



Universal Design for Housing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

General FAQ

1. What is Universal Design?

Universal Design is a home design approach that makes homes easier to use for people of all ages and abilities. It includes features that improve accessibility, safety, and convenience for residents and visitors.

2. Why is Prince George's County implementing Universal Design requirements?

The County is implementing Universal Design to help create more accessible and inclusive housing options for current and future residents. These features can help people safely remain in their homes as their needs change over time.

3. When do the new requirements take effect?

The Universal Design requirements take effect on July 1, 2026, per Council Resolution CR-151-2025.

4. Does Universal Design apply to existing homes?

No. Existing homes are not required to be renovated or modified. The law applies only to certain newly constructed residential homes.

5. What types of homes are affected?

The requirements generally apply to newly constructed:

- Single-family detached homes
- Single-family attached homes, e.g., townhouses
- Two-family homes
- Two-over-two's
- Three-family homes
- Multifamily residential buildings

6. Will all new homes have to be fully ADA accessible?

No. Although Universal Design mirrors many of the requirements of the ADA, it does not subject the building to all the ADA accessibility requirements. Universal Design focuses on incorporating features that improve usability, accessibility, and adaptability for a wider range of residents.

7. What are some examples of Universal Design features?

Examples include:

- A step-free entrance



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- Wider doorways and hallways
- Lever-style door handles
- Accessible bathrooms on the entry level
- Wider kitchen clearances
- Accessible light switches and controls
- Visual and audible smoke alarms

8. Why are these features important?

Universal Design features can:

- Improve safety
- Support aging in place
- Increase accessibility
- Accommodate changing mobility needs
- Create more inclusive communities
- Save costs on renovation

Exemptions FAQ

1. Are any homes exempt from the Universal Design requirements?

Yes. Certain homes and projects may be exempt. For a complete list of exemptions, visit our website and County Code 4-357.

2. Are homes that already have permits exempt?

Yes. Projects that received building permits or approved site plans before the implementation qualify for an exemption.

3. Are owner-built homes exempt?

A single-family detached home built or subcontracted by an individual for their own personal residence is exempt.

4. Are college dormitories and student housing exempt?

Yes. Undergraduate and graduate student housing, including dormitories, are exempt from Universal Design requirements.

5. Are townhouses exempt?

No, however, Universal design compliance for townhouses is limited to achieving only certain provisions, including:

- Wider hallways, doorways, and stairs
- Bathroom reinforcement for future grab bars
- Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms
- Stairways designed to accommodate future chair lifts



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Refer to County Code 4-364

Waivers FAQ

1. What is a waiver?

A waiver is a request for relief from a specific Universal Design requirement when site conditions make compliance difficult or impractical.

2. Who can request a waiver?

Builders and Architects/Engineers may request waivers during the building permit process.

3. When may a waiver be granted?

Waivers may be considered when:

- Property topography creates challenges
- Unusual site conditions exist
- Practical construction difficulties prevent compliance
- Other – refer to County Code 4-365

4. How do I apply for a waiver?

Applicants must submit:

- A waiver request form
- Supporting documentation
- A detailed explanation of why the requirement cannot be met
- Certification from a Maryland licensed architect or professional engineer

5. Who reviews waiver requests?

The Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement (DPIE) reviews and approves or denies waiver requests.

6. Is there a fee to apply for a waiver?

Yes. Administrative fees may apply to waiver requests. Current fees are available in the County's fee schedule.

Homeowners & Homebuyers FAQ

1. Will Universal Design increase the cost of a home?

Construction costs vary by project. However, many Universal Design features are generally less expensive to incorporate during initial construction than to add later through renovations.

2. Will Universal Design affect a home's appearance?



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No. Most Universal Design features are integrated into the home's design and are often not noticeable to visitors.

3. Does Universal Design only benefit people with disabilities?

No. Universal Design benefits many people, including:

- Older adults
- Families with young children
- People recovering from injuries
- Visitors with mobility challenges
- Individuals using strollers, walkers, or wheelchairs

4. Where can I learn more?

Visit the Universal Design webpage for detailed requirements, guidance documents, implementation updates, and contact information.

Contact Information

Building Plan Review Division at: dpiebprd@co.pg.md.us

Site Road Plan Review Division at: dpiesiteroadplanreview@co.pg.md.us

Website: [DPIE/Universal Design](#)