

Ron Wickman : History of Accessible Housing

00;00;00;00 - 00;00;36;19

Karen Brown

Welcome to another edition of Real Life Renos, The Podcast. I'm your host, Karen Brown and today we begin a short series on accessibility in the residential environment. Through the series will look at the history of accessible building, what we need to do to change how we all look at accessible building and the three key areas of a home, new or existing, that are important to turn an inaccessible home into one that anyone and everyone can access.

00;00;36;21 - 00;00;48;06

Karen Brown

We'll be doing all of that with a familiar voice on our podcast. Ron Wickman. Ron is an architect who specializes in barrier free design and he joins us today from Edmonton, Alberta. Welcome, Ron.

00;00;48;08 - 00;00;49;10

Ron Wickman

Thanks. It's great to be here.

00;00;49;16 - 00;01;12;21

Karen Brown

We've done a couple of podcasts together in the past and people can access those through my website or yours. But today we want to take a step back and look at the history of residential design, as well as the market trends. Because in order to understand where we are today, it helps to be able to understand where we've come from, where we are today, and then we can look forward at what needs to be done in the future.

00;01;12;22 - 00;01;17;20

Karen Brown

So can you start us off by talking a little bit about the history of residential design?

00;01;17;23 - 00;01;43;25

Ron Wickman

Yeah, for sure. And I guess, I mean, that's a that's a long, a long conversation. So I'll well, kind of keep it to the idea of, of as it relates to accessible design, accessible, accessible culture. I think it's fair to say that throughout the history, though, of our residential design of most of what we've designed and built has been for what we would call the average person.

00;01;43;28 - 00;02;21;29

Ron Wickman

And the average person also would have been the person building the homes. So it's fair to say that we're looking at a house being designed for a roughly six foot tall male because that's who was typically building homes. So the heights of light switches, windows, doors, all that kind of stuff was related to this average person. And I think today it's fair to say that there's no such thing as an average person, but the industry has just never really acknowledged that.

00;02;21;29 - 00;02;47;08

Ron Wickman

So even today, I think of more single family homes are designed for this ideal 1950s family a wife, so husband, two kids and a dog, white picket fence, that kind of thing. And in the way stays at home in the house and goes on to work. And what we know that that just is actually rare these days for sure.

00;02;47;10 - 00;03;22;21

Ron Wickman

So so so this idea that we still design for this kind of ideal seems odd to me. The other thing that I think is important to mention now is the fact that here in Canada we do live in a colder climate and the basement has had a tremendous influence on on the way we build our homes. So originally basements didn't exist, so we would have built to get our foundations to lower our frost line, maybe with a crawl space.

00;03;22;23 - 00;03;52;17

Ron Wickman

But then somebody figured out that, you know, maybe we can just dig a little bit deeper and you'll get all this bonus space underneath your main floor that to be used for storage and you could put some mechanical room down there and and and you could have a nice recreation room, maybe TV room, that kind of thing. So, so the basement has and dealing with the basement has had a tremendous influence on on how we've evolved with our with our housing design.

00;03;52;20 - 00;04;22;28

Ron Wickman

And a lot of times that's that's gone counter to making things accessible for people, especially people who use wheelchairs. So what I what I've seen in my time is, is bungalows were very common in the fifties and sixties, and we started going to trying to gain access to more like for our basement. So we started doing things like high level homes, split level.

00;04;23;00 - 00;04;52;13

Ron Wickman

These would allow us to have our basements a little higher out of the ground and have more access to light. So again, that thinking is all part of providing better lighting, which we all want a more flexible space for the average person, the average family. And the market is really dictated by the builders. The builders will always tell you that they're they're building to market demand, but they come out of the gates first.

00;04;52;15 - 00;05;32;25

Ron Wickman

They they build and they they find out what the market actually wants. So if they're hearing that the basement is not a it's not as great a space as it could be, then they come up with innovative ways to make the basement a nicer space to be. And so the idea of bringing it further outside of the ground level to have more lighting into the basement, of course, that that kind of happened in the seventies, sixties and seventies, this sort of split level by level house and, and then land started to become expensive.

00;05;33;00 - 00;05;59;04

Ron Wickman

And so now we get smaller lots and then we have to get to mostly two storey homes. And because we have frost lines, we have water and we build with wood, we want to keep our wood away from water. So generally we're at least two feet above the ground, our main floor level or entry level to stay away from the water.

00;05;59;06 - 00;06;04;13

Ron Wickman

So that kind of gives you a general sense of why we build the way we do.

00;06;04;16 - 00;06;31;15

Karen Brown

Is it fair to say to that from the developer standpoint, their business has evolved as well and the little builder is now joined with other little builders and there are larger, bigger building firms and it is to their benefit to have more cookie cutter plans so that they can build faster without having to make changes to things too often.

00;06;31;17 - 00;06;38;17

Karen Brown

I don't mean to do them a disservice because business is business, but I think that is a truth in today's market.

00;06;38;20 - 00;06;59;04

Ron Wickman

That's absolutely correct. Yeah, and it is a business. And frankly, when I was younger and, you know, first came out of architecture school, I laid a lot of blame on why we didn't have accessible housing on the builders, because I thought they made nothing about money and they were all rich and they have fancy cars and they have their own fancy houses.

00;06;59;05 - 00;07;04;07

Ron Wickman

And and obviously at time I've learned that that's just not true. And they they're fighting.

00;07;04;09 - 00;07;05;24

Karen Brown

Well, some of them do.

00;07;05;26 - 00;07;36;03

Ron Wickman

Yes. It's same with our this thing with architects. Some architects make a lot of money and others just kind of eke out a living. But, you know, generally, I think it's safe to say that most builders are fighting to survive and keep their business running. So they're sort of risk averse. They don't want to do too many different things that might, especially your speculative home builders, the ones that are building for who knows who's going to buy it.

00;07;36;05 - 00;08;13;02

Ron Wickman

They want something that is fairly safe. So they try to find you know, they try to find something that we call a cookie cutter. They would call it a sort of standard standard house. And, you know, with each which with each of those standard home designs, you can alter it slightly. But it's safe to say when you drive through a typical newer suburban neighborhood in Edmonton or Calgary here in Alberta or I'm sure Toronto or back to the Vancouver to is the houses tend to look the same and and the variation is done very much.

00;08;13;02 - 00;08;38;03

Ron Wickman

And again, that has a lot to do with this idea that market value will stay high if everybody sort of behaves themselves. So we don't want we don't want too many risky, risky homes out there that esthetically look really odd compared to the to the their neighbors. So so we've kind of got to this point where we just don't want to do too much different.

00;08;38;06 - 00;09;03;16

Ron Wickman

But we're in a time when there's just so many different people out there and there's so many different needs and and and nothing has brought that to a head more than our aging population, our boomer population, which is enormous. And, you know, we see it now in Canada and elsewhere in the world where the dollar amount spent on health care for our seniors is is astronomical.

00;09;03;17 - 00;09;30;02

Ron Wickman

And we knew this was coming. It's not like we didn't know this was coming. So, you know, I remember back in 1995, I was in an a year registered architect. For a year. I did a luncheon, a lunch time for a CMHC, China Mortgage and Housing Corporation luncheon. And and my topic was, was how to do a successful housing.

00;09;30;02 - 00;09;58;09

Ron Wickman

At the time they called it flex housing, but it essentially was was a kind of accessible housing. And they said they asked me if is this a trend or is it a niche market? In 1995, I said, this is a niche market. This is something that, you know, only a few people are doing and they're probably not making a lot of money, but they're providing a great service for people that are outliers, like you can fit in your typical home.

00;09;58;12 - 00;10;03;26

Ron Wickman

But I said at 1995, I said, You know, next five years I can see this being a trend.

00;10;03;28 - 00;10;06;11

Karen Brown

You wouldn't answer that way today, would you?

00;10;06;14 - 00;10;32;09

Ron Wickman

2023 And today I would say we're it's not five years away. It's probably further away. So it's just been a it's been a real struggle to see where we're at right now. When in 1995, it seemed like there was some real momentum that was taking us to this next level of design that would accommodate so many different types of families and types of individuals.

00;10;32;11 - 00;11;15;26

Ron Wickman

And the market also doesn't change much when the economy is strong. So, you know, and in the nineties, in the early nineties, the economy wasn't that strong and then it started to get really good until about 2008. And so so until then, you know, you could build almost anything and make a fair bit of money and, and then it got the economy got weak again and then so we go in these cycles and and every time we get into a cycle of low lower economy or tougher economy, that's when people start thinking about innovation and different ways of strategizing to design and build homes.

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Ron Wickman

And I kind of think that we're in that right now. In 2023. We've just gone through a pandemic. The economy is getting back to to a better place. But, you know, we're still struggling.

00;11;28;23 - 00;11;54;14

Karen Brown

And you mean you mentioned earlier about the the different kinds of people that we are building for. And when you look around the world, I mean, certainly accessible housing tends to bring up images of people in wheelchairs and walkers. But I know you have children who are growing young families now. I do as well. I have a daughter with a 19 month old and she's expecting their next one.

00;11;54;14 - 00;12;22;12

Karen Brown

And so she's often managing strollers and bags of groceries. There are people who have temporary afflictions like a broken leg or sciatica. There are people with progressive diseases, There are people with diseases that are unseen. There are people who are just growing older, as you mentioned. So aren't we really building for everybody on a spectrum? But maybe maybe we're mis naming it by calling it accessible housing.

00;12;22;12 - 00;12;27;00

Karen Brown

Maybe that just brings up the wrong image and we need to think of something else.

00;12;27;03 - 00;12;56;01

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So there's a there's a couple of things that you mention that are really, really important. So one is that there still is this this idea let's call it a myth or idea that accessible design is designed for a specific population, a small population of people who use wheelchairs. So dispelling that message is something that, you know, we've been doing for for quite a long time now trying to do anyway.

00;12;56;03 - 00;13;34;17

Ron Wickman

And a good example of of something out there that was once designed specifically for people who use wheelchairs so that now people see the benefits for everyone is the curb ramp or curb cuts. And those those curve ramps or curb cuts, you see and in many downtowns and other parts of the communities or at the corners of intersections, and they allow somebody in a wheelchair to get from the sidewalk level down to the street level and cross the street, then get back up to the sidewalk level on the other side.

00;13;34;19 - 00;14;06;19

Ron Wickman

And you do see that those curve ramps are benefits. So many people pushing a, like you said, young families pushing strollers. And when I had children have three. My wife and I, we have like a tiny little stroller like it barely 50 or so now. My kids have their own kids and they come to my house with these, like small vehicles that are their strollers.

00;14;06;22 - 00;14;32;01

Ron Wickman

And they, you know, they can have like rations for they got lost in the woods just, you know, for for a week. And and and my house happens to be one that has has a level entry. So there's no steps. So certainly my kids and anybody else who enters my house has an easier way of getting in. So the curb, the curb cut has this enormous benefit.

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Ron Wickman

But you know, I was around in Edmonton when there was no such thing as a curb Cuts came to be in the seventies and and I was born in 64. So so I remember my dad being a strong advocate for people with disabilities as he was somebody who used the wheelchair, but he used a manual wheelchair. So he could easily not easily, but he could he could manage to get up either on his own and usually a parking meter that would help him pull himself up to the curb from a from the street level or somebody behind him to help them push them up.

00;15;07;09 - 00;15;29;19

Ron Wickman

So the the curb ramp was was not high on my dad's list of things to advocate for necessarily. But then we started to see more and more people use powered wheelchairs. And of course, they're quite heavy. And then all of a sudden, the need for this program became quite vital, actually. And and so slowly you started to see it more and more.

00;15;29;22 - 00;15;51;03

Ron Wickman

And then once it once it really caught on, it really caught on. And it was seemingly like overnight, all of a sudden, every city had four cuts everywhere. And today, I think if you asked a young person working on the jobsite or in the concrete sidewalks and making these programs, they they I'm sure they couldn't tell you why they're there.

00;15;51;03 - 00;16;02;26

Ron Wickman

They just think, well, as long as people have been pouring sidewalks, they've probably been doing these programs and they

certainly wouldn't know that the origins are because of people who use wheelchairs.

00;16;02;29 - 00;16;36;25

Karen Brown

I want I want to refer to a podcast that you mentioned to me, and I went and listen to it. It was all about curb cuts. I'm going to list it in the show notes for this podcast because it was really, really interesting. But in that podcast they talked about a group from Berkeley in the sixties. I mean, who doesn't know stories about California in the sixties, But they were called the Rolling Quads and they would go out at night under cover of darkness and pour their own curb cuts because the city didn't do it for them and they needed to be able to get around.

00;16;36;25 - 00;16;43;09

Karen Brown

People would just wake up the next morning and there would be a curb ramp where there had not been one the day before. I thought that was hilarious.

00;16;43;15 - 00;17;03;15

Ron Wickman

Yeah. And you know, it's funny because we didn't do we didn't do quite that radical things. Well, maybe, you know, I was I was just a young guy, but I used to be around my dad and all his friends, and they, they, they did their own little stunts to to gain attention. Right. That in those days that's what you had to do.

00;17;03;15 - 00;17;29;28

Ron Wickman

You had to somehow find ways to to get media attention or just use almost like do it yourself or. Right. But you were really going

counter to often what was the general public wanted. So, you know, again, the general public is often slow to catch on to the benefits until they start seeing it for themselves. And and my dad was a politician.

00;17;29;28 - 00;17;56;12

Ron Wickman

He was a city councilor for for nine years here in Edmonton. He was a liberal MLA in Alberta. And I remember as a councilor he was very, very popular. And but I do remember one time he he managed to negotiate and get a series of programs built for a young girl in a neighborhood that used her wheelchair to get to her junior high school.

00;17;56;14 - 00;18;16;17

Ron Wickman

And my dad actually got a lot of phone calls and negative reactions from people in the community saying, Why are you spending all this money just for one little girl? Right. And today, I would argue that that's one thing we wouldn't necessarily see as much anymore. Right? For sure. So so that, you know, that was that was in the late eighties.

00;18;16;24 - 00;18;18;15

Ron Wickman

So not that long ago.

00;18;18;18 - 00;18;19;21

Karen Brown

Right.

00;18;19;24 - 00;18;42;27

Ron Wickman

That you know so there's so much of that attitudinal adjustment recently we continue to have to make. Right. And that's definitely brings us back to the house and and people's reaction to the house. So I do know today that if you market your house as an accessible one, you're really limiting the number of people that even want to look at your house.

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Ron Wickman

And so it in my mind, having an accessible house just means you should have more people wanting to look at it and purchase it because it has all these added benefits. But the attitude out there is that an accessible house is one that has been designed for for somebody with a disability and specifically somebody who uses a wheelchair.

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Ron Wickman

So somehow it's going to be not as effective for somebody who is, let's say, walking.

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Karen Brown

And yet it is effective to a greater degree for everyone. I've been in accessible houses. Of course you have as well. You've built them and you would not know. You wouldn't know unless you knew that there was anything different about it, which is a nice segway into your house because you have an accessible house. You've mentioned that it has a no step entry.

00;19;29;22 - 00;19;37;10

Karen Brown

Tell us a little bit more about it and then you have some stories about some other homes that that you have dealt with in Medicine Hat and Calgary.

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Ron Wickman

Yeah. So I'm actually going to go back even further than my own house and just go back to 1967 when my parents built their house. Again, a little bit historic, but it brings us to our house. But like my dad was able to to gain access to a builder and find a lot and built a built a new 1100 square foot bungalow in the in the far south of Edmonton, far as I could get at the time.

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Ron Wickman

And the builder the builder just they just took a site plan and really all they did was they made the hallways a little bit wider. But at the end of the day, when when they finished the house, the doors were still 30 inches wide. My dad could just barely get through them. The bathroom was such that my dad would wheel in for words to transfer into the bathtub or onto the toilet.

00;20;29;27 - 00;20;52;09

Ron Wickman

He couldn't get underneath the seams. He would just from the sides. He would access the sink and the faucet. And and then he would have to back out to to get out of the bathroom. The kitchen really didn't offer much. You know, it was just your standard kitchen. And even even when they were building it, they built it more than two feet off the ground.

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Ron Wickman

And my dad said to the builder, Well, how do I get in? And so they just they just pushed a concrete ramp at about going to say it was about a 1 to 6 slope. So, well, currently currently you would want to build over one in 12 according to the Alberta building code. So twice as steep as what you would normally do today.

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Ron Wickman

And there was no landing at the top. So my dad basically used rails on the side of the ramp to pull himself up the ramp. He would lock his breaks in his wheelchair and then open the door and unlock his brakes and get in. But again, he's on an incline as he's trying to get in the house. It's even worse trying to leave the house because he's trying to reach back and shut the door as he is.

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Ron Wickman

Wheelchair wants to go down and he use the rails to just sort of slow himself down, even as he got towards the detached garage. And that was really that was considered accessible. In 1967, I bought a house that isn't far away from my parents house, so it was built in 1968 and it was a bungalow much, much the same as what I grew up in, except there was no switched up ramp and we ended up adding a second story to the house.

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Ron Wickman

And then we and then the unusual thing about our house in our neighborhood was a back lanes. We had a front car garage. So this was a time when there were just a couple of houses on our street that had some car garages, and they were just starting to

think about this idea of the front car garage, which of course has had a huge impact on the way we design homes today in newer neighborhoods.

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Ron Wickman

So so we we were able to repair our driveway and sidewalks so that it just simply slope to the door, the front door of the house. And so my dad could now easily before we did that, my dad would have these metal ramps that he kept in his van and we brought them up on the stairs and push them up to get in the house and and help them get down with the new sidewalk.

00;22;56;07 - 00;23;17;12

Ron Wickman

We were able or the New York sidewalk to the door. We were able to just wheel right into the house. And we we did plan to have there was a space for an elevator to the elevator in the house to get to the second floor. And there's the washroom on the on the ground level that would allow my dad or anybody else to to use the bathroom.

00;23;17;18 - 00;23;36;18

Ron Wickman

So this was the this was this idea of what we call visibility, which means you design houses. And this should be this should be the lowest way we build the lowest common denominator. So every house should be filled with this idea of visibility. In my mind, I can't see anybody benefiting from stairs.

00;23;36;21 - 00;23;41;22

Karen Brown

Well, nobody does, except builders who get to build taller homes on smaller lots.

00;23;41;24 - 00;24;04;04

Ron Wickman

Like, I guess. But they didn't even, you know, they built them a little bit lower. So this this whole idea of stairs is like a whole nother topic. But it's still I think it's still out there that people want these stairs because it just feels like a house. And I could take it. I can take that idea of the stairs all the way back to Greek and Roman times when stairs were used to get onto a platform.

00;24;04;04 - 00;24;25;28

Ron Wickman

And that's where the higher, higher level people, the gods and goddesses, they were on that platform and they were higher than the people below. So, you know, it kind of has that form of of of history to it. And somehow even if you eliminate the stairs, just have a sloping sidewalk to the entrance that takes away from that idea, I guess.

00;24;25;28 - 00;24;50;11

Ron Wickman

I don't know. It's sort of an odd thing that just there's not enough people have been fighting to make that change. And so you're starting to starting to see that a little bit. And and so my house is one that, you know, we tend to pretty much grow in now living forever. If we if we so choose, then technically, my wife and I are empty nesters of.

00;24;50;14 - 00;24;53;21

Karen Brown

Technically.

00;24;53;23 - 00;25;19;02

Ron Wickman

All three of our kids are within walking distance of our house while one one my son just moved a little further away and I have three grandkids now and two on the way, so I'm actually on a two storey, 3000 square foot house. I'm actually working on a small renovation to the house to increase the size.

00;25;19;03 - 00;25;21;16

Karen Brown

Oh, no. Well, you know, in.

00;25;21;16 - 00;25;40;01

Ron Wickman

Our house this week, I'm the gathering space. So. So it is this idea of the Forever Home I think is kind of great. And our house is so accommodating because we have the no step entrance so everybody can get in easily and bring the kids over the grand sets and everything. We don't have to worry about steps and the kids falling down and all that kind of stuff.

00;25;40;04 - 00;26;08;21

Karen Brown

And on the inside you've made room for the potential for a future elevator. And that, it seems to me, would be so easy for builders to do because it's simply aligning closets on all the floors. That's the elevator shaft. And of course, we've got stairlifts and chairlifts and platform lifts and and residential elevators. And sometimes a residential elevator can be more cost effective than a chairlift, depending on how many runs you have.

00;26;08;21 - 00;26;13;19

Karen Brown

So people should not think that because they've got a two-storey house, there's nothing to be done.

00;26;13;24 - 00;26;38;24

Ron Wickman

Yeah, that's absolutely correct. And I know we'll be in the future. In a future podcast we'll be getting into the weeds more on this. But right. But yes, yes. Generally speaking, what I can say now is that the residential elevator is, is frankly quite economical in the in the global sense of a house built. So you can get a residential elevator for around \$25,000.

00;26;38;26 - 00;27;05;03

Ron Wickman

So, you know, for a for a \$500,000 or \$800,000 bill depending on where you are in Canada, you know, 25, 20, \$25,000 is a small fraction of that. And you can build a new house, you could build you could build the elevator shaft and have everything ready to go for the for the elevator installed at a later date.

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Ron Wickman

Having said that, every one of my clients had that idea initially to build the shaft and add the elevator later ended up out in the elevator during construction because they just saw the wisdom in that. Right. You know, right away.

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Karen Brown

Yeah, it's a lot smarter.

00;27;19;15 - 00;27;51;11

Ron Wickman

And that does kind of lead to this discussion about clients that I've had that are looking for a house to renovate. Let's say they're in a rental situation or, you know, the house that they live in just is too difficult to renovate. So they they're looking for something to renovate. And and first and foremost, I'll say that for anybody with a disability, especially somebody who uses a wheelchair, finding a house that lends itself to an easy renovation is extremely hard.

00;27;51;13 - 00;28;14;26

Ron Wickman

Right. So we all want we all have that. We all have the same desires. We there's there's neighborhoods we've targeted. It has maybe because of schools that our kids go to, maybe because of work, access to public transportation. We want the same freedom of choices as everybody else looking for a house. We have a certain bracket of of dollars that we want to spend on the house.

00;28;14;26 - 00;28;26;03

Ron Wickman

All that kind of stuff factors into why we take what we do. When you're somebody in a wheelchair looking for a house, all of a sudden your choices are extremely low.

00;28;26;05 - 00;28;45;11

Karen Brown

And that's that's a really nice teaser for our next podcast, I think, because that's really the subject that we want to tackle in a bit more depth. But you've got stories about some houses in Medicine Hat and Alberta and another a four level split that you made accessible.

00;28;45;17 - 00;29;06;14

Ron Wickman

Yeah, so, so just again, in a very general terms because we will be kind of getting into the weeds a little bit more, but just, just going back to this idea of looking for houses, this is what people generally will do is they they will because of the look, this elevator seems to have this kind of idea that this is the difficult piece of the puzzle.

00;29;06;16 - 00;29;25;04

Ron Wickman

So they'll look for a home that looks like it would see easy the easy way to to install an elevator into the house. So they often look for a footprint of a house and a house that has a space that can get you from, let's say, the basement to the main floor. And if it's a two story house up to the second floor as well.

00;29;25;09 - 00;29;50;18

Ron Wickman

So so that's what's guiding their decision making is is the elevator how to easily install an elevator into the house. So there was one in Madison, Howard, I was just talking with. Some clients are finishing their two story house. They had a big lobby space, so the elevator and at these sort of L-shaped stairs. And so there was a nice spot for an elevator to easily fit into this big foyer space.

00;29;50;21 - 00;30;23;20

Ron Wickman

And in Calgary, I'm just working on a house right now. That's a really nice footprint. It's it's only 14 inches off the ground. It's bungalow and we can easily modify everything at the elevator. And so we're not in terms of of ease of of doing this renovation.

It's one of the one of the best that I've seen. But but again, it just goes back to this idea of like, how do we where we find these houses that sort of fit our income brackets and all that kind of stuff.

00;30;23;23 - 00;30;51;29

Ron Wickman

And that's one candidate, I should say, that is like experience. But for other people, they don't have that same, same experience. Most of my involvement as an architect on projects is through the work I do with workers compensation Board. So the Workers Compensation Board will pay for the renovation to the house. So all of a sudden that big piece influences what we buy is is not as important.

00;30;52;01 - 00;31;16;27

Ron Wickman

It's it's held by WCB or if there is, you know, money involved already, like a lawsuit or something like that. So generally I'm working with clients who have who are at a slightly higher income level that have more choice as they have more money. And so often I don't get involved in projects where just it has to be like super, super affordable.

00;31;16;27 - 00;31;48;28

Ron Wickman

So that's that's the majority of people and that's the struggle that many of those people have trying to find a house and just just because we maybe we won't be able to as well be able to talk about it and the podcast too. But a house that I did, which was a four level sled, I just I'm quite proud of it and I know it's real outside of the box thinking, which takes us back to our general

conversation about getting design designers and builders to build in more innovative ways.

00;31;49;01 - 00;32;14;01

Ron Wickman

I did a house for for a family where the son uses a wheelchair and we designed a new split level four level split house with ramps inside instead of stairs. So as far as I know, it's the only house in Edmonton that has sets of ramps instead of like three sets of ramps instead of stairs in access to these various levels.

00;32;14;03 - 00;32;39;18

Ron Wickman

And Daniel was only six when when he lost all four limbs to meningitis. And he's 32 now. I think it is. And and so he was able to grow up in a house where he could he could just get around. He can operate a joystick with with the little bit of arm that he has and he can just cruise around the whole house.

00;32;39;20 - 00;33;01;00

Ron Wickman

So his mum, his mom and him have been able to grow in that house in a very flexible, very independent kind of way. And at least at least mum has so much pressure to take care of her son and just her son independence and a big thing to mention too, is the fact that Daniel uses a power wheelchair.

00;33;01;00 - 00;33;25;10

Ron Wickman

So all of his friends came to his house instead of him going everywhere else too. You just can't. You can't go to other people's homes to visit them even because how are they going to get a wheelchair up to them? So floor level. So not only does

Daniel have a really great perspective on accessible housing, but so do all of his friends, which I think is really fascinating.

00;33;25;13 - 00;33;59;05

Karen Brown

Right? So the perspective piece leads us into how we approach the issue today to make some changes. I mean, his friends have had the blessing of their friendship with Daniel to educate them and to change their minds when perhaps before that they wouldn't have even thought about it. So we've you know, new houses are being built all the time, but at the same time, we have this huge stock of existing homes that people don't want to leave, may not be able to afford to leave.

00;33;59;08 - 00;34;12;17

Karen Brown

There are a number of reasons why we need to have approaches that are different for both, but so from a very high level. How do you think we should approach the issue of changing minds today?

00;34;12;20 - 00;34;41;00

Ron Wickman

Well, the key word would be education. So we just need people to understand what what all the issues are and more so how to how to solve, how to solve them, the problems that do exist. The the biggest problem is, is that people don't generally understand the issues until it actually happens to them. So I grew up I grew up with a dad in a wheelchair.

00;34;41;01 - 00;34;45;09

Ron Wickman

So I've been exposed to this my whole life.

00;34;45;12 - 00;35;12;00

Ron Wickman

Daniel As you mentioned, Daniel and his friends, such as friends, got to understand and appreciate accessible housing through experience of being friends with Daniel. And so we tend to we tend to learn through experience and not just all types of time. So so that's the struggle that I've always had for, you know, my throughout my career has been how to fast track that.

00;35;12;00 - 00;35;40;24

Ron Wickman

So how to get people interested and stimulated to to think about this more and want to do something about it. That's the general public educating the general, educating our builders and developers and our and our designers and also educating our politicians and and our key decision makers. How important is how important this issue is? So so really comes down to it's about education.

00;35;40;26 - 00;36;15;01

Ron Wickman

And with with the with our ability to access information. Now in the tutor, I think we need to rely on people doing their own research as well. So if your it's hard and takes time, but if you're if you're a homeowner looking for a house that is accessible or you want to build a new house that's accessible, it's in your best interest to learn as much as you can about the building industry to to know how to approach a builder and say that these are the things I need.

00;36;15;03 - 00;36;42;03

Ron Wickman

Like I need a no step entrance or I need a residential elevator. And unfortunately, a lot of builders will say, Oh, well, you know, residential elevators, \$150,000, just, you know, and if you don't know, you go, wow, that's I can't afford that. Right, Right. And and or, you know, the no step entrance. It can't be done because we have to build off the ground to keep our wood away from the hardwood floors, away from the water.

00;36;42;06 - 00;37;05;24

Ron Wickman

There's ways around that to protect the wood and do the no step entrance is easy to do. But if you don't know that it can be done, then it's really hard to challenge the designer or builder if they're telling you that it can't be done. So it's it's it's upon us to to also of educate ourselves and try to learn as much as we can.

00;37;05;26 - 00;37;25;11

Ron Wickman

And that's a difficult thing to do in this day and age when there's just so much other information that we can access. Some of it's just, you know, for fun. Right? Right. So I could learn I can learn about how to build a no step entrance or I could watch a movie, my phone, you know, and most people would probably go to the movie.

00;37;25;11 - 00;37;49;07

Ron Wickman

So so, you know, it is tough. And then and then all of a sudden, you know, you have a family member that's in a car accident or you're young, you're a young couple, and you have a child with severe disabilities and your world is locked and you don't know where to go, You don't know where to start. And and here in

Alberta, I've managed to gain a bit of a reputation, a name for myself.

00;37;49;07 - 00;38;13;24

Ron Wickman

So a lot of times people come to me and they're they just don't know where to start. So I try to help them get started the best I can. But one thing that's telling of the Times is the sheer volume now of people contacting me is so high that I the first time in my career, I've had to turn people away and just tell I'm sorry, I just don't have time to help you right now.

00;38;13;27 - 00;38;38;28

Ron Wickman

Try to find some information. That's why I have a website that has our, you know, the podcast we've done in the past on my website so people can at least get started and start learning something. And hopefully they they have the discipline and and desire to learn more to learn more for themselves and then maybe come back to me at a time when or hopefully more people that do what I do that can help them, right?

00;38;38;28 - 00;38;48;01

Ron Wickman

So we need more builders that are actually building these things. We need more architects and designers that that really understand the issues and can really help people.

00;38;48;03 - 00;38;49;23

Karen Brown

I think.

00;38;49;25 - 00;38;52;04

Ron Wickman

Start from just relying on books and standards.

00;38;52;07 - 00;39;16;02

Karen Brown

I find myself talking to people a lot about advocating for their future selves. So when you're, you know, 40 years old or 50 years old and you're renovating that kitchen that you're tired of, if you're plan to stay in that house, why not renovate it for what you're going to need 20 years down the road and do some serious thinking about that?

00;39;16;04 - 00;39;52;29

Karen Brown

Maybe there are people in your life that have arthritis. Maybe you yourself have a progressive disease. Maybe you recognize that range of motion will be an issue. I mean, it doesn't have to be something horrible, but if people would think about this down the road. Case in point, I just recently bought a new place. It won't be ready for a while yet, but as I was looking at the development, I said to the the sales consultants, I gave them my business card and said, You should hire me to give a seminar to the people who buy your homes so that I can tell them the sorts of upgrades they would need to live in these

00;39;52;29 - 00;40;23;13

Karen Brown

homes forever. And she said, yes, she would talk about that with her, but she said, you know, we have this whole accessibility team. So if somebody comes to us and has a disability and needs accessibility features, we can accommodate that. And I said, That's lovely. But what I'm talking about are things that will allow people to have homes that function better for them, not only

now, but in the future when they don't even think about the ways that they will need to use that home 20 years down the road.

00;40;23;15 - 00;40;27;15

Karen Brown

So people are advocating for their future selves would be an idea to.

00;40;27;18 - 00;40;47;19

Ron Wickman

Absolutely. And you know, that's a great, great point. And and I think I think it has to do with the way we market that concept is so so with you and I've been around this for a long time so I can say this with some authority. If you try to market it like, you know, one day you're going to be in a wheelchair.

00;40;47;21 - 00;41;34;04

Ron Wickman

Arthritis greatest knows a storm is, you know, they're like, oh, okay, well, I guess I'll deal with some of the time. So you're not making it very sexy, I guess could say. Right? Like you're you're not attracting people to the idea as much. And so I think I know in the design world and you see it already, especially especially in places like the United States, where there's just a huge market of people who are older, you you see this this idea of making specialty kitchens, making it easier, making it easier for people to use who might have arthritis, who might be have trouble reaching out for reaching down, might be in a wheelchair.

00;41;34;07 - 00;41;56;15

Ron Wickman

But they don't really talk about it like that. They talk about it as this idea, like the back to the curb cut it, this idea that, you know,

what we're doing is designing something that just benefits everybody and it benefits you now. It benefits your children when they're just little it benefits you when you're older. But right now, it's it's just a really good system, but you just really get all these benefits.

00;41;56;15 - 00;42;16;10

Ron Wickman

And if you ever want to sell it, sell your house. This kitchen's going to be the value of your house even more. Right? Because it's just so it offers so much to to your you know, you're buying public that that idea, that cultural shift in the market I think is is what needs to be done and what needs to happen.

00;42;16;12 - 00;42;39;04

Ron Wickman

Semantics Yeah yeah it it is in a way right. And even in my world, the design world, you know, when you go to a school of architecture and you and I went through this myself, I went into architecture school with the idea that I would leave with the skill set to be an architect who would specialize in barrier area for design.

00;42;39;06 - 00;42;56;14

Ron Wickman

So throughout my my schooling, I just kept pushing that agenda and I didn't really realize it at the time. But my professors didn't know enough to really comment on it, right? So they just said, Well, you know, that's what that's what the code is for. You know, just you'll learn all that stuff when you get out to the real world.

00;42;56;14 - 00;43;04;16

Ron Wickman

Like right now, just, just dream, you know? And I'm like, I am dreaming. I mean, all the time houses are built for everybody.

00;43;04;19 - 00;43;05;06

Karen Brown

Well.

00;43;05;08 - 00;43;08;17

Ron Wickman

You mentioned you dream is than that.

00;43;08;18 - 00;43;32;01

Karen Brown

You mentioned code. And then you and I were both in attendance at the Recants and Foundation conference a short while ago. And one phrase that stuck with me was one of the presenters said code is the bare minimum that anyone needs to do in order to avoid being sued. That's an example that really stuck with me. So we need people to advocate for themselves and for their loved ones who perhaps have disabilities.

00;43;32;01 - 00;44;01;05

Karen Brown

So the self-advocacy piece is important to we need more champions in the building industry people to turn their minds to the type of work that you have built your career on. And, you know, I have a note here. It's worth noting that designing for accessibility, adaptability and flexibility is the true form of sustainable design. And that's a quote from from you, because it satisfies the long term living requirements for the largest number of people of all ages and abilities.

00;44;01;07 - 00;44;16;02

Karen Brown

So when we look at new builds and renovations in a lot of ways, those are two separate discussions. So let's look at a new building environment to start out with. What do we specifically need there in our champions?

00;44;16;09 - 00;44;57;05

Ron Wickman

First of all, I'll say that sustainability and accessibility are kind of more alike than they are. Separate issues. And and what I find really curious is that most people who are in my town, the accessibility town, completely understand the sustainability is part of accessibility and accessibility as part of sustainability. But I would argue that most of your designers and builders focused on on sustainable issues and sustainable design still see accessibility as something that's like an oddity, you know, sort of descent from from there.

00;44;57;05 - 00;45;08;10

Ron Wickman

So so that's, you know, again, that's tying those two together. I think this is really, really important to to get everybody thinking about trade.

00;45;08;16 - 00;45;09;25

Karen Brown

Right. Sorry.

00;45;09;27 - 00;45;44;01

Ron Wickman

This is this idea that that designing for flexibility is important. Is it truly is a sustainable issue. So again, we've talked about about

making house so that there's no steps of the main entrance. The idea of the elevator shaft having that that flexibility in mind. We talked about the kitchen. So, you know, you really just design a kitchen so that it can be designed so that it's easy to adapt in the future.

00;45;44;03 - 00;46;13;18

Ron Wickman

More open space is typically a little easier, less less walls to move the structural issues in the future. And what's really fascinating, I think, is that this does I know a little off topic, but this does translate into bigger buildings as well. So we started designing our really big buildings with this idea of flexibility in mind that would have a goal that would go a long ways to to satisfy both the accessibility and sustainability agendas.

00;46;13;21 - 00;46;45;24

Ron Wickman

So single family houses are one thing, multifamily. All of this designed with these ideas in mind. I think it's really going to going to help of future generations. And for me, always, whether it's a residential building or a public building, the key always revolves around the bathroom. So right in the bathroom so that it's big enough for somebody, let's say, in a wheelchair to use will forever be able to accommodate anybody.

00;46;45;24 - 00;46;49;29

Ron Wickman

I know we'll be talking about this in more detail in a future podcast. But yeah.

00;46;49;29 - 00;46;52;09

Karen Brown

We've got a whole podcast coming up on bathrooms.

00;46;52;11 - 00;47;18;13

Ron Wickman

So so this idea of the bathroom really getting some real attention is something we need to do. And some of the more simple things you see, some of these things are happening that's happening naturally, the doors being wider, that's just, that wasn't an accessibility agenda. That was that was, that was just something that came because people are buying bigger pieces of furniture and all that.

00;47;18;13 - 00;47;41;09

Ron Wickman

So that's the wider doors to get through. And it just reminds me of of something that I talked about years ago that I thought was really fascinating, was one of the greatest inventions that have come about in my time. And for young people, they will they won't get it really, but of like it's bags with wheels.

00;47;41;12 - 00;47;42;14

Karen Brown

Yes.

00;47;42;17 - 00;48;07;27

Ron Wickman

I'm I'm I'm old enough to have been, you know, traveling without luggage, bags with wheels. You carry them everywhere and now you've got a dad in a wheelchair. So you got to carry his bag to. Right. Or like put all your bags on his lap seat wheels around. But then really around the airport to get to multi levels of the airport and all of that is you finding the elevator, all that kind of stuff.

00;48;07;29 - 00;48;30;26

Ron Wickman

But wheels on, on luggage all of a sudden meant nobody wants to go down stairs with a big, big bag, big heavy bags on wheels. So all of a sudden our airports are designed with ramps everywhere, not stairs as much. Right. And none of that has to do with making it more accommodating for somebody in a wheelchair. It all had to do with making it better for everybody.

00;48;30;26 - 00;48;49;03

Ron Wickman

So again, it's another great example of the ramp being a benefit for everybody, not just for a small population of people, that kind of thing. And it again, the no step entrance just seems like a natural to me that that should just be commonplace. Right? It would be unusual. It would be unusual to ask for stairs at the front door.

00;48;49;06 - 00;48;50;16

Ron Wickman

That's what I'd like to see.

00;48;50;19 - 00;49;15;25

Karen Brown

That would be amazing. So from your lips to God's ear, when we're looking at dealing with accessibility issues, there are some experts that we can bring in who aren't typically thought of in terms of the building environment. I'm thinking of occupational therapists, for instance. Can you talk a little bit about the kind of contribution that these professionals can make to the housing industry?

00;49;15;27 - 00;49;58;15

Ron Wickman

Yeah, I actually work quite a bit with occupational therapists in in working for specific clients. So most of my houses are very tailor made and designed for an individual's very specific disability. So, so what's, what's kind of transpired in that is occupational therapists are valuable part of that process. And so what we need to see in our tools of occupational therapy and architecture is is more cross cross education.

00;49;58;15 - 00;50;32;10

Ron Wickman

So letting our patients, occupational therapists know more about the design world and letting the design world know more about occupational therapists would be helpful. But definitely an occupational therapist looks at the person with a disability or anybody really, and how they engage with the environment. So I've also been told us a physiotherapist kind of deals with your injury or your condition and how to, you know, let's say something's not working right with your arms or your arm.

00;50;32;16 - 00;50;54;28

Ron Wickman

They'll work with you to make your arm function better. It's an occupational therapist is trained to think more globally, if I can say that. So they look at how you how you as an individual function within the environment that you live in. So so this is really how I approach things as an architect as well, is how do people engage the space?

00;50;54;28 - 00;51;11;11

Ron Wickman

And again, I don't design for what I would consider the average person I design for my worlds. And my world includes people who

are blind, people who are deaf, people who are in wheelchairs. So I can't I can't design without thinking about all these issues all at the same time.

00;51;11;13 - 00;51;58;01

Karen Brown

The sub trades, you know, there is such a large push toward college these days for trades because we we can't get enough of them. Electricians and plumbers and carpenters. And I know I was looking at some data just locally about our our local school board and the bulk of graduates are going to college, not to university anymore. Those 61%, I want to say, with a much smaller number going on to university and then something like 8% going right into the workforce and the sub trades play such an important role in how buildings come together, but they don't learn this stuff in school.

00;51;58;03 - 00;52;00;27

Karen Brown

How do we get the curriculums changed?

00;52;01;00 - 00;52;31;17

Ron Wickman

Yeah, that's a that's a that's a tough one. Yeah. It's like trade schools. And I think there should be more emphasis put on that. In the earlier years of your high school, for example, high school, there could be more of more emphasis on on understanding kind of practical things, I think like building a house. And I remember taking a drafting class in high school, but that was kind of my exposure to to the world.

00;52;31;17 - 00;52;50;06

Ron Wickman

But, you know, I would have loved to have been part of a class. Let's say that part of the class was to go to a Habitat for Humanity job site, actually work on site. And and I would say that every school of architecture should for students to have to do that kind of thing. Right e e on a construction site.

00;52;50;06 - 00;53;15;03

Ron Wickman

And actually, you know, I obviously when it's safe to be on the site, but just to just understand and appreciate what trades do they they are very important to to our built environments and and sometimes they don't get enough credit for the skilled work that they do. And I find I find today there really is a lack of training.

00;53;15;03 - 00;53;33;10

Ron Wickman

So often a young person will be hired by a construction company and then not necessarily given enough credit. So they're just they're sort of forced to learn on their own. And, you know, I mean, I hate the idea of like, hey, frame this wall and look it up on YouTube and I'll tell you how to a wall.

00;53;33;13 - 00;53;36;18

Karen Brown

That's frightening.

00;53;36;21 - 00;54;05;08

Ron Wickman

But, you know, that's how a lot of people are kind of learning, Right? And so you need skills, people on the site to mentor and train younger people to some extent crafts and how to how to make it work. And and this is where I find a real disconnect is is this whole communication of, you know, myself as the decider,

trying to communicate to a general contractor, this is what I need to happen to make this work for this person who, let's say, uses a wheelchair.

00;54;05;10 - 00;54;26;11

Ron Wickman

That contractor then takes my information and sends it to the sub sub trade. And that substrate, that person that the contractor talks to may not be the person that actually executes the work. Right. An example would be an electrician, you know, like I say, and on my drawings I say I want my light switches to be at 41 inches or 42 inches off the floor.

00;54;26;13 - 00;54;47;29

Ron Wickman

The contractor tells the electrician, I want those light switches to be 42 inches off the floor. Normally they're about 48 or 50 inches off the floor, but then the electrician sends one of one of their younger junior people go and, you know, install some light switches. So that junior person, all they know is that light switches are normally at 50 inches or 48 inches.

00;54;48;02 - 00;54;49;24

Karen Brown

So that's what they do. Yeah.

00;54;49;27 - 00;55;12;11

Ron Wickman

And so you know, the communication kind of gets lost. Right. So so it's really it's, it's, it's really a lot harder than it should be. And, and everybody has to start getting used to it, I guess used to do these things, but it's, it's getting there more quickly. Again, that is the tough thing. So It'll happen in time.

00;55;12;14 - 00;55;37;00

Ron Wickman

We'll start seeing a lot of these things coming to the accessibility features coming to be. But it seems like a shame when I drive, when I drive around suburban Edmonton or suburban Calgary and we're fighting to talk about renovations and building new houses are more accessible and yet houses are going up faster than we tend to talk about, and none of them are being made accessible.

00;55;37;00 - 00;55;40;01

Ron Wickman

So we're sort of really fighting an uphill battle.

00;55;40;04 - 00;55;56;08

Karen Brown

We talked earlier about the cookie cutter plans or the stock plans, as you call them, and you have mentioned that life would be so much easier if there were these plans, stock plans available that had the accessibility features built in. There's a business for somebody there.

00;55;56;08 - 00;56;15;01

Ron Wickman

Absolutely. There there is. Right. And I think in that in the building world, you know, you need you need some of the key, key builders to do it and make it work and, you know, make a legitimate business case for it and demonstrate that, yes, this is good stuff and we can make money doing it and then the others will kind of follow.

00;56;15;01 - 00;56;36;15

Ron Wickman

Right. So so, you know, when you go down a typical Sure home street, you might have six or seven different builders building a house on the shovel street. Generally speaking, the houses more or less are the same. They have like slightly different looks, but you're going to see more or less the same floor plan and same features being promoted.

00;56;36;18 - 00;57;01;17

Ron Wickman

You know, there was a time that there was a room on the main floor of a two story house called the Flex Room. You know, this room that could be almost anything. And then somebody figured out a way to build over and attached garage. They called that the bonus room. And so you see you see these little trends right as somebody tries it it works and then everybody does it and then you know, and then you move on to the next kind of trend.

00;57;01;20 - 00;57;14;28

Ron Wickman

And accessibility has never really been that a true trend, right? That right. You do see you do see some some of these old streets with their elevators in them, but there are few and far between.

00;57;15;01 - 00;57;37;23

Karen Brown

Right. And one of the things we touched on earlier also was the political will that is needed to make this happen. I find that too often when I go to council meetings at Picket, pick a city, it doesn't really matter where it is. It really seems to be the

developers that are driving the planning for a given area instead of the local politician.

00;57;37;23 - 00;58;12;06

Karen Brown

Those who are supposed to know their own market better. Being able to say, Well, we want a percentage to be visible or accessible and they don't say that because they're afraid that the developer will go on down the road to the next city where they won't encounter a roadblock like this, or somebody with a new idea. So getting the municipal staff who make the recommendations often to councils and then getting council members on board and get them to start thinking about questions to ask around visibility and accessibility, that would be wonderful.

00;58;12;10 - 00;58;13;21

Karen Brown

That's a constant conversation.

00;58;13;21 - 00;58;41;00

Ron Wickman

I find it. Yeah, you're absolutely right. And generally speaking, you know, across Canada, in North America, really, government tries to stay out of the business of residential design and construction. The most part, you know, as you were talking about, about how government could be more forceful, it is true. I think, you know, builders hate that. They don't want they don't want the government telling them what to do.

00;58;41;02 - 00;59;17;07

Ron Wickman

But we do see that. And most recently we've seen that in the new Energy Code of Canada. So across Canada, builders have to meet certain energy codes, which means more insulation generally, you know, little added cost to the to the home builds, which adds the cost to the to the market. But the government the government has seen the wisdom in collectively building housing stock that is more energy efficient and like government hasn't been able to collectively think that way about accessibility or hasn't had the nerve to kind of force the issue.

00;59;17;07 - 00;59;42;01

Ron Wickman

Is this a complex question, I guess, right in all of this? Right. So I do know that when it comes to accessibility, City of Edmonton, the city of Calgary are two cities they know better than the rest of Canada. But anything that the cities are responsible for, like libraries, recreation centers, they're they're designed and built to a very high level of accessibility.

00;59;42;04 - 01;00;05;14

Ron Wickman

Rec centers in Alberta are generally really, really good when it comes to being inclusive and being accessible for as many people as possible. And they control it. They they make sure it happens. And staff that are out that work with the architects and builders, they've they've really forced the issue and they have the they have the ability and the power to make it happen.

01;00;05;17 - 01;00;21;21

Ron Wickman

But the housing industry is just kind of left alone. Right. And we're always told, well, you know, we'll we'll do it. Don't make us do it. We'll we'll do it when the market demands it. But the

market doesn't know what to bat to demand if they don't know what exists or what are the possibilities.

01;00;21;21 - 01;00;46;21

Karen Brown

Right. There you go. So yeah, and so that would lead us into just a bit of a discussion on renovations because we've talked about new builds and renovations are somewhat different in that we've got homeowners who have lived in homes for, you know, 20, 30, 40 years or more. They tell us that over 90% of them have no desire to do anything other than stay in their own homes and their own communities.

01;00;46;23 - 01;01;13;09

Karen Brown

Home care is not where we need it to be. Families are stretched. They're geographically distant and staying in homes in familiar communities is in fact what is best for people for a variety of reasons, including social engagement and mental health and so forth. But they don't know what to ask for and when they're talking to contractors who don't know what to offer, it becomes the perfect situation to do what we've always done because we've always done it this way.

01;01;13;15 - 01;01;25;28

Ron Wickman

Yeah, You know, that's that's exactly it. And, you know, the pandemic has done nothing but escalate all of that, everything that you just said. Right. So even more so now. People want to stay in their own homes.

01;01;26;00 - 01;01;26;24

Karen Brown

Right?

01;01;26;26 - 01;01;52;15

Ron Wickman

They don't want to end up in a in a larger long term health care facility that, you know, a pandemic, just a virus, could just like literally suck the life out of the building. And and and so it it touches on all those things. Right? Like it's you need it you need to you need people to know or what they want and what they need.

01;01;52;18 - 01;02;24;01

Ron Wickman

You need the builders to be able to offer better, better solutions, better suggestions. So it's just it's it's a matter of of, you know, both parties being more educated and and typically my, my own experience has been that until the markets the public and the and the and the builders until they get to a certain level of understanding, it's it's it's up to our decision makers and our governments to kind of force the issue.

01;02;24;07 - 01;02;48;00

Ron Wickman

And sometimes that's actual codes, codes and standards. Sometimes it's financial incentives. So I couldn't I couldn't there be something where if you're renovating your house and you're renovating into a place and be more friendly for people with disabilities, why wouldn't there be some kind of government incentive that would allow you to pay a good chunk of that for you?

01;02;48;00 - 01;03;03;01

Ron Wickman

So you're it's not on you to spend all that money, right? And the government should understand that that's a good idea because then that person doesn't necessarily end up in a hospital setting where, you know, the cost of health care is just keeps escalating. It's rising.

01;03;03;04 - 01;03;08;19

Karen Brown

I would argue that by just by doing that, it would actually positively impact the health care budgets.

01;03;08;21 - 01;03;31;16

Ron Wickman

It would yeah, would definitely do that. Right. And it's just unfortunately, you know, in the political worlds, most of your politicians, they'll hate me for saying this, but they they don't think much further ahead than the next election. Right. So they they're not thinking 20, 30 years down the road. I think they're all going to say they do, but they're really looking at how they can get elected in the next election.

01;03;31;19 - 01;03;50;24

Ron Wickman

And it's the nature of the beast. But, you know, sometimes you have to make some tough decisions now to to help keep the generations. Right. It's a it's a I understand it's a it's a really tough thing. I grew up around a politician who wasn't that decision making role and he had to make some tough decisions right then.

01;03;50;28 - 01;04;16;26

Ron Wickman

And what I found is my father did often think about issues like I'm going to in reference to our light rail transit or our public transportation system. In the early days in our downtowns, he and others advocated for elevators installed and certified a huge fight on that. You know, why are we going to spend all this money on elevators when it's only going to benefit a few people?

01;04;16;26 - 01;04;43;12

Ron Wickman

And he won. He was successful in getting elevators installed at that time. Today it's it's just gets done. But imagine the amount of money that he saved the city in the long run because they did it way back then instead of having to do it later on. And he also fought for LRT earlier on 30 years ago and a lot of communities just didn't want the LRT running through their neighborhoods.

01;04;43;12 - 01;05;05;24

Ron Wickman

Right? So we're doing it today. We're doing a lot of LRT now in Edmonton when it's just that much more expensive. And so that's an LRT example or a public transportation example. But I would argue the same can be said about our health care and how we house ourselves. And, and I think I think government can step in in some way.

01;05;05;24 - 01;05;32;01

Ron Wickman

And for sure there is one example that I can give you in in Winnipeg. It was done through the Manitoba government. It's called bridge water in in in Winnipeg and it's a subdivision for about 30,000 people, as I understand it. And lots we're actually building lots for single family homes were designed to easily accommodate houses that could be visible.

01;05;32;01 - 01;05;54;03

Ron Wickman

So this idea of having a step entrance, so once the builders purchased the lot and built it was easy to do having to have sex at the front door. And from what I understand to I don't know this for sure, but it's it's a it's one of the fastest selling communities in all of all of Winnipeg. So sales are high there.

01;05;54;04 - 01;06;18;03

Ron Wickman

They're doing well, but it hasn't been replicated yet anywhere else in Canada. Right here to stare at Everton. We have we have a site, our old downtown airport, Blatchford, which can accommodate about 30,000 people. So you know, we myself and others went before council maybe eight years ago, nine years ago, and made that same pleas. Right. We said they did it.

01;06;18;03 - 01;06;41;01

Ron Wickman

Bridgewater, like you, you can do it here at Blatchford and Council at the time just said well let the market decide. So I just go back to that original question you asked. This is you know like how do we how do we move the needle forward? And I don't I don't think we can I don't think we can do it really well without without government involvement.

01;06;41;03 - 01;06;42;02

Ron Wickman

Right.

01;06;42;04 - 01;06;48;16

Karen Brown

And homeowners advocating for themselves, too, as as has been mentioned. Right.

01;06;48;18 - 01;07;09;14

Ron Wickman

That's true. And and, you know, people with disabilities themselves to be really great advocates. And again, I grew up in a different time, but there was nothing right when I was growing up. There were no clear cuts, so there was just nothing. So people with disabilities were really forced into a corner and they had to fight their way out of it.

01;07;09;16 - 01;07;35;20

Ron Wickman

Today, people with disabilities have had struggles, but the struggles are not the same as what they were in the sixties. And and so a lot of times people just get on with their lives, right? And they and they tend not to be as strongly motivated to advocate or be an activist. So I really applied those that do. And we do have a pretty good culture here in Evanston.

01;07;35;20 - 01;08;04;03

Ron Wickman

US of people with disabilities are really fighting hard, right and right. I'm going to argue that that has a lot to do with my mother and and others that I started out in the sixties, right, and went on to become decision makers themselves. So I personally know some extremely smart, clever people who use wheelchairs. So I would encourage her to run for city council or provincial government.

01;08;04;03 - 01;08;08;11

Ron Wickman

But I'm not sure anybody is seeing the wisdom in that these days.

01;08;08;17 - 01;08;10;09

Karen Brown

Right. Right.

01;08;10;11 - 01;08;14;23

Ron Wickman

It's it's it's a tough job to begin with. It's it's it's harder these days.

01;08;14;25 - 01;08;37;15

Karen Brown

Right. We should mention that there are lots of voters that do home environment assessments for people who are looking to maybe renovate their homes. They're they're at the early stages of thinking about it. And the voters can look at it in terms of what their personal needs are. There are also professionals such as myself, who specialize in aging in place strategies and can help with newbuilds and renovations.

01;08;37;15 - 01;08;59;11

Karen Brown

And there aren't very many of us, but we're out there. So, you know, there is more and more help for people who really don't know where to start. But anyway, let's stop here and let people know that our next podcast in this series will look at the three areas of a home that Ron looks at to assess whether or not and how an existing home might be renovated.

01;08;59;11 - 01;09;05;02

Karen Brown

I can't wait for that one because I think that's the one that a lot of people are going to be wanting to hear.

01;09;05;04 - 01;09;29;15

Ron Wickman

Yeah, yeah. And I'm anxious to talk about it. I, I did. I just saw I just want to go back to the one thing that you just mentioned about about some of the experts that are out there just wanting to add to that, too, because I think it's really important is is I think there also is a bit of a cultural cultural issue that a lot of this stuff costs money, right.

01;09;29;16 - 01;09;58;17

Ron Wickman

So to hire you or me as experts to come and assess your house is just money that I don't know. People don't seem to want to spend like. They've just sort of been culturally raised to think that that's stuff that people should, you know, neighbors or friend should just be able to help you with. So there's also got to be a little bit of a shift in appreciation and understanding that some of us have spent a long time getting pretty good at this and that it's hard for us to do everything for free.

01;09;58;19 - 01;10;13;07

Ron Wickman

And, you know, it's one thing to have a quick conversation with somebody on the phone, but it's not a thing to come to your house and assess it and all that kind of stuff. And and people have to see the value in that. Like, yeah, sure, I might spend a few hundred dollars on this expert, but look at all the money.

01;10;13;07 - 01;10;19;21

Ron Wickman

That person is going to save me with this great conversation or that, you know, this few hours that spend with that person.

01;10;19;23 - 01;10;22;14

Karen Brown

And I get to stay in my own home, in my own community.

01;10;22;17 - 01;10;51;24

Ron Wickman

Yeah. And the other Yeah. And sorry and prolonging this. But that's the other, the other thing that just can't put value like an actual dollar figure on is that emotional reward, like a being able to stay in your home. Like, you know, again in my world, architects are celebrated for their sculptural designs for these buildings that look outrageous and and pleasing to the eye.

01;10;51;27 - 01;11;12;20

Ron Wickman

But the biggest compliment I consistently get from my clients are you've turned three hour, four hour bathroom routine in the morning to a half an hour. So that gives me three extra hours every single day to do other stuff. That's way more fun than getting ready for the day, you know, spending that time fighting in the in the bathroom.

01;11;12;20 - 01;11;30;22

Ron Wickman

So how do you put the value on that? Like that? It's just it's enormous, right? So so people have to have to somehow learn to appreciate that that's that's what we can do as experts is we can bring that value to the to the conversation.

01;11;30;24 - 01;11;58;29

Karen Brown

Perfect. Well, let's end it there. And I will look forward to our next podcast. To our listeners. Thank you for joining us. And please stay tuned for the next in this series In Real Life Renos : The Podcast. Real Life Renos : The Podcast is a production of Reno Studios. Executive produced by Karen Brown. This is Real Life theme, music and lyrics by Jane Carmichael, recorded at Swamp Songs Recording Studio in Lucan, Ontario, engineered by Matt Weston.

01;11;59;01 - 01;12;17;18

Karen Brown

Thank you for tuning in.