

Juneau Commission on Aging (JCOA) Asks ...

Can You Support Age Friendly Construction in Proactive Ways?

What if all homes in Juneau could be suitable for anyone regardless of a person's age or physical ability?

What if a person who wants to live within their community regardless of his or her age or physical ability, could do just that?

These are questions being asked by other municipalities that, like Juneau, are also members of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. CBJ needs to work towards moving the city to a well-designed, age-friendly community with housing that allows elders to continue to spend their retirement years and money in Juneau. Your support is necessary to make this goal a reality.

The fact is that nearly 30% of the Juneau population is over 55. Aging in place is a personal objective of most Juneau Elders as indicated by the CBJ 2020 Senior Survey. Unfortunately, their homes generally were not built in the past taking into consideration an owner's probable future limitations.

That needs to change and CBJ can help. Whatever your role in government, look for ways to facilitate age friendly housing, homes that are attractive to 1st time buyers as well as those residents who need to downsize ... universal design. Ask this question *"What kind of housing do you imagine needing and wanting for your well-being as you move towards Elderhood?"*

Requirements to make this happen are not onerous. To make this point here are examples of what the Juneau Commission on Aging is asking developers to voluntarily adopt as construction best practices in all new housing construction. The list was created from recommendations included in the Fair Housing Act Design and Construction Requirements, AARP HomeFit Guide, and other sources. Basically, we are just asking that all new housing and remodels be user-friendly for everybody, regardless of their age.

Promote universal construction design

1. Apartment & condo units that are single story within a multi-story building
2. Homes have an accessible living space including master bedroom/bath + laundry on at least one floor
3. Doorways (interior/exterior) that are at least 36" wide or made that wide by installing swing-away or swing-clear hinges to make use of entire doorway opening
4. Elevators in multi-family buildings of 3 floors or more
5. One bathroom with a walk-in shower, a built-in bench seat and grab-bars
6. Phone jacks in the master bedroom and kitchen
7. Zero step entrances/ramps into the building and zero step thresholds
8. Electrical outlets (above 18") and light switches and thermostats (below 48")
9. Pocket doors where practical in small spaces

Encourage feature friendly selections

Entrances and Exits

- Exterior lightening at all entrances with sensors
- Doors have lever-style handles

Kitchen

- Cabinetry is easy to access with pull-out cabinetry
- Suitable lighting over sink, stove, and other work area
- Easy to grasp D-shaped pulls and handles
- Stove and cooktop controls are near the front
- Area where a person can work while seated

Steps and Stairways

- Stairway lights can be turned off and off at both the top and bottom of the stairs
- Non-slip surface on steps
- Handrails on both sides of stairs

Living Room and Bedroom

- Light switches are rocker-style and installed between 36" and 44" from the floor
- Easy access to electrical and phone outlet
- Closets have interior lights and adjustable rods and shelves
- Room for the bed to place in a location that allows for easy access to the bathroom

Bathroom

- Raised or high-profile "comfort" toilet
- Easy to use lever handles for sink, bathtub, and shower faucets
- Walls are reinforced with blocking so grab bars can be installed in the bathtub, shower and adjacent to the toilet
- Shower has a no-step entry and seating
- The shower features a hand-held or adjustable showerhead

What could you do in your job role to increase age-friendly housing?

- Within your role at CBJ, we ask you to explore ways the city can incentivize developers to include age-friendly features.
- Could the Planning Commission, Zoning Commission give credit/points to developers who demonstrate their willingness to help make Juneau an Age Friendly Community - such as including mini pocket exercise areas within their development, etc.?
- As was done to create accessory apartments, can a new program be created that would make grants available to seniors to help cover the cost of retrofitting a multi-story home with an elevator or other senior friendly requirements.
- Look for ways to encourage or approve the building of tiny homes and other small residential models suitable for elders. Possible examples include adjusting the city code to not require streets but rather covered walkways. Could these walkways even be in a CBJ Right of Way? Could public water and sewer also be there and CBJ maintain the covered walkways instead of a street?
- Could the Juneau Economic Development Council provide developers loans for senior specific housing? The support could be in the form of loans, or a guarantee to the bank of a portion of the loan, or interim financing for the construction loan.
- Could the city sponsor or work with local builders to develop the Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAP) designation? This is a National Association of Home Builders Certification.
- Could the city continue to refine current senior population numbers for Juneau to aid in better projections of senior housing needs, specifically how many senior housing units are required of each type?
- Could the city consider codifying any of the requests that we are asking developers to do as a best practice?
- Could select Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Fair Housing Act (FHA) recommendations be formally adopted by CBJ?
- Could the city land code be modified to allow developers to build affordable, small one-level homes on smaller lots than are currently permitted? Could parking requirements be reduced as often senior couples only have one car?

Be creative in supporting diversity in innovative housing options

It is recognized that Juneau does have land availability issues that impacts the type of housing that can be constructed profitably. Today, however, there are evolving housing types that could diversify options for Elders beyond what is currently available: house/condo/apartment complexes.

What is necessary for this to happen is CBJ supporting these new innovative approaches and removing obstacles to their development. Consider the possibilities.

- Tiny Homes
- Village Model
- Cottage Communities
- Accessory Dwelling Units
- Multigenerational Living Concept
- Etc.

Links for additional information

- 2020 Juneau Senior Survey <https://juneau.org/clerk/boards-committees/jcoa>
- Fair Housing Act Design Manual: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/destech/fairhousing.html>
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): <https://www.ada.gov/>
- AARP HomeFit Guide: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/housing/info-2020/homefit-guide.html>
- National Association of Home Builders Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS): <https://www.nahb.org/Education%20and%20Events/Education/Designations/Certified%20Aging-in-Place%20Specialist%20CAPS>
- Example of Tiny House Cottage Community: <https://tinyhousetalk.com/tiny-cottage-community-in-bend-oregon/>
- Example of the Multigenerational Living Concept: <https://seniorhousingnews.com/2021/05/05/bill-thomas-colleagues-unveil-kallimos-communities-multigenerational-living-concept/>
- Universal Design: <http://universaldesign.com/what-is-ud/>
- AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/>

Just as Juneau's developers will need to be creative and flexible to see how these types of age friendly housing can fit into the land they own, so does CBJ need to see how city practices can be changed to accommodate new housing models. Everybody wins.

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