

Access Alert

FHA 'Adaptability' in Multi-Family Dwelling Units

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The Federal Fair Housing Act (FHA) Design Guidelines require most newly constructed residential units to be 'adaptable.' Recent US Department of Justice investigations of multi-family projects raise the question: Which elements in a residential unit must be accessible at the time of first occupancy, and which can be "adapted" at a later date?

Adaptable Dwelling Units are defined in the FHA Design Manual as: "...dwelling units that include the features of adaptable design specified in the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's design and construction standards - [24 CFR 100.205\(c\) \(2\)-\(3\)](#)."

FHA "safe harbors" contain specific allowances for adapting certain specific kitchen and bathroom elements to provide accessibility only when needed by a resident. For example, grab bars need not be installed immediately, as long as reinforcement is provided in the walls at water closets and bathtubs/showers to allow for their future installation.

Architects should remember that requirements not specifically stated as being 'adaptable' at a later time must be provided at the time of first occupancy. For example, the min. 32" clear door width must be provided at the time of first occupancy. [Click here for more examples](#). The safe harbor chosen for a project should be carefully reviewed for the specific allowances and requirements. In addition, state allowances/requirements regarding adaptability often differ from the FHA's.

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