case studies (233 Queen Mary Road and 40 Cliff Crescent), so the key informants spoke to both cases. Two of the interviews were conducted in person, and two were conducted by phone.

All of the interviews were semi-structured using an interview guide (Appendix A). The interview guide allowed the researcher to pursue ideas brought up in the interview by asking follow-up questions or probing responses. The guide helped to ensure consistency across the case studies with a specific agenda and also permitted the interview to be partially led by the researcher, and partially led by the informant (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

Ethics clearance was obtained from the Queen’s General Research Ethics Board prior to commencing the interviews. All participants received a combined letter of information and consent form, so that the informants understood the nature of the research and the purpose of the research. The consent form portion of the combined form were returned to the researcher.
after the informants had read and understood the letter of information and any questions were answered. This consent form explained the confidentiality protocol and allowed participants to agree or disagree to the usage of their names within the report. A copy of the interview questions was given to participants before the interview so they would understand the scope of the interview and questions and enable them to prepare for the interview.

### 2.4 Limitations and Bias

This study had several limitations. Some of these were mitigated to the extent possible within the scope of the research.

Time frame for this research limited the number and type of key informants who were interviewed for this research. Ideally, current or former residents’ and builders’ perspectives could have complimented the research and provided insight on the impacts of visitability on quality of life and construction costs. Adding these perspectives in future research on visitability would further strengthened understandings of visitability.

Visitability is an emerging concept in Canada and in Kingston the three buildings that were chosen as case studies were the only social/affordable developments built in Kingston with visitability standards within the past five years. The definition of visitability is not widely known, and different key informants considered the term differently. In particular, there are accessibility features such as grab bars, or power door openers that go beyond the formal definition of visitability. In the case studies, the distinction between visitability features and accessibility features were clearly identified.

All of the buildings used for the case studies were multi-unit residential developments. This study did not look at visitability in single detached homes or townhomes. Meaning that the findings of this research may not be generalizable to other housing forms.

Since this research focused on social/affordable housing multi-unit residential developments in Kingston, Ontario not all of the findings of this study will be generalizable to other communities, or outside a social/affordable housing context. However, providing affordable housing is a common challenge in most communities, particularly given the high costs of housing development and limited funding available to keep rents affordable. Therefore, the ability to provide visitable housing in this sector provides a comparative benchmark for all types of development.

Lastly, awareness of the potential for researcher bias is important in all studies, particularly those based on qualitative methods. In this research, the researcher holds the belief that the built environment should be accessible to anyone regardless of their level of ability. This may have influenced the findings of this research to some extent. However, all of the data obtained from the study have been presented regardless of consistency with the researcher’s views, mitigating the potential bias (Yin, 2009).
3.0 Literature Review

3.1 History of the Visitability movement

Eleanor Smith was the policy entrepreneur who started the visitability movement in the United States, starting in the late 1980s (Hartje, 2004; Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, & Spegal, 2007). She uses a wheelchair, and realized that she could not access many of the homes in her community and also noticed that there was a Habitat for Humanity project constructing homes without accessibility features, which led to her wanting to address this issue (Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, & Spegal, 2007). Smith set up a non-profit organization called Concrete Change and began advocating for basic accessibility features in homes (Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, & Spegal, 2007). She started calling the movement “visitability” after she heard that that was what it was being called in Europe (Fuller, 2008). In 1991, with the help of a councilwoman, they pushed to get Atlanta, Georgia to pass a visitability ordinance, which passed unanimously in 1992 (Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, & Spegal, 2007). This was the start of the American visitability movement that has since spread across the country. As of 2008, there were 32 municipalities in the United States had implemented visitability ordinances (Fuller, 2008). The United States is much further ahead in the research and implementation of visitable housing than Canada, so most of the research drawn upon is from the United States.

3.2 Visitability Requirements

While visitability has been more broadly implemented in the United States, it is becoming more popular in Canada. There are slight differences in the features required for visitability in Ontario and the United States. Table 1 below compares the features that are required in both Ontario and the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero-step entrance</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32” wide doors</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider hallways</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large washroom on main floor</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washroom with 5’ turn circle on main floor</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that most of the features are the same in the Ontario and American requirements, the only difference is in the washroom standard. In the United States the requirement says a “larger washroom” but does not specify a size that would make it larger. Whereas, in Ontario, a five-foot turn circle is required in the washroom for a house to be considered visitable. This five-foot turn circle is defined within the Ontario Building Code, which only requires 15% of units within multi-family residential buildings to be visitable. The five-foot
turn circle provides an explicit requirement compared to the American requirement which leaves it up to developers to interpret what is a large enough bathroom to be used by a person with a disability. Since this study is taking place in Ontario, the Ontario requirement will be used to evaluate the buildings.

Visitability can also go beyond just “visiting” a friend or family member, and can help accommodate extended stays for people with disabilities within a home, for example if an aging parent came to stay with an adult child. Visitability can also allow someone who has developed a disability the opportunity to move back home. Visitability not only promotes an inclusive community for all residents but can benefit homeowners without disabilities. For example, a zero-step entrance can help young families using strollers. These features can also help when while moving, especially large furniture since furniture can easily be rolled into the house and a large door can make it easier to manoeuvre furniture.

### 3.3 Visitability Implementation in the United States

In the United States, there have been various counties and municipalities that have implemented visitability codes, however, they have not all taken the same approach. Fuller (2008), found that there are four different strategies these municipalities and regional governments have used to promote basic home access, besides mandatory programs:

- Mandating that publicly funded housing be required to meet visitability criteria
- Creating a builder incentive voluntary program with no public mandate
- Creating an incentive program for consumers to choose to participate in
- Creating an awareness program demonstrating how to incorporate universal design and visitability features into home design and construction

All of these methods of implementation can help promote visitability and have the potential to create more visitable housing stock. None of the other options of implementation would be as inclusive or effective as the implementation of a mandatory program. Fuller (2008), notes that a mandatory visitability code is the most far reaching however, she also noted that the alternative policies would still provide more awareness about visitability and universal design. Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, and Spegal (2007), found that mandated visitability programs produced the majority of visitable housing stock. So while a mandatory code is the best option for increasing the number of visitable homes, any type of visitability policy will increase awareness about visitability and inclusive communities.

### 3.4 Visitability Criticisms from Disability Advocates

Many disability advocates view visitability as a “half a loaf” solution to the issue of inaccessible housing (Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, & Spegal, 2007). Nishita et al., 2008) noted that this lack of consensus can lead to fragmentation of efforts between disability groups. Eleanor Smith
has stated that she wants to “radically change the way new houses are built... and if you’re going to do that, you can’t have a long list of demands” (Truesdale, Steinfeld, & Smith, 2002 in Fuller, 2008). Similarly, Lewis (2009), argues that the goal of visitability is “to change a little about a lot”, not full barrier-free use. For these reasons, visitability is a way to easily change a little bit about a lot of housing, for all people. Whereas fully accessible housing would need to change a lot about every home, and would be based on an individual’s specific needs. Visitability allows for a baseline of accessibility into all homes.

3.5 Visitability & Builder’s Criticisms

3.5.1 Issues with implementation
Builders have expressed concerns about the implementation of visitable features on varied or unique topographies, like steeply sloped sites (Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, & Spegal, 2007). Lewis (2009) suggested that while it is ideal for the zero-step entrance to be the same entrance that able-bodied people would use, in cases of unique topography, the zero-step entrance could be located at the back of the house, which would require an accessible path to reach the entrance. This could be a solution for lots that have unique topography. While it is not the ideal of having everyone be able to use the same entrance, it is better to still have the zero-step entrance than to not have one at all. As Lewis (2009) suggests, a zero-step entrance is essential to having a visitable home because even “one small step poses a significant barrier”. Builders have also identified that it would be challenging to implement a zero-step entrance in cold climates with snow because it would require more landscaping and drainage to prevent water from entering the building (Maisel, Smith, & Steinfeld, 2008; Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, & Spegal, 2007). However, as the builders have identified this issue is easily solved with careful planning and design in regards to the landscape and drainage, to avoid flooding.

3.5.2 Private ownership rights
There have been concerns about the government’s role in dictating what can be done to private lands. Malloy (2008), suggests that there would not be as much private housing if the United States government did not subsidize and support the construction of private housing. So, while it is private land, since it is subsidized in some ways by the federal government it could be viewed as “quasi-public” (Malloy, 2008). Furthermore, governments already control much of what happens on private land through building codes and zoning by-laws. These control mechanisms ensure that a building is safe and that it is a compatible height, land use, and density to ensure a safe, cohesive, and aesthetic neighbourhood (Malloy, 2008). So while it is true that it is private land, the government is already monitoring various aspect over of private property and housing, so visitability would be just another form of control.

3.5.3 Cost
One of the main concerns highlighted by builders and developers have been the additional cost that visitability features will have on the construction. In the United States, there is not a consensus as to how much visitability features increase costs, it ranges from $10-$600 (Concrete Change, 2012; Cook, 2011; Maisel, Smith, and Steinfeld, 2008). Even without consensus of how
much visitable features cost, all researchers agree that the costs of building visitable features into new construction is much less expensive than retrofitting a home to be visitable. Retrofitting a home to have a zero-step entry can cost approximately $3,300 whereas, in new construction it typically adds $100-600 to construction costs (Cook, 2011). Similarly, to widen doorways in an existing home it costs approximately $700 dollars, whereas in new construction it is an additional $2 per door (Cook, 2011). To help counter builder’s concerns advocates have used this comparison technique to demonstrate the low overall cost to add these features at the beginning of the process rather than retrofitting a home (Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, & Spegal, 2007).

While all of these concerns are valid and not all of them have solutions. Researchers have found that using negotiation, compromise, and education has proven to be an effective way of countering all of these concerns (Nishita, Liebig, Pynoos, Perelman, & Spegal, 2007).

3.6 Canadian Accessibility Policy & Legislation

In 1982, the Constitution Act 1982 came into effect which included the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was the first time the rights of people with disabilities were protected (Peters, 2004). People with disabilities lobbied to be included in Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, so it explicitly mentions people with mental and physical disabilities meaning that Canadians with disabilities are to be seen as equal by the law and government (Peters, 2004). The Canadian Human Rights Act and provincial human rights codes also prohibit discrimination based on disability.

Prince (2004) calls Canada’s disability policy “a hit-and-miss affair” due to the slowness of the implementation of disability policies to remove barriers and advocate for people with disabilities. Canada has been making an effort to make disability issues a priority. Consultations began in July 2016 about federal disability and accessibility legislation to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities. Kovacs Burns and Gordon (2009), found that Canada needs a federal disability Act in addition to the current Canadian Human Rights Act.

A national disability act is necessary to ensure that people with disabilities have access to programs and services regardless of where they live. Currently provinces all have different codes of practice that shows “inequity and lingering discrimination across Canada” (Kovacs Burns & Gordon, 2009 p. 3). In the summer of 2016, consultations began for the Canadians with Disabilities Act. It is promising to see the federal government is working towards implementing this legislation, however since it is still not law, it is impossible to estimate whether it will be effective to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Considering that Kovacs Burns and Gordon (2009) found that previous research has highlighted that Canada has made little progress for people with disabilities, the efforts of the Trudeau government show a definite positive trend to the continuing betterment of access and services and programs for people with disabilities.
3.7 Provincial Disability Policy

Since there is no federal disability legislation most of the responsibility falls upon provinces to provide equal access to all aspects of life, for every resident. Different provinces have created different legislations, policies, and services to try to create the equity that is required in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Some provinces have been more proactive than others. This has resulted in inequity for people with disabilities based on where they live in Canada (Kovacs Burns & Gordon, 2009). This report focuses on a project within Ontario, so the disability policies within Ontario will be further discussed, specifically those dealing with the built environment and accessibility.

3.7.1.1 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
The AODA was passed into law in 2005 with the ultimate goal of achieving an accessible Ontario by 2025 (MMAH, 2016). This Act was designed to “benefit all Ontarians by developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises” (Bond & McColl, 2014). The AODA is made up of five standards: customer service, information and communication, employment, transportation, and the design of public spaces. While these all work towards the goal of an accessible Ontario, none of these standards address accessibility in housing.

3.7.1.2 Ontario Building Code (OBC)
The Ontario Building Code sets the minimum standards for construction of buildings to ensure that they are safe for Ontarians (MMAH, 2016). Within the OBC there is a section on barrier-free design that sets minimal standards of accessibility for various buildings (MMAH, 2016). However, the barrier-free design section provides an exemption for most housing. Except in multi-unit residential developments it requires:

- 15% of units within all new multi-unit residential buildings to be visitable (wider doorways and hallways, zero-step entrance, and a five-foot turn circle in the washroom);
- a zero-step entrance into new multi-unit residential buildings;
- wider doorways into units within multi-unit residential buildings; and
- to provide visual alarms in corridors (MMAH, 2016).

3.7.1.3 Planning Act and Provincial Policy Statement
The Ontario Planning Act promotes “sustainable economic development in a healthy natural environment” and to “provide land use planning system using provincial policy” (Bond & McColl, 2014). The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) guides the Planning Act by providing direction on matters of provincial interest (PPS, 2014). One of the provincial interests’ identified within the PPS is to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and older adults (PPS, 2014). The Planning Act is required to “have regard” to the provincial interests’, like accessibility, so the Planning Act and PPS could be used to encourage the implementation of accessible housing, based on Ontario’s expressed interest in improving accessibility.
3.7.1.4 Housing Services Act

The Housing Services Act is provided for the community based planning and delivery of housing and homelessness services with general provincial oversight, policy direction and flexibility for service managers and housing providers (Bond & McColl, 2014). The Act specifies that a target number of units be modified to be accessible for certain housing developments (Bond & McColl, 2014).

3.8 Canadian Legislation vs. American Legislation

The United States has had an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) since 1990, which experts believe have helped improve accessibility in the United States for public programs and services (Kovacs Burns & Gordon, 2009). The ADA has a public and private sector scope with four mandate areas: public service, accessibility and non-discrimination in public accommodations and in services offered by many private sector business, and telecommunication services (Prince, 2010).

The goal of the ADA is to provide a national mandate for the elimination of discrimination for people with disabilities (Prince, 2010). The implementation of the ADA has been viewed as a major civil rights win for people with disabilities. Prior to 1990 when the ADA became law, people with disabilities were not explicitly protected under the Civil Rights Act (Kovacs Burns & Gordon, 2009). This means that Canadians with disabilities have had greater civil rights protection since the 1980’s, whereas Americans with disabilities have only the ADA in order to use as a civil rights tool. So the ADA has been viewed as a major win for the civil rights of people with disabilities, similar to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada in 1982.

It is important to note that the US is 27 years ahead of Canada in terms of providing a national disability policy, and working to improve accessibility through this legislation.

3.8.1 American vs. Canadian Accessible Housing Policy

The United States also have other laws that can help people with disabilities such as the Rehabilitation Act and the Fair Housing Act (Prince, 2010). The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 is a law that has a section requiring some level of accessibility in new multifamily housing but does not apply to single family housing (Malloy, 2008). These inclusive design standards include guidelines for entrances, hallways, grab bars, light switches and other elements (Malloy, 2008). The Act applies to all multifamily housing with at least four units and apply to ground units in buildings with no elevator, and all units if the building has an elevator. Since this Act is in place to create accessible housing within multifamily units, the focus of most United States literature is in the implementation of inclusive design features in single family housing. However, this is different than Canada where most housing is exempt from barrier-free design.

Kovacs Burns and Gordon (2009), found that accessible housing policy was particularly deficient in Canada. There are limited laws in Canada about accessible housing, and in Ontario most housing is exempt from the barrier-free design section of the OBC. The only requirements regarding
accessible housing are that 15% of units within multi-unit residential buildings must be visitable and that these units must be distributed throughout the building (MMAH, 2016). The other requirement is a visual component to an audio fire alarm in hallways in multi-unit residential buildings as well as a visual component on smoke alarms in every sleeping room of all residential buildings (MMAH, 2016).

Compared to the United States’ accessibility requirements for housing, Canada appears to be quite far behind which is also apparent in the lack of research and implementation of accessible housing in Canada. This report looks to increase research about implementation of visitable housing in Canada, specifically in Kingston, Ontario. The following chapter provides a detailed assessment of visitability in three housing developments.
4.0 Case Studies

This chapter discusses how visitable design standards have been implemented in affordable/social housing developments. Three case studies of visitable affordable/social housing developments were selected to better understand how visitability has been implemented within developments with small budgets as well as challenges they faced. The three cases are: 233 Queen Mary Road, 40 Cliff Crescent, and 35 Lyons Street all of which are located in Kingston Ontario.

It is important to note, that while this study focused on the three visitability requirements outlined in the Ontario Building Code, these case studies had additional accessibility features that go beyond the requirements of visitability. These additional features will also be discussed in the case studies, as they were discussed by all of the key informants throughout the interviews, and work to increase the accessibility of the buildings beyond the three basic visitability features.

Through background research it was identified that visitable housing developments have been undertaken in the social/affordable housing sector in the Kingston area. The three case studies were selected because they were completed within the past five years or are under construction at the time of research, they exceed the mandated visitability requirements of the Ontario Building Code, the developers willingness to participate in the research and the availability of information on the projects.

Data was collected for these case studies using document reviews that included relevant city council meeting minutes, municipal reports, organizations reports, news articles, and other publicly available information. This data was supplemented with key informant interviews. The architect for each project\(^1\) was interviewed to gain further understanding about:

- the visitable features in their building; as well as
- any challenges they faced due to visitability
- potential cost impacts of visitability

A representative from each of the housing providers was also interviewed to better understand why:

- they chose to develop visitable buildings;
- their clientele; and,
- any challenges that they encountered.

\(^1\) 233 Queen Mary Road and 40 Cliff Crescent had the same architect, which was unknown during the background research phase since the drawings were from different architectural firms, which was due to an amalgamation of the firms between the years of the two buildings.
4.1 Case Study #1: 233 Queen Mary Road, Kingston, Ontario

Background on Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation (KFHC)

Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation, is the largest social housing agency in Kingston with 1,519 rent-g geared-to-income and rent-supplemented housing units in the City of Kingston and the County of Frontenac. Their units include semi-detached, row housing and apartments. They are a wholly-owned subsidiary of the City of Kingston.

Address: 119 Van Order Drive, Kingston ON,
Phone: 613-546-5591
Email: kfhcinfo@kfhc.ca

Background on 233 Queen Mary Road

- This 27-unit senior’s building was initially proposed by Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation (KFHC) to be built on the Cliff Crescent property owned by KFHC. However, for the development to occur on Cliff Crescent a severance was required. After discussing with municipal and ministerial staff, it was decided that it would take some time before the site on Cliff Crescent would be construction ready.
- An alternate site, 233 Queen Mary Road, was suggested so that the project could move forward.
- The City has noted that this project with KFHC was desired since many of their social and affordable housing units are reaching their life expectancy and the affordable units at Queen Mary can be converted into social housing units, when the older housing stock needs to be demolished. This opportunity was only available with KFHC since the municipality is their sole shareholder.
- This building is a senior’s only building and was built this way since KFHC’s other seniors building had over 90 seniors on its waitlist. Many senior’s expressed interest in moving to a senior’s only building, and this allows additional units to be freed up within KFHC’s other housing stock for others to get off the general waiting list.
- Since this building was designed for senior’s it was important to KFHC and the architects to allow people of all abilities to move through the building. Therefore, the whole building and all units were designed to be visitable.
## Case Study #1

### Developer/Owner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developer/Owner</th>
<th>KFHC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Description of Housing Project

| Description of Housing Project | 233 Queen Mary Rd  
4 storey wood frame apartment building with one elevator  
Type of housing – social (subsidized) and affordable units  
Housing units – 27 units, all of which are 1 bedroom units  
10 RGI units (37 %)  
17 affordable units (63%) at 80% CMHC market rent (~$775) in Kingston for 1-bedroom units²  
Client target group – Senior’s building (65 years and up)  
Year completed – July 2012 |

### Planning & Development

| Planning & Development | This land was originally owned by the City of Kingston and was sold to KFHC for $1. However, it cost approximately $600,000 for the land to be ready for construction. The site is 0.61 acres and the building footprint is 574.5 square metres (6,184 square feet) for a total building area of 2,118.6 square metres (22,804 square feet). Site plan – Can be seen below  
Zoning/rezoning – A zoning amendment was required to increase the density from the allowed 69 dwelling units/hectare to allow the project to be viable. The property also |

² This rental rate was calculated based on an average rent of a 1-bedroom apartment in Kingston ($968) from the CMHC Rental Market Report 2016 and prices do not include utilities.
required a reduction the minimum number of parking spaces required from 1 space per unit to approximately 0.5 spaces per unit. Both of these amendments were passed.

**Project Costs**
- Soft costs - $551,241
- Hard Costs (construction) - $4,013,320
- Furniture and Appliances - $46,539
- Total project cost - $4,611,099

**Project Financing**
- Equity Contribution – $700,000
- HST Rebates – $424,058
- Capital funding from provincial housing program - Delivering Opportunities for Ontario Renters (DOOR) (Province of Ontario) – $3,240,000
- Infrastructure Ontario mortgage – $580,000 (3.59% interest rate, 20 year term)

**Other general background**
- Built to LEED Silver standards (though not certified\(^3\))
- Nominated for a Livable City Design Award in 2014

### Q1. How Visitability Standards Applied?

**Visitability Features Used – in all units?**
- All units have these features:
  - 32” clear width through doorways
  - Wide hallways
  - 5’ turn circle in washrooms (1500mm)
  - Zero step entrance into building, and units

**Added Accessibility Features in all units?**
- Grab bars in washrooms
- Zero-step/roll-in showers
- Zero step entrance to the balconies
- Colour-blocking in hallways to help with wayfinding to each unit
- Covered entrance to building
- Power door opener for main entrance, common rooms, and garbage room
- 4 units are fully adapted to be wheelchair accessible

**What minimum standards for visitability were used?**
- The Ontario Building Code requirements were exceeded in this building by providing 100% of units to be visitable instead of 15%

### Q2. Challenges Encountered

**Zero-step balconies**
- The zero-step entrance to balconies were challenging to design because of drainage concerns. This was addressed by designing the balconies with a slope of 1-2%, and by providing covered balconies that can somewhat protect from the weather.

**Type of building**
- Challenging because of opposition of nearby residents to having an apartment building in their neighbourhood. With the design they tried to make the building fit into the landscape nicely, with a peaked roof and concrete siding that fit into the neighbourhood.

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\(^3\) It is expensive to become LEED certified, so many buildings say they are built to the LEED standards to avoid paying the fees to become officially LEED certified.
### Q3. Impacts of Visitability on Project Costs and Affordability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Costs</th>
<th>They think that it is a necessary additional cost, and reasonable investment for what you are providing. About 5-10% including power door operators, grab bars, so this estimate includes other accessibility features beyond visitability.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Affordability for tenants | • The visitable features did not affect affordability for tenants, since these are pre-determined rates based on either the tenants’ individual income for the rent-g geared-to-income units and the remainder of the units are set at 80% of the CMHC average rental rates for the area.  
• It is important to note that 80% of market rent would still be unaffordable for some people and since more than half of the units are set at 80% market rent, this building could still be seen as unaffordable to some. |
| Other Impacts (Benefits) of Visitability | • Residents enjoy having these features available to them, especially since it is a senior’s building it allows them the ability to visit their friends in the building, and having their friends be able to visit their apartment.  
• Mrs. Bertrand a tenant said, “the kitchen and bathroom both provide great space… We’ve had friends come and visit us in our new home. We are very happy” in the housing and homelessness report (2012). |

### KEY LESSONS LEARNED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitability Costs</th>
<th>The visitable features were built into the cost from the outset of the project, so getting a specific estimate for the cost of visitability is very challenging, making the topic more challenging to study, since the costs are not separated.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Since the features of a visitable building are quite basic compared to those of full accessibility, and may not provide provisions for everything that would be necessary, this project exceeded visitability standards by including additional features like roll-in showers and grab bars. When providing a cost estimate for visitability, the architect included these types of additional costs into what he considered to make the apartment visitable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balconies</td>
<td>Constructing zero-step balconies proved to be somewhat challenging because they were concerned about flooding. To help with concerns, the balconies are all covered and have a gentle slope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Costs</td>
<td>The city essentially gave the land away to KFHC, however KFHC had to invest approximately $600,000 to make the land developable. So while it seems as though Kingston gave away the land, it was because they knew the costs involved in preparing the land for construction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Site Plan of 233 Queen Mary Road in Kingston, Ontario

Courtesy of Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation, 2017
4.2 Case Study #2: 40 Cliff Crescent, Kingston, Ontario (KFHC)

Background on KFHC
KFHC – refer back to KFHC under Case Study 1

Background on 40 Cliff Crescent
- The City of Kingston has begun a regeneration project in Rideau Heights, where Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation owns the majority of the housing.
- The new project on Cliff Crescent, will have 10 RGI units which will act as the replacement of 30 units for the decommissioning of 80 Daly Street, for the Shannon Park redevelopment, part of the Rideau Heights Regeneration Strategy.
- Since 80 Daly was owned by KFHC the City of Kingston acquired it through the Cash-in-Lieu of Parkland Reserve Fund and a contribution from Affordable Housing capital programs to KFHC to compensate for its loss in assets as well as to support the construction of the replacement 10 RGI units at the new development.
- KFHC decided to make this building visitable because they cannot provide many upscale finishes because they are costly and are providing additional features wherever possible. Therefore, visitability was one of these enhancement features.

Figure 4. Render of 40 Cliff Crescent in Kingston Ontario

Courtesy of Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation, 2017
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Case Study #2</strong>&lt;br&gt;Developer/Owner</th>
<th>40 Cliff Crescent, Kingston ON KFHC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of Housing Project</strong></td>
<td>4 storey wood frame apartment building with an elevator Type of housing – social (subsidized), affordable units, and market units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Housing Units</strong> - 29 units (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bachelor – 2 units (6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• One-bedroom – 24 units (83%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Two-bedroom – 3 units (10%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affordable Unit Breakdown:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 10 RGI units</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 6 Affordable units (80% CMHC market rent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 13 Market rental units</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rental Prices</strong>&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bachelor – AMR ($696), 80% AMR ($556)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1 Bedroom – AMR ($968), 80% AMR ($774)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2 Bedroom – AMR ($1165), 80% AMR ($932)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client target group – All ages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year completed – Summer 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning &amp; Development</strong></td>
<td>The site is located adjacent to two arterial roads, Johnson Street and Sir John A MacDonald Blvd. The site was already owned by KFHC and was an empty part of the land beside another one of their buildings at 36 Cliff Crescent The site is approximately 0.57 acres, and the new building footprint is 575 square metres (6,189 square feet) for a total building area of 2,300 square metres (24,756 square feet). Site plan – Can be seen below In order for this development to proceed they required zoning by-law amendments for the sites of both (36 &amp; 40 Cliff), since the proposed building will share access and a parking lot, the zoning by-law needed to be incorporated for both sites to: increase maximum density, lower parking requirements and not have to provide a play structure. They also needed a consent to sever the land. All of this was received and construction began in July 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Financing</strong></td>
<td>Total project cost- $ 4,700,000 City of Kingston (cash-in-lieu of Parkland Reserve) - $500,000 Federal-Provincial Affordable Housing Initiative – $1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other general background</strong></td>
<td>This building is KFHC’s first truly mixed building with RGI, affordable, and market rental units.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>4</sup> Rental prices do not include utilities
The site access is off of Cliff, but as previously mentioned is adjacent to two arterials and as such the development re-established a pedestrian connection from the property to Johnson St., to promote active transportation and provide easier access to public transit.

Q1. How Visitability Standards Applied?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitability Features Used – in all units?</th>
<th>All units have these features:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 32” clear width through doorways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wide hallways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 5’ turn circle in washrooms (1500mm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Zero step entrance into building and units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added Accessibility Features in all units?</td>
<td>• Grab bars in washrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Covered entrance to building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Power door opener for main entrance, laundry room, and garbage room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 4 units are fully adapted to be wheelchair accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Zero-step entrance to balconies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What minimum standards for visitability were used?</td>
<td>The Ontario Building Code requirements were exceeded in this building by providing 100% of units to be visitable instead of 15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2. Challenges Encountered

| Type of building | Challenging because of opposition of nearby residents to having an apartment building in their neighbourhood. With the design they tried to make the building fit into the landscape nicely, with a peaked roof and concrete siding that fit into the neighbourhood. |
| Noise Concerns | There were concerns about the noise levels that tenants would experience because the building is located adjacent to two arterial roads. The planners at the last minute required that the project team provide audio testing of noise levels at the ground and upper floors. This testing led them to require additional sound barricading, the project team wanted to incorporate a berm with landscaping to make the sound barricade aesthetically pleasing as possible, however the city ended up rejected that suggestion and a fence had to be put up instead, which is less aesthetically pleasing, and there are concerns about graffiti. |

Q3. Impacts of Visitability on Project Costs and Affordability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Costs</th>
<th>They believe that is a necessary additional cost, and reasonable investment for what you are providing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~5-10% including power door operators, grab bars, so this estimate includes other accessibility features beyond visitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordability for tenants</td>
<td>This project is unique in that it is KFHC’s first mixed building with a combination of RGI, affordable, and market units. This means that not all units are affordable to all, however it is notable that this project was able to incorporate a similar number of RGI units (10) to market units (13), as well as 6 affordable units. So this building may not be affordable to the entire population, it is an example of a social mixed building that was built to visitable standards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Other Impacts (Benefits) of Visitability

This building has had tenants for less than a year, as such the impacts of visitability were not known to the key informants from this project.

### KEY LESSONS LEARNED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitability Costs</th>
<th>The visitable features were built into the cost from the outset of the project, so getting a specific estimate for the cost of visitability is very challenging, making the topic more challenging to study, since the costs are not separated.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Since the features of a visitable building are quite basic compared to those of full accessibility, and may not provide provisions for everything that would be necessary, this project exceeded visitability standards by including additional features like power door operators and grab bars. When providing a cost estimate for visitability, the architect included these types of additional costs into what he considered to make the apartment visitable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with City Staff</td>
<td>This project ran into some difficulty with City staff regarding an acoustic by-law that was not addressed because of the two arterial roads. The architect mentioned that this issue could have been improved had they defined what the building was and shown them working drawings before they were completed to be able to work with the City’s potential concerns at an early stage instead of near the end of the project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5. Site plan of 40 Cliff Crescent in Kingston, Ontario

Courtesy of Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation, 2017
4.3 Case Study #3: 35 Lyons Street, Kingston, Ontario

Background on AMHS-KFLA
Addiction & Mental Health Services – Kingston Frontenac Lennox & Addington (AMHS-KFLA)
AMHS-KFLA is a collaborative organization that provides community-based addiction and mental health services that empowers the people they serve to be well and achieve their full potential. AMHS-KFLA have 16 managed properties and provide a range of housing services with varied levels of support from staffed homes to independent living.

Address: 385 Princess St, Kingston ON
Phone: 613-544-5804
Email: info@amhs-kfla.ca

Background on 35 Lyons Street

The Lyons St project, is a three phase development. This case study will look at Phase Two (35 Lyons Street) project has included an increased number of visitable units than required by the building code in order to accommodate the expected client group and provide more space for them. A timeline of the developments is below:

2011
- Received site plan control approval for all 3 phases
- Phase One (31 Lyons Street) occupancy in May 2011

2013
- Construction began on the original design of Phase Two as a 49-unit poured concrete 4-storey apartment building

2014
- Phase Two construction ceased in November due to various operational and financing issues

2016
- AMHS-KFLA worked with city staff to create a viable construction and operating budget for Phase Two to proceed.
- This resulted in a 44 unit, 3-storey wood frame construction building

2017
- Construction on Phase Two was resumed in February 2017

2018
- Expected completion date for Phase Two

---

5 After investigating why the construction ceased, the only answers that were publicly available were that it was due to operational and financing issues.
**Figure 6. Photo of 31 Lyons St (Phase 1 building) as there is not a photo or render of 35 Lyons St available.**

Courtesy of Colbourne & Kembel Architects Inc., 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Develop/Owner</th>
<th>35 Lyons Street AMHS-KFLA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of Housing Project</strong></td>
<td>3 storey wood frame apartment building with two elevators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing units – 44 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 bedroom units (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rental Prices</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a total 20 affordable units (68% of units) with a mixture of these 20 units(^6) set at:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-bedroom unit at 60% of market rent (~$580)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-bedroom unit at 80% (~$775) of market rent(^7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-bedroom unit at market rent (~$968).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27% of units visitable (12 units that are dispersed on all 3 floors of the building)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client target group – All ages, people with mental illness or developmental disability and individuals with low incomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>This building is currently under construction, expected completion: September 2018</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\(^6\) After researching it has not been made clear how many of the 20 affordable units will be 60% market rent and 80% market rent because apparently this number continues to change.

\(^7\) This rental rate was calculated based on an average rent of a 1-bedroom apartment in Kingston ($968) from the CMHC Rental Market Report 2016.
### Planning & Development
The site is 3.7 acres. During phase one planning approvals the approved site plan obtained approval for two additional multi-unit buildings to be constructed on the 3.7-acre site, for a total of three buildings on the site. Phase two is what this case study is focused on and it received zoning and site plan approvals during phase one of this project. Currently phase one is completed and phase two is under construction.

### Project Financing
- Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) in Ontario – 1,651,662
- Social Infrastructure Fund (SIF) Rental Housing – 750,000
Building has higher costs due to the clients of the AMHS, which require staffing of the building and other supports.

### Other general background
- Indoor bicycle parking
- Common room and public barrier-free washroom

### Q1. How Visitability Standards Applied?

#### Visitability Features Used – in all units?
- Twenty-seven percent (12/44 units) of units have these features:
  - 32” clear width through doorways (3’2” door width)
  - Wide hallways
  - 5’ turn circle in washrooms (1500mm)
  - Zero step entrance into building and units

#### Added Accessibility Features?
- There is a public washroom within the building that is barrier-free, so any visitors could use this if the unit they were visiting did not have an accessible washroom.
- All of the units have a larger than standard washroom
- All of the units have a wider entrance door to the unit, just smaller door widths within the unit (besides those that are visitable)
- Zero step shower in all units
- Scooter parking with charging stations
- All of the visitable units also feature barrier-free kitchens with side-opening ovens and knee space under the counters.

#### What minimum standards for visitability were used?
- This project exceeded the Ontario Building Code requirement by providing 27% of units to be visitable instead of the required 15%. The rest of the units follow American visitable standards (as they have larger washrooms but not a 5’ turn circle).

### Q2. Challenges Encountered

#### Financial Challenge
- This project was started in 2013, however there were many financial and operational challenges and construction was stopped. It was resumed in early 2017 after changing the building construction from a 4-storey poured-concrete building to a 3-storey wood frame apartment.

#### Sloped site
- There was a slope on the site that made it challenging to provide a zero-step entrance into the building. In order to provide this they provided a ramp that runs beside the stairs, which can be seen in the site plan in Figure 7.

#### Location of visitable units
- The OBC requires that the “barrier-free” units (read: visitable units) are spread among all the floors of the building. However, the users and the client would have preferred having all of the visitable units on the main floor of the building. They had to follow the
OBC in this case, however it was a challenge trying to balance the OBC requirements and the requests of the clients.

### Q3. Impacts of Visitability on Project Costs and Affordability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Project costs</strong></th>
<th>The costs of visitability are challenging to extract from the total building costs, since the potential difference of cost is not priced during the costing phase. However, the architect believes that the only real difference in cost is the larger door size and mentioned that it would not be a major cost difference between the larger door and the standard door size.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affordability</strong></td>
<td>Almost 50% of the units of this building are going to have affordable rents set at 60% and 80% of market rent, thanks to grants, however this building has no RGI units and for some people 60% of market rent would not be affordable. Therefore, this building may not be affordable for those of the lowest income status, including those on Ontario Disability (ODSP) or Ontario Works, which is one of the housing provider’s potential target groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area &amp; Size</strong></td>
<td>Visitability does have some effect on area and size, however it did not affect the number of units within the building. The building has enough units to be viable, after changes in the building code, they had to try and maintain the number of units even though some space requirements changed. They were able to maintain the number of units by squeezing the design (making the kitchens and closets smaller).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### KEY LESSONS LEARNED

#### Phase One lessons
- After phase one, it was decided that all of the units in 35 Lyons should have slightly larger washrooms, they do not have a 5’ turning circle or transfer space but they are more generous. This was also a funding requirement for phase two.
- In 31 Lyons Street, the client had issues with flooding bathrooms due to the zero-step showers, so in 35 Lyons they provided drains in all bathrooms to reduce the risk of floods.
- In Phase One, the building was more about providing housing and has lacked a sense of community. So in 35 Lyons Street they are trying to create more of a sense of community.

#### Site with slope
A ramp was created through landscaping to ensure that there would be a zero-step entrance into the building. So although the ground was not level, a solution was made in order to make the entrance visitable.

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8 These changes included a wider door and larger clearance space beside the door, they were affected by this change because of the halt in construction in 2014.
Figure 7. Site plan of 35 Lyons Street in Kingston, Ontario

Courtesy of Colbourne & Kembel Architects Inc., 2017
5.0 Summary of Key Findings

5.1 Overview of Case Study Findings

The case studies demonstrated that visitability has been created in affordable/social housing developments. The units in 233 Queen Mary Road and 40 Cliff Crescent are 100% visitable, whereas at 35 Lyons Street 27% of the units are visitable. Therefore, all of these buildings provide visitability beyond the OBC minimum requirement of 15% of units within the building being visitable. The research also found that enhancements were made to the basic visitability features. These added improvements provide for more accessibility to meet tenants needs. There were also some design challenges that were highlighted in the case studies.

5.1.1 Challenges of partial visitability

While there are benefits to tenants from any increase in visitability, the research highlights some of the challenges for buildings with only partial visitability. The issues include: property management, aging in place, and social inclusion in buildings with less than 100% visitability.

**Property management:** Allocating the visitable units to tenants could be challenging. If there is more need for the visitable units than there are visitable units available. Tenants may prefer a visitable unit, either for their own needs or for the needs of their family and friends who would visit. It may be difficult for property management to who requires the visitable unit the most. By making the entire building visitable, one would not have to consider who would get these units, since the units are all the same.

**Aging in place:** Since needs tend to change with age, living in a visitable unit would allow for someone to continue to age in place more easily. It may be challenging for people to stay in their unit if it does not provide the necessary space for their changing needs. Even though there are other units in the building that were visitable, a tenant may not be able to move into one of them. This could force them to leave their building and/or neighbourhood. Buildings with 100% of the units in the building visitable better support tenants changing needs and aging in place.

**Social Inclusion:** Full visitability promotes social inclusion within buildings by allowing people to visit others’ homes, regardless of their level of ability. As well, neighbours, friends, and family from outside would be able to visit all tenants. In this way, visitability promotes social interactions and reduces social isolation.

Providing buildings that are fully visitable is easier for property management, and better supports aging in place and social inclusion.
5.1.2 Enhancements to visitability
These case studies highlighted that in practice there is not a clear distinction between the minimum 3 features for visitability and additional features that make the building/units even more accessible. Many of the informants discussed additional features that went beyond the basic visitability features in their buildings. Added features include but are not limited to the following:

- Power-door operators,
- Covered entrances,
- Zero-step balconies,
- Accessible garbage areas,
- Accessible common rooms
- Grab bars, and
- Roll-in showers

Key informants for 233 Queen Mary Road and 40 Cliff Crescent believed that these additional features enhanced the buildings’ visitability. Further research is needed to assess the value of including features above in the visitability standards. As noted in the quote below, there is support from the housing developer for enhanced visitability features, beyond the three standard features.

“Features like power-door operators, covered entrances, accessible garbage areas, accessible common rooms, grab bars, and roll-in showers enhanced the buildings’ accessibility to make it even more visitable than if their buildings had only included the three required features of visitability” – Scott VanderSchoor, KFHC

Pros and Cons of Enhanced Visitability: The case studies highlighted arguments for and against increased visitability standards. Key informants identified various advantages of more features such as:

- Increased visitability and liveability of individual units and the building as a whole.
- Providing additions like roll-in showers increases the accessibility of the unit for tenants.
- It increases the unit’s ability to allow tenants to age-in-place since it is removing barriers that may become an issue as a tenant ages.

The main concerns about adding more required features for a visitability standard relates to the increased costs and it being more difficult to require developers to follow visitability standards.

The differing views and definitions of visitability from the key informants made it challenging to extract the basic visitability features from the enhanced features that some key informants believed were crucial to having visitability. The founders of visitability thought it would be more effective to have a short list of requirements. However, the case studies highlight in practice there
is not a clear distinction between the minimum requirements of visitability and the feature that go beyond those. Further research should consider the feasibility of additional features beyond the three currently required. It is interesting to note that even on tight budgets all of these developments were able to exceed the three required accessibility features.

5.1.3 Costs of visitability
The literature identified that one of the main issues with implementing visitability was the cost of providing the features. This research found it difficult to determine the cost of visitability. The costing of construction incorporated the visitability features, instead of comparatively costing the building with and without the visitable features. Since costing was done with the visitability features being considered, it makes it was not possible extract the additional costs of the visitable features.

“It’s a necessary cost and, relative to the expense of the whole building, it is a reasonable investment and it makes the building work well” – Rick Taylor, Architect of 233 Queen Mary Road and 40 Cliff Street

As seen in the quote above, many of the key informants said that the added costs for visitability were minimal. Another informant said that while "there are extra costs associated with visitability, it was considered from the outset of this project, so the costs were built into the budget, making it worthwhile”. One estimated that visitability added 5-10% to the total building cost. However, this architect was including additional accessibility features like power door operators and grab bars.

Another informant said that the only feature that would increase the cost of the building was the door since there would be an upcharge for a wider door and otherwise there would not be that much of a difference in terms of cost.

The housing type is important for costs for these case studies. Since all of the case studies were multi-unit residential buildings, they had additional Ontario Building Code requirements. These include providing an accessible entrance to the building and wider entrance doors to all units that are accessed by an elevator. These OBC requirements, mean that some of the costs associated with visitability (zero step entrance and wider doors) are no longer issues in the case studies, since they are required by code. However, wider doorways would still be a potential increased cost inside of each unit, where the OBC does not currently require more than 15% of units to have wider doors within the units.

The overall sense is that the added costs are fairly small compared to the overall cost of construction of the buildings. This is consistent with other research that suggests that visitability can increase costs by as little as 1.5-2% of the total building cost (Claar & Boan, 2005). However,
It is important that further research is conducted about these costs within Canadian social/affordable housing projects to ensure that this cost estimate is accurate in these types of developments.

It appears from the case studies as though the issue with visitability is not primarily cost. These buildings with limited budgets were able to exceed the OBC requirements and add additional accessibility features. The issue for visitability may in fact have more to do with the perception of demand rather than cost. The three case studies had a clear demand for visitability for their tenants and were able to provide it even with limited budgets. If more housing projects saw the demand for visitability, it may be implemented more often.

5.1.4 Design Issues & Solutions
There were some design issues with visitability features that were raised in one or more of the case studies, namely:

- Size and space issues,
- Balconies, and
- Sloped sites.

**Size and Space:** The five-foot turn radius in bathrooms was one of the main issues at 35 Lyons Street. The larger washroom was seen as reducing other areas of the unit (such as the kitchen and closets) to ensure they still had enough units to make the project viable. This “squeezing” seems to demonstrate that they thought that this five-foot turn circle was diminishing the space.

In contrast, the other two case studies discussed how providing a bathroom with a five-foot turn circle along with the other visitable features made the unit, and particularly the washroom feel more generous.

It is interesting to note the different perspectives on how visitability may be seen as either “squeezing other elements” or “providing generous washrooms”. This difference in how 35 Lyons Street looked at the larger washrooms in a way that negatively impacted the rest of the space versus 233 Queen Mary Road and 40 Cliff Crescent where they thought it positively impacted the space, may be part of the explanation for the difference in the percentage of units within the building that are visitable, since it was a better perception of the additional space. It may also be important for future work to frame visitable features in a positive way as adding to the space instead of taking away from it.

**Balconies:** Another design challenge was providing a zero-step entrance to the balcony. Providing zero-step balconies is not a visitability requirement defined by the OBC, but rather an enhancement that improves the accessibility of the unit, and since it was mentioned in two case studies the challenges will be discussed. They are also an important accessibility feature for fire safety as it can be a safe, ventilated area for a person to wait, during an emergency, if they cannot use stairs. So it is important to discuss their design challenges to make buildings safer for everyone.
Balconies are typically designed with a step down to them to prevent flooding. However, to make the balconies visitable, they needed to have a zero-step entrance. The architect's solution was to:

1. construct balconies with a slope of 1-2%; and
2. cover the balconies.

This works to provide drainage and protect the balconies from some precipitation. This provides enough drainage and coverage, that the zero-step balconies have not experienced flooding. This design could be used in all new building construction to make balconies visitable, so that anyone can enjoy the outdoor areas.

**Sloped Sites:** At 35 Lyons Street, it was more challenging to create a zero-step entrance into the building because of the topography of the site. Providing a zero-step entrance is a building code requirement for all multi-unit residential buildings, so it is required regardless of how visitable the building is. However, since site topography was noted as an issue in the literature review, and was brought up in the case study it will be further discussed.

The site had a slope, which required a ramp in order to provide a zero-step entrance. Since sloped sites were often cited in other research as being an issue with visitability implementation it is interesting to note that this project was still able to provide a zero-step entrance - they just had to change the design. In this case, the site's topography did not significantly affect the visitability of the building since a ramp could be built. The designers chose to incorporate the ramp with landscaping so that it looks more natural and welcoming. So once this building is constructed the ramp should fit seamlessly into the design of the landscape.

A ramp is not the first choice for providing a zero-step entrance as it is more inclusive if everyone visiting a building can enter the same way, instead of via a ramp. However, it is a solution to provide the zero-step entrance on a site that is not level. It is not clear how much of an additional cost the ramp was in comparison to a zero-step entrance on a non-sloped site. Comparative costing should be done to better understand how much of an added cost building visitability on a sloped site is, compared to a level site.

The design issues faced by architects in these case studies demonstrate that, with creativity and a desire to make a building visitable, it is possible to solve design challenges. The design solutions highlighted in this research can be used in future developments to facilitate visitability.

### 5.2 Visitability Policy in Kingston Social/Affordable Housing

The research has shown that a visitability policy is feasible from a design point of view. However, there is currently no policy about visitability in Kingston. Even with no policy in place, in the past five years, three different social/affordable housing developments have incorporated visitability features that go beyond the OBC requirement.
A visitability policy for the City will require some political goodwill. It is interesting to note that KFHC (which is a municipally-owned housing corporation) has been at the forefront of building visitable social/affordable housing developments. So it is possible that there is some support for visitability at the City of Kingston as well as at KFHC. However, more research would be needed for a municipal visitability policy.

Regardless of whether the City of Kingston supports the idea of visitability, KFHC has been demonstrating that it is possible to do, and now similar design work is being done at AMHS-KFLA newest building at 35 Lyons Street where 27% of their total units will be visitable.

KFHC has adopted visitability as practice and have been able to incorporate it into their newest developments, with plans to continue to incorporate it in future developments. When asked why KFHC decided to make their entire building visitable, KFHC said that "they try to do the extra features where possible" because high-end finishes like granite counters are too costly. KFHC believes that providing visitable buildings is a low-cost feature that gives them a competitive advantage, making their buildings more attractive to potential residents.

It is impressive that KFHC and now AMHS-KFLA have developed buildings and units that are visitable. Given Kingston’s aging population, the practices of these housing providers are forward-looking and increases the visitable housing stock in Kingston. Assuming that Kingston would like to increase the amount of visitable housing stock, it should consider different policy options. Enhancing the features beyond the minimum elements is an option worth considering as it enhances the attractiveness and livability of the new housing developed and may better meet the needs into the future.
6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has found that it is possible to develop social/affordable housing in Kingston that is visitable. There is a variation in the level of visitability provided, from certain units being visitable for a ratio of 27% of the units in a building, to the entire building being visitable. In all of the buildings that were studied, the amount of visitable units exceeded the OBC requirements of 15%. Providing some visitable units in a building may cause problems for property management, in terms of deciding who gets the visitable units, it also does not make the building as inclusive socially, since not all of the units are visitable. Therefore, there is a strong argument for full (100%) visitability within developments.

6.1 Research Question Conclusions

The conclusions on the initial research questions for the study are as follows.

6.1.1 To what extent have visitability standards been incorporated in new social/affordable housing developments in the City of Kingston in the past five years?

- Three buildings have been built (or are currently under construction) with visitability features beyond the OBC requirements
  - Two of the buildings had 100% of the units that were visitable, making the entire buildings visitable
  - One of the buildings had 27% of the units that were visitable, making some units visitable
- All of these buildings used the Ontario Building Code’s visitability requirements, which include a five-foot turn radius in the bathroom; wider doorways and hallways; and a zero-step entrance. They all exceeded the building code in providing more than the code’s required 15% of units to meet these requirements

6.1.2 What were the challenges in implementing visitability in these new affordable housing developments?

- Each of the buildings had their own challenges that included sloped sites, size and space restraints, and zero-step balconies
  - Not all of these challenges were present in every building but they were the main challenges that were pointed out within the case studies

6.1.3 What were the impacts of visitability on project costs and housing affordability for residents?

- The exact added costs of visitability could not be determined in these buildings because the costing was done after it was decided that the buildings would provide visitable features and so comparative costing was not done.
- It was noted that the main cost associated with visitability would be an increased cost for a door because the door would have to be wider. However, comparative costing was not completed so this cost cannot be confirmed
• Affordability of a unit is based on the available funding and grants from all levels of government for affordable housing. The three buildings that were used for this case study had a low number of rent-gearered-to-income (RGI) units, and most of the affordable units were based on 80% of the average rent for the unit size in Kingston, which could still be unaffordable for many tenants. While this is due to the amount of funding and grants available, it is still important to note that there is a limited number of units with lower rents within the study’s buildings.

6.1.4 Is a visitability policy (or standard) feasible for new social/affordable housing developments in the City of Kingston?
• Visitability is feasible from a policy and design point of view for social/affordable housing developments in Kingston. However, in order to implement a policy, there has to be political goodwill for such a policy to be put in place

6.2 Promising Areas for Future Research

The current research identified some areas that require further research. Key areas relate to costing and standards for multi-unit residential buildings.

   6.2.1 Comparative Costing
This research found that it was challenging to understand the costs associated with visitable features. This was mostly because the costing for the building was done once visitability had already been decided to be incorporated into the building. In order to understand the impact of visitability features onto the costs of the project, further research would need to be done that looked to compare the costing of a building with and without visitability features.

This research would strengthen the current research by providing an accurate assessment of the cost of visitability. This would further visitability research in Canada by providing Canadian estimates to the cost of visitability, particularly in multi-unit residential buildings. Most of the cost estimates that were found from the research were from American sources that looked at visitability in single-family homes, so providing Canadian estimates would be beneficial research.

6.2.2 Visitability Standards & Emergency Features for Multi-Unit Residential
While conducting this research, it became evident that the three standard features of visitability (zero-step entrance, wider hallways and doors, and a bathroom with a 5’ turn circle), while a good start to providing basic access may not be enough within a multi-unit residential unit. Since these buildings are three or more storeys high, it may be a good idea to consider whether certain life-safety and emergency features become standard for visitability as well. Future research should look at emergency features like areas of refuge within stairwells. An area of refuge would provide space for a person unable to use stairs to stay safe and allow for easier evacuation from the fire department, as well as allowing the person to communicate with emergency workers. Another way to provide some fire protection, is to incorporate zero-step balconies into units, to provide a ventilated area for people to wait for rescue if an area of rescue is not available.
Areas of refuge and zero-step balconies are not currently requirements within the OBC or any other visitability standards, however, it is an area that should be further researched since fire safety is important for all people and not just those who can use stairs. Since the idea is to have a building that will be socially inclusive, these buildings should also think about all possible tenants and visitors to the building when designing emergency and lifesaving standards.

These buildings rely on elevators to provide access to upper floors, however, what would happen to those tenants and visitors who needed to use elevators if there was a power outage. This is another area which could benefit from being further researched to understand the best way to handle power outages in multi-unit/multi-storey buildings. While this is important for visitability so that tenants and potential visitors can enter and exit the units on upper floors of a building, it is also important in terms of high rise buildings with so many storeys that many tenants and/or visitors would be unable or unwilling to climb all of the storeys to get to their unit or the unit they are visiting during a power outage.

The idea of visitability is important. In multi-unit buildings it may be a good idea to consider additional features that would enhance people with disabilities safety in emergencies and during power outages, so that they can feel safe visiting someone else’s building or while living in their own building. More research should be done to assess the benefits of adding emergency features to visitability standards.

6.3 General Recommendations

**Recommendation 1: Implement a mandatory visitability policy for social/affordable housing**

The research found that in other municipalities the most successful way to implement visitable housing is to make it a mandatory requirement. In discussion with the key informants, all of them noted that the only way to ensure that visitable housing was built was to make a visitability policy mandatory. They also noted that providing funding would help to make this policy possible. Even without funding specific to visitability the three case studies in this research were still built to be visitable. If this policy is successful within social/affordable housing developments it could be expanded to include private developments as well, more research would need to be done in how best to implement a policy for private development.

**Recommendation 2: Create buildings that are fully visitable (100% visitability)**

There are different levels of visitability that were implemented within the buildings that were studied. By providing a visitable building, it works to include everyone within the building, since anyone can visit any unit, so they can visit their neighbours and visitors can visit anyone within the building. Making every unit in a building visitable, it would also allow people to age in place more easily, as their needs change. For these reasons, the City of Kingston should consider requiring that 100% of units in new social/affordable housing developments be visitable in their visitability policy. As highlighted earlier in the report there are other drawbacks to having partial visitability
such as property management complications, being unable to age in place, and not being socially inclusive buildings. These are overcome if you have 100% visitable buildings.

**Recommendation 3: Look at promoting visitable housing in private housing developments**

This research demonstrated that it is possible to build visitable housing in social/affordable developments. These developments typically have the tightest budgets with less room to provide additional features for tenants compared to the private sector. If social/affordable developments are able to incorporate visitability even with their small budgets, private developments should also be able to incorporate these features, given their larger budgets. Furthermore, visitability could be used as a marketing tool to set new private developments apart from others, where anyone can live or visit. So visitability should be promoted within private developments.
References


