

## **Ways to Merge the Common Interests of Missouri Realtors with the Need for Verified, Accessible Housing for People with Disabilities**

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People with disabilities including those with physical limitations are increasingly living in the community. Past practices of placing people in institutional or group home congregate settings are giving way to people residing in integrated and inclusive residences on their own with supports or living longer in family residences. (See Missouri and United States trends from Braddock, 2008)

With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 which created accessibility standards and the U.S. Supreme Court case *Olmstead* which states, Washington, DC, June 22, 1999 -- In rejecting the state of Georgia's appeal to enforce institutionalization of individuals with disabilities, the Supreme Court today affirmed the right of individuals with disabilities to live in their community in its 6-3 ruling against the state of Georgia in the case [\*Olmstead v. L.C and E.W.\*](#)

There is an increasing opportunity and challenge for realtors to address the housing needs of people with physical disabilities whether mobility, hearing or visually impaired. Increasingly our society is aging and many elder citizens will have accessibility issues as well.

In the research of housing web sites across the nation, PPIWDC and its Missouri advocates who assisted look at other state housing web sites and found almost a universal failure to identify accessible housing, in part because of its non-existence or additionally because it is not clearly verified as to the extent that is accessible. Many of the sites proclaimed they would link the user to accessible properties but with thousands of searches none were found.

The original mission of this project of the Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities has been to create a housing resource web site that contains applicable for rent and for purchase properties as well information applicable to seeking such housing: financing, housing processes and assistance, rights and laws, accessibility standards, community neighborhoods and safety, governmental housing support/service agencies nationally and in Missouri and governmental and private agencies that offer necessary non-housing supports. 95% of the site is complete. Remaining is the development of the site linking available housing including accessible housing with consumers who have disabilities.

To meet this last purpose, we need coordinated efforts by realtors and other housing vendors to upload their properties to the web site. We are using a model obtained from the Ohio housing locator. We need the typical information found in an MLS listing or apartment listing. We anticipate that there will be no charge for the listing on our site. If the realtor or housing vendor wants to identify particular accessibility features, we will provide an accessibility survey based on Universal Design principles from the North Carolina State University Center for Universal Design, Raleigh, North Carolina. The survey will take about one hour to conduct by a trained surveyor and there will be a fee

of fifty dollars. We will look at the following components in the attachment. We will conduct the survey with input from the realtor or housing vendor as desired. Once the survey is completed, we will upload the "Yes" answers from the survey to accompany the MLS listing entitled "Verified Accessible Features". The information will be searchable by the applicable features so that a person needing particular accessibility design can readily locate properties that meet these specifications.

Oftentimes, people who do not work around universal design principles or other accessibility standards are not adequately prepared to make these assessments. A "one step" entrance is not accessible to a person in a wheel chair. Knobs on doors and not levers create difficult circumstances for a person with cerebral palsy or paralysis. 30" interior doors may be acceptable to the mobile person but not one in a wheel chair. A freezer on the top of a refrigerator will be largely out of reach of a person in a chair. These are only a few examples. However, it is worthwhile to note the frustration of a person in a wheel chair coming to a residence or apartment that has been "proclaimed accessible" to find no meeting of these accessibility principles. Our joining efforts can resolve this issue as well as perhaps lead to increased utilization of universal design principles in the new construction and renovation of housing stock. Any of us can be only moments away because of an acquired disability like a stroke or paralysis from needing such essential accommodations.

Hopefully, we can partner on this initiative that can give realtors and other housing vendors another avenue to meet an important and increasing housing need throughout Missouri.