**Ramps**

00:00:18:55 - 00:00:38:43

Karen Brown

Welcome to another edition of Real Life Renos : The Podcast. My name is Karen Brown. I'm your host, as always. And for those who are joining us for the first time, I'm an Aging in Place and Accessibility Strategist. Today, we are pleased to welcome back one of our favorite guests, who is an architect specializing in barrier free design. Mr. Ron Wickman. Welcome, Ron.

00:00:40:10 - 00:00:41:20

Ron Wickman

Thanks. It's great to be here again.

00:00:41:56 - 00:00:47:45

Karen Brown

Today we are all about ramps. Getting in and out of the house.

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Ron Wickman

Sounds good. Yeah. Yeah.

00:00:49:37 - 00:00:55:15

Karen Brown

So let's just start with basically what is a ramp and why would somebody want it?

00:00:57:12 - 00:01:23:47

Ron Wickman

Yeah, a ramp. I think most people would understand a ramp as being this wooden pathway on an incline and it would lead up to and over the front steps of a door. So if if you're a lay person and somebody out there in the public that doesn't have a lot of experience with ramps, this is what you might commonly see.

00:01:23:48 - 00:01:58:58

Ron Wickman

You might have been involved in helping provide a ramp for neighbors or family or friends. And so a ramp is this incline pathway. By definition, though, in terms of a building code, a ramp is considered something that is more than or steeper than a one in 20 incline. And that incline can, by building code, can never get steeper than one in 12.

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Karen Brown

So let's explain what that means. Let's just take 1 in 12. Right. Break that down for us.

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Ron Wickman

So, so, so one in 12 essentially means that for every I'm going to use feet and inches. Sorry for people that are well, I guess it doesn't really matter. You can use metric too, but I'm just used to using feet an inch. And so for every foot you you go up vertically, you go 12 feet out. So it's a 1 to 12 ratio.

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Ron Wickman

So for, let's say every meter you go up, you would go 12 meters out.

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Karen Brown

So I think the building trade uses feet in inches.

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Ron Wickman

The residential building trades usually use feet in inches and then government buildings are typically metric. So I'm just I'm just used to speaking in imperial and understanding it better in imperial. But yeah, that's essentially at one in a one in 12 ratio. So one part up 12 parts across.

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Karen Brown

So so has a porch that is three steps from the ground level to the porch. How would they go about this? They'd measure that and that would be roughly what, 22 inches? Yeah.

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Ron Wickman

So both 24 inches or two feet. So two feet is 600 millimeters. You would go out 24 feet. So, so imagine, if you will, your house is four feet above the ground. Your main floor. That means you would need at least 48 feet of ramp and not very many people have front yards that can accommodate such a ramp.

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Ron Wickman

And especially just like one straight long run. There's some other subtle issues around ramps. You can't go more than 30 feet without having to have some sort of landing as well. So often you do like a maybe a switchback ramp where you do a 90 degree turn or a 180 degree turn. So all of this just tends to fill up your yard.

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Ron Wickman

So. So one thing I was going to say about that is in my time and I've been at this in practice for almost 30 years now, and having grown up with a father in a wheelchair at 59, I have nine years old after 59 years of experience. And I can tell you in those years, when you drive through neighborhoods, certainly here in Edmonton and other parts of Alberta that I frequent, Calgary, Red Deer, you drive through, neighborhoods are starting and you've all you just see more and more of these wooden ramps going up.

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Ron Wickman

And I would venture to guess that many of them, if not most of them, don't actually meet any kind of code. They're just sort of slapped together. I'm not even sure how structurally sound they often are, but it is. Desperation requires desperate acts and you rely on friends to to get these things done, handymen to get these things done.

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Ron Wickman

Often you don't you don't go to a certified contractor or structural engineer or anything like that. You just kind of you just kind of get these things up and they're they're primarily they look like they're temporary and they are often very temporary. And you just start. Yeah, and you just start seeing more and more of them, which tells you that this is a serious issue.

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Ron Wickman

Right. And again, for at least 30 years, I've been talking about our our aging population and and how that that's going to influence the way we built. And it hasn't really caught on in terms of making houses so that they're lower to the ground or don't even have steps at the front door. That's still not translating. So we're still in kind of renovation mode and it's really hard, especially nowadays when newer neighborhoods have small lots, smaller front yards.

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Ron Wickman

We're just not set up to to allow for this adaptability.

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Karen Brown

I can tell you that one of the most frequent calls that I get and that I know my colleagues get is from people whose loved one is in rehab. They've had a car accident. They've had a workplace accident. Whatever the case is, they can't come home from rehab until they can get in and out of the house and have a washroom that they can access and use independently.

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Karen Brown

So I think that probably gives birth to a lot of these sketchy ramp structures that that all of us see from time to time. It's not necessarily the best case scenario because, you know, it's part of what you and I have talked about all along is planning ahead, plan for your old age. I know you can't plan for a workplace accident and you can't plan for a car crash.

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Karen Brown

But if we plan to build houses that were more accessible for all people, this would have solved some of these problems.

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Ron Wickman

Oh, absolutely. And and it is it is twofold, a very common issue for for me that I get involved with this exactly what you're talking about. Somebody's been injured maybe through work, a work injury or a car accident or a fall. And a ramp is just necessary. And again, more often not, people will just build something in wood there.

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Ron Wickman

There are companies out there that provide temporary metal ramps. They can be used in a residential context, like a single family house or they're often used in temporary situations where you might have like a big auditorium with a stage and you have people with disabilities that need to get up on that stage. So they they'll build this temporary ramp to get up there and then they're demountable and can be put away and used.

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Ron Wickman

And another time so you see those as well, those metal ramps.

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Karen Brown

So what is the typical material if if you were contracted to design a ramp, what materials would you specify? Typically.

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Ron Wickman

I well, I have I have a I have my own kind of theory, I guess, or concept of building ramps and relating to the costs of ramps. I think I would typically go and try to build with concrete like a concrete sidewalk or a concrete ramp. If we're talking about an elevation change of less two feet or less.

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Ron Wickman

So concrete is by far the most durable material to to build your ramps with you can do a rough a kind of a rough textured surface or we call it a broom finish, which is your most common finish. It's got some grip to it. You add the handrails and it's easy to maintain in the winter time when you get snow and ice, it's easy to chip away the ice or put salt down sand down on the concrete.

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Ron Wickman

The concrete starts to get a bit more expensive. If you get into distances that are more than the two foot vertical rise. So a ramp that's more than 24 feet, for example, a than a wooden ramp or a metal ramp, start to become less expensive or more economical to build.

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Karen Brown

And just touch on what those costs would be. So a two foot concrete ramp.

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Ron Wickman

Now concrete ramp, you have to with a concrete ramp, typically you'd have to build up the earth. So there's some work there. You you build up you build up a bit of a hill and then you pour a concrete basically, you pour a concrete sidewalk on on the hill. Right. So there's there's work to be done with the, with, with all of that, I, I often use about $150 a running foot for, for that.

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Ron Wickman

So that's a that would include your, your metal handrails or your wooden handrails as well that it varies very much probably with regions and and contractors and so on. But often I'll use that to, to kind of help my clients understand that that's what we're talking about. So and then of course.

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Karen Brown

Let's understand that we're recording this in February of 2024. So right. The costs that we're talking about here are what we know to be true now.

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Ron Wickman

More or less. Now, that's. Yes, that's a good that's a good way to put it. Yeah, for sure. Because it it was a lot cheaper 20 years ago and it's probably going to be more expensive ten years from now. Right. So so yeah, the, the the concrete is also, you know, pretty durable at that you can some people try to do the pavers but you know, again, in this part of the world, we get a lot of movement in our earth.

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Ron Wickman

The pavers can start to buckle up there and then that just becomes a horrendous surface to try to to to wheel on even worse, if you're using a cane or a walker. So, yeah, that's not a that's not generally a good idea.

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Karen Brown

So can we say and go so far as to say we don't recommend that.

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Ron Wickman

Yeah. Highly, highly. Don't recommend it. The wood the wood ramp it it varies too. Like you can, you can do a a bit more of a temporary wood ramp where there's really no kind of foundation for that just sits on the ground. So the the ramp wood kind of and again, we're not talking about huge movement, but there would be some movement as the earth freeze freezes and thaws a ramp that just sits on the ground made of wood.

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Ron Wickman

You know, again, is is probably in that $100 and $150 per running foot that's like full on handrails and so on. Maybe a little maybe $100 a running foot for something without any kind of foundation work, like concrete piles, sort of tying it into to the the house itself. So it just doesn't go anywhere and you get no movement at all, which allows the ramp to also always maintain its being flush with the with the door threshold to that you're entering in.

00:13:12:06 - 00:13:21:24

Ron Wickman

So around that can move might might drop by an inch or so and then that could create a real problem getting in and out of the house.

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Karen Brown

Right.

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Ron Wickman

Now. Now, now have sorry. Just having said that, when you get into concrete and you start getting into a 36 foot long concrete sidewalk or even more, then the costs start to escalate quite a bit. Right? So you don't use that $150 anymore. It's just it's so much more earthwork. It's harder to tamp that earth and create a surface that won't sort of collapse, I guess, under the pressure of our free star.

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Ron Wickman

Right. So it I would never recommend somebody doing a 30, 36 foot or 48 foot long ramp in in concrete, unless the the landscape itself allowed for that. So, you know, a hill or something like that. But generally you don't want to build these gigantic hills and then pour concrete on them.

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Karen Brown

Right

00:14:19:32 - 00:14:22:20

Ron Wickman

So yeah, the wood is better for longer distances.

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Karen Brown

And you've touched on railings. Railings are a necessity.

00:14:27:53 - 00:14:28:09

Ron Wickman

Mm.

00:14:28:54 - 00:14:29:08

Karen Brown

Yeah.

00:14:29:26 - 00:14:52:05

Ron Wickman

Yes. So, so a ramp is defined again by something that is steeper than one in 20, that's by the, the building code. So one in 18, one in 15, one in 12. And then you can't get steeper than one in 12. So you have to have handrails on both sides of the of the ramp.

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Karen Brown

Right.

00:14:53:33 - 00:15:24:31

Ron Wickman

And the width of the ramp has to be at least 800. And now I'm talking in metric because the code is in metric all the time at 850 or 860 is the is the least you can have the ramp in terms of width, but most ramps are quite a bit wider, you know, at least three feet or 900 millimeters or more like I usually make them at least four feet wide.

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Karen Brown

Right, right. Well, that's helpful. If you've got a person accompanying you or perhaps a service dog that may to be beside you for some reason.

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Ron Wickman

Yeah. And let let me let me just back up a little bit and share something with you that I think will help listeners as well with my own experience. So, so my, my father built a wheelchair accessible house in 1967 and there was no code at all for accessibility. And this new house and the understanding of of accessible architecture and all that was just really not well known.

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Ron Wickman

So the house was built. It was built two feet above the ground. I think we've we've talked about this in previous podcasts when we talked about visitability but essentially two feet. Again, just to quickly tell you again why most houses are at least two feet above the ground in Canada is because we want to we build in wood and we want to keep the wood away from water.

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Ron Wickman

So usually our joists or at least ten, 12 inches, and then we need to be another eight inches above above the ground from there. So we're talking at least 20, 24 inches before we would actually get to the main floor. So that's that's kind of where the two feet comes from. I hope that makes sense.

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Karen Brown

It makes a lot of sense. And thank you for clarifying that.

00:16:57:20 - 00:17:23:15

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So so this house was just built in that traditional way. It was a little 1100 square foot bungalow. And my dad detached garage. My dad noticed that it was there's two foot distance above the ground and he's he was like, well, what are we going to do about that? And and the builder said, Oh, yeah, I guess that's a problem, isn't it?

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Ron Wickman

And so they just poured a ramp in 1967 that was essentially one in six steepness. So that's very, very steep. But I think the when the code first was proposed, one in six was kind of like the first dimension or first thought that people had. So my dad would and this ramp led from the ground to the door to the door threshold.

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Ron Wickman

So essentially for almost 40 years of my dad's life, he used the rails to grip on to the rails and pull himself up, get to the front door, locked the brakes of his wheelchair, his manual wheelchair, and unlock the door, open the door, unlock his brakes and wheel in. Imagine coming ... leaving the house was was having to reach back on this incline as you tried to reach back and grab the door handle and and shut the door and then he would hold on to the rails going down so that he didn't go too fast and then make his way to the detached garage.

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Ron Wickman

So he had that for, again, almost 40 years of his life in a wheelchair and and about three or four years before he passed away, we redid that ramping situation, which was a little bit tricky. We had to do a a 90 degree turn, but we we were able to build the new ramp so that it was a one in 12 slope.

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Ron Wickman

And we also had a five foot by five foot, 1500 millimeter by 1500 millimeter level landing at the door itself. So once you're out at the door, then that then you have a level area that you can kind of get yourself positioned, gain access to the door handle and get in or get out, right? So when we do talk about ramps, we have to remember that there are these requirements for level areas at the top and bottom of the ramps as well.

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Karen Brown

Two things ...

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Ron Wickman

Just again adds to space and cost.

00:19:37:22 - 00:19:42:52

Karen Brown

Two things come to mind. Number one, how relieved your father must have been with the new ramp when it was in place.

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Ron Wickman

Mm hmm.

00:19:43:58 - 00:19:50:52

Karen Brown

And secondly, his upper body strength must have been out of this world for all those years.

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Ron Wickman

It it was. He had really good upper body strength. You're. You're right. But he was also close to 60 when we switched out the ramp and all those years of kind of abuse to his shoulders and pressure on his shoulders finally gave way. And that's why we had to do the ramp. He just he just couldn't make the house work anymore.

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Ron Wickman

And so, you know, he was driving a car. He went to from that to driving a van because he just couldn't transfer anymore, getting in and out of his vehicle. He was out he was actually using a bathtub and imagine trying to transfer in and out a bathtub if you're paralyzed from the waist down and that just he just couldn't do it anymore.

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Ron Wickman

So all of this came because he was somebody with a disability who was also aging. So it's not just hard on those of us who are able bodied as we age, but it's also becomes a big factor for people who who are disabled as well.

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Karen Brown

Right.

00:20:54:19 - 00:21:19:35

Ron Wickman

So it just it just kind of tells you that I've been around this a long time and it's it's I'm not going to lie. It's a bit discouraging and disappointing that I still continue to drive through neighborhoods and see brand new houses being built, infill housing that is, you know, highly promoted in this part of the world. Now, in all of Canada, this infill housing.

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Ron Wickman

And there's you know, there are four or five more steps to the door, brand new houses. We have an opportunity to do this right. And we just don't, you know, and it's just really it's really it's really sad to see. So then you just see these and these narrow lots now taking a bigger lot and dividing it into two.

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Ron Wickman

You just can't get the ramps there anymore, right? They're just not going to work at all. So it's becoming a. Sorry, go ahead.

00:21:48:00 - 00:22:16:22

Karen Brown

And it's it's just such a problem that we have talked about time and time and time again that builders and developers continually say, we will build what the people want, but the people don't know what to ask for. Can we just go back to code for a second because you've touched on. And how code applies to residential versus commercial or public spaces.

00:22:16:22 - 00:22:52:31

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So this there's a there's sometimes a bit of a misconception about this, but the, the, the building code is, is primarily for all buildings, but primarily for buildings used by the public. Right. It's to ensure the health, safety and welfare of, of people who use the buildings, whether that be staff or visitors, the the barrier free design requirements within the building code are a part three of the of the building codes.

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Ron Wickman

So part three is for public buildings. So when we talk about accessible washrooms ramps, the need for ramps, these all relate to spaces primarily used by the general public, a single family house or anything up to a four plex or smaller is considered residential in scope, and residential construction falls in part nine of the building code and part nine has no barrier free design requirements.

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Ron Wickman

So I do often get into the situation where we do build a ramp and the the inspectors want that ramp to meet part three of the building code. And and we do typically we do make that meet part three or better. I have though found myself in situations where we've done a small deck and ramp off of master bedroom.

00:23:59:10 - 00:24:21:06

Ron Wickman

Let's say the bedroom used by the individual who uses a wheelchair is has a disability. And that is primarily just used for emergency egress. So it's it's not a big deck that people enjoy themselves on. It's just so enough of a landing to get out of the house onto the deck and then a ramp would get you out of the house.

00:24:21:51 - 00:24:47:41

Ron Wickman

And I've tried to make that ramp steeper, maybe even one in six in terms of slope, thinking that it's only used for emergency egress. And I just don't want to take up a lot of space in somebody's yard unnecessarily. And that's where it's a bit of hit and miss for me, frankly. So depending on the inspector, it's not clear.

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Ron Wickman

But the inspector has the ability to use their their own discretion. So more often than not, they do ask that the ramp be made according to code, even though I would argue it doesn't need to be. It's not, it's not something that's being used in that context. Right. So so it does get a little bit tricky and this a little bit beyond the ramps.

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Ron Wickman

But you know, again, I would certainly I guess you can't hold me to this because again, it depends on who inspects your house. But if you were doing a bathroom and you needed grab bars in a certain place for your own disability and your own independence and safety, I would put those grab bars where you need them, not where the building code tells you they should be.

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Ron Wickman

I don't see the I don't see the benefits of that. So in a in a private residence, I think you can make a strong argument that you're you're going to do what works for you as an individual. And that is something that we get into a bit of a gray zone. It's it's interesting that way.

00:25:52:23 - 00:26:18:13

Karen Brown

We do have some pictures that you sent to me of some various ramps. You know, one that is the typical example that we see and then some better alternatives. So for our listeners who are listening to the audio version of the podcast, we will do our best to describe these images really, really well, but we will put them in the podcast notes and for those who are watching the video version, then you will see it.

00:26:18:29 - 00:26:27:40

Karen Brown

So it's it's a little rough, you know, in terms of showing the PowerPoint presentation, but we'll give it a go. There we go. There's the first one.

00:26:29:30 - 00:27:11:51

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So the this image shows two houses in a mature neighborhood in Edmonton. I can't even remember exactly where it is, but it doesn't matter. Fairly common neighbor, mature neighborhood. There are 50 foot wide lots, there's two bungalows. Each of the bungalows are a good three feet above the ground, the main floor. And that, again, another another big issue for people in this part of the world is to is to try to get that main floor as high out of the ground as you can to give yourself as large a window space in the basement as you can as well.

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Ron Wickman

I would make an argument that we can just build bigger window wells and you still get your your big windows in the basement. But conventional attitudes have always been, well, let's raise the house up. That's the easiest thing to do, except for when you're in a wheelchair or have a disability. So these two ramps are, oh, boy, a good a good 30, 36, 40, maybe even more feet each.

00:27:41:06 - 00:28:14:42

Ron Wickman

There are switchback ramps. Basically, they they take up the front yards of their of of the respective front yards there and they're both built out of wood. Looks like they have concrete, concrete piles that they're sitting on and they're I don't know, you might have your opinion, Karen, but I think they're quite unsightly. They don't give they don't give ramps a good a good name.

00:28:15:30 - 00:28:24:47

Ron Wickman

And they certainly don't give a good feel for those of us promoting a better, more beautiful kind of accessible architecture.

00:28:25:15 - 00:28:46:32

Karen Brown

I would agree with you. I find them to be quite ugly. And I think that in terms of people being nervous about how they might sell their house when the time came, they would be very nervous about that. But you need to live. So these are the ramp designs that they have chosen or have been proposed to them.

00:28:46:32 - 00:28:58:17

Karen Brown

But it's also the kind of ramp design that that you, Ron and I would see when we get these emergency calls from people that say, hey, I can't come home until something happens, you know, that I can get into the house, right?

00:28:59:13 - 00:29:29:11

Ron Wickman

That's that's exactly it. And I think, you know, a lot of times people they just don't have the the ability to to easily move and find something else. And so they're they're in a tough spot. Right. And and this is often now we're seeing seniors that don't have the the assets to be able to go, well, fine, I'll sell my house and just build something new or, you know, move somewhere if you're if you're a bit more elderly.

00:29:29:13 - 00:29:53:15

Ron Wickman

My mom is 81, for example. You know, there's no way you're going to get her out of a community that she's been in since 1967. She wants to stay where she is. Now, she's lucky, in a sense that her house was built to be wheelchair accessible. So she can do that. And, you know, maybe I should promote that more and show that as a good example of somebody being able to stay at home easily.

00:29:54:05 - 00:30:07:44

Ron Wickman

But we don't all have that choice, right? That choice hasn't been presented to us and we just don't have the, the, the, the income to be able to, to make it work in any other way than to kind of slap on a ramp in front of your house.

00:30:08:04 - 00:30:11:13

Karen Brown

Right. Let's move on to the next one. There we go.

00:30:12:55 - 00:30:45:32

Ron Wickman

Well, we're at it, too. I should mention that I'll I'll send you some more photos that there's a couple of examples that I can show you. The alternative to the ramp, which is a mechanical porch lift. So if you think of I can't do my math here, but if you're looking at a 24 foot long ramp, wooden ramp that, you know, even $100 a running foot, that's 2400.

00:30:45:41 - 00:31:14:32

Ron Wickman

Am I right there? You have $2400. And and if you start getting into longer ramps, of course, the numbers go up. So, yeah, you know, I always say a ramp is you should budget at least, you know, double what I just said. Like at least 5000 typically unless it's a nice short ramp, you can get a a porch lift, this mechanical porch lift that you can just add on to your front steps.

00:31:15:50 - 00:31:16:09

Karen Brown

Right.

00:31:16:09 - 00:31:21:51

Karen Brown

And then in that picture, I'll put it here, but I'll put it back in the podcast that we did. Yeah.

00:31:21:51 - 00:31:42:21

Ron Wickman

Like I won't be able to send it to you right now, but yeah, you can just have it in the for the podcast notes, but essentially it's just something that sits beside people might have seen it, this sort of funny looking thing that that sits beside the sits beside the front steps. There's all kinds of logistics to that as well.

00:31:42:21 - 00:32:12:35

Ron Wickman

It's the the lifts themselves though, are about $7 - $8,000. That's just a supply, install a lift. Then you've got to add add costs related to making a level area, maybe pouring a sidewalk to the entrance of the lift, modifying your steps a lot of times means sort of re kind of adding some structure onto your steps to make up.

00:32:12:35 - 00:32:26:32

Ron Wickman

Usually you're you're top landing of your step is about four inches below the door threshold. So all of that gives you something that probably ends up being about $10,000 at least. Right. And they definitely do not look nice.

00:32:27:30 - 00:32:38:16

Karen Brown

Well, I will mention to you that for those who might think of going that route and want to check into the option, I do see them come available second hand from time to time. So.

00:32:38:59 - 00:32:39:42

Ron Wickman

Yeah, that's true that.

00:32:40:04 - 00:33:04:01

Karen Brown

The cost of a brand new one might be able to be mitigated by a little bit by finding something second hand. So but yeah, I will also say that I have seen some porch lifts that can be fairly attractive when people start to use landscaping around them and and do it up properly, they can be okay. They can be okay.

00:33:04:06 - 00:33:07:40

Karen Brown

Better than a ramp that takes up your entire front yard.

00:33:08:27 - 00:33:31:25

Ron Wickman

That's right. Yeah. So. So again, you can you can sort of see if you're around $10,000 for the porch lift. If you're you're around that number probably too. If you're like a four foot 40, 48 foot long ramp or you know more, you're going to save a lot of space. Something you can shield like you said, with some landscaping and that.

00:33:32:25 - 00:34:00:10

Ron Wickman

So it the porch lift again becomes a very good option when you look at houses that are I use them all the time when I'm in a situation with a bi level house. So, so that's where you're often like almost six feet above the ground, right, with your your main floor. Right. And, and first of all, I should say with a bi level, I tell people to move, I just find.

00:34:00:10 - 00:34:00:37

Karen Brown

I was wondering when you were going to say that!

00:34:01:38 - 00:34:23:34

Ron Wickman

Find the money somehow and just move. Don't, don't do it. But you know, I have people I've just been in a situation where for a number of reasons they decide to stay. And it does be, you know, you can imagine a ramp trying to go six feet vertically. That's, you know, it's if you have to have a landing every every 30 feet, you're at least two landings.

00:34:23:34 - 00:34:46:38

Ron Wickman

So you're got you've got a really long ramp for sure. So so the the economics are are are definitely play a role in all of this. Right. And that's where it's great if you can find a friend or a neighbor or family member that can just build something for you, it can be done very, very economically that way.

00:34:46:56 - 00:34:58:18

Ron Wickman

And again, that's why most people do it that way. They just don't have the resources to pay for something that's done sort of properly. But wouldn't it be nice if you had no steps at your front door and you never had to worry about a ramp?

00:34:58:25 - 00:35:03:45

Karen Brown

I mean, that is the ultimate solution, right? Yeah. Let's take a look at this second image here.

00:35:04:27 - 00:35:31:16

Ron Wickman

So, yeah, so so the next couple of images show kind of group home situations. This is one that I was involved with and we were building in a mature neighborhood. And one of the one of the problems with mature neighborhoods is often the infrastructure below ground isn't very deep. So too you don't always have the option to be able to sink the house into the ground.

00:35:31:16 - 00:35:54:11

Ron Wickman

So that's that's why, you know, when I said, you know, it's too bad we don't build with more or no step entrances and infill, a lot of times it just becomes a little bit tricky. You have to lower the existing infrastructure, which can cost a lot of money. And and our governments aren't interested in helping us out in any way to to make that happen.

00:35:54:11 - 00:36:27:06

Ron Wickman

So here's a situation. This is a ten bedroom group home for people, adults with disabilities. And we had to add add the ramp here. And interestingly enough, what I what I try to do when this is a this ramp is a what we call a switchback ramp. So you you you can either you get to a point where you can either go straight up the stairs five, five steps up to the front door, or you can start to make your way up a ramp.

00:36:27:06 - 00:36:52:03

Ron Wickman

And about halfway you hit a landing and you turn 180 degrees and you go back up towards the the entrance. And so what I what I try to do in these cases is build the the first half of the ramp with the one in 20 slope. And then we can we we can do away with the the handrails.

00:36:52:03 - 00:37:16:10

Ron Wickman

It's a nice, gentle slope that most people can negotiate and when you get to the landing, you have to do some some earth landscaping to so that you don't have like a big drop off area at the landing. That's really easy to do. Just just push some dirt up against the landing. And then your only portion of ramp is the the part that goes back up towards the entrance.

00:37:16:30 - 00:37:53:13

Ron Wickman

So you get rid of a lot of the hand railing and give it a bit more of a landscaping feel. Often that's that's one that's always what I present in the beginning. But more often than not, clients like to just go with the handrails. I for for sometimes they feel it's safer sometimes they feel they don't want to do that extra all that what they perceive as extra work so just you know it's it's hard sometimes when I don't have examples to show people of what I'm talking about, they get a little nervous trying to visualize what I'm what I'm saying.

00:37:53:13 - 00:38:20:24

Ron Wickman

Right. So this this is a nice, I think a fairly nice group home esthetically. But I would make an argument again, the ramp tends to take away from the the esthetics of the house. So anything we could do to make that ramp less kind of visible would be would be great. Having said that, the ramp is used by all of the residents who use this group home.

00:38:20:24 - 00:38:30:09

Ron Wickman

So I wouldn't, I wouldn't give up the ramp for esthetics. So it's needed. But I'm always I'm always working on ways to make it look nicer.

00:38:30:38 - 00:38:39:43

Karen Brown

For our listeners. I'll label this picture B in our podcast notes. And so the picture that I will label C is on the screen now.

00:38:40:53 - 00:39:13:01

Ron Wickman

And yeah, so this is another this is another group home. I wasn't involved in this project, but I was able to visit it. And it's, it's a, it's a small group of of homes in a neighborhood in Edmonton that were built for veterans who are maybe going through some tough times and need some affordable housing. So in a really great way, they made sure that a couple of their units dwellings were made to be accessible as well.

00:39:13:28 - 00:39:41:04

Ron Wickman

So here was a situation where you can see it well in for those that I can see, I guess there's some construction equipment around, so it's not completely finished, but there is a ramp that goes up to the front door of of the this would be the accessible suite for for for a homeowner that are a renter that that, let's say, uses a wheelchair, has a disability.

00:39:41:04 - 00:40:17:43

Ron Wickman

And again, be really nice to to be able to have this closer to the ground so that we could eliminate the ramp itself. But these are modular homes that were brought to site, and there's just some logistics with construction detailing and so on that makes it a little bit trickier to to make this all work. And yeah, it's always so it's always a bit of a tricky thing when we're trying to create something that is affordable, can be built quickly and still meet our accessibility goals.

00:40:18:35 - 00:40:23:34

Karen Brown

Right. Okay. Picture D is up on the screen.

00:40:23:34 - 00:40:49:35

Ron Wickman

And, and so this is a this is a wheelchair accessible house that was built in an inner city neighborhood in Edmonton. So, you know, again, showing that it can be done, that this has a sidewalk that is leading up to the front door. So the house was built low enough to to the ground. There's about an I'd say about an 18 inch difference between the main floor and the and and the ground.

00:40:49:35 - 00:41:13:09

Ron Wickman

The from the public sidewalk to the front door allows you to have a have a sloping sidewalk. So this really isn't a ramp. It's just a sloping sidewalk. For those that can see, it's obvious that the landscaping isn't finished. So there is a big drop off from from each side of the sidewalk that has since been filled in with earth.

00:41:14:00 - 00:41:24:53

Ron Wickman

And you don't you don't have that situation. But this then becomes a nice way of having that that front entrance without any kind of ramp in the front.

00:41:25:26 - 00:41:52:18

Karen Brown

So for those who are listening to the audio version, this is a two story house, probably older, and there is a sidewalk that goes. The entrance door is right in the middle of the first story on the ground floor and the sidewalk the sloped piece that Ron is talking about goes straight up to that door. And there is a piece of the sidewalk that goes off to the left, presumably around to a side door or the backyard as well.

00:41:52:18 - 00:41:54:21

Karen Brown

That is not sloped. It's just a regular sidewalk.

00:41:55:11 - 00:42:00:39

Ron Wickman

Yeah, that's that's correct. And not not that it makes a big difference, but this is a brand new house, so.

00:42:00:42 - 00:42:01:51

Karen Brown

Oh, is it really.

00:42:01:51 - 00:42:08:39

Ron Wickman

Yeah. It's just been designed to look a bit, a bit more kind of Victorian and sort of traditional look. Yeah.

00:42:08:56 - 00:42:18:44

Karen Brown

Okay, fair enough. And so once this is landscaped, which you say it is now, I'll bet it is now. Yeah. Nobody would even know that that is an accessible entrance.

00:42:19:27 - 00:42:25:42

Ron Wickman

Correct. Correct. That's right. And that's the eye. That's certainly the ideal, right? That's what we're trying to achieve.

00:42:26:03 - 00:42:36:08

Karen Brown

Okay. So picture E is on the sidewalk or sorry, on the the screen now. And this is it. A bungalow. Looks like a bungalow.

00:42:36:31 - 00:42:59:30

Ron Wickman

Yeah. This is a this is a bungalow where the the the homeowners didn't want to get their main floor too close to the ground. They wanted to have a basement that had and you can't really see it in the front of the house. But in the back, there's, it's not a walk out, but it's it's there's quite a bit of window space in the back of the house.

00:43:00:08 - 00:43:23:14

Ron Wickman

But they did definitely want to have a space for one of their aging parents to come and be able to visit at least visit the home and have a have a main floor flexible bedroom space that they could stay in if they were visiting for any period of time. So this was also a nice solution where we were kind of the reverse of the house.

00:43:23:14 - 00:43:48:02

Ron Wickman

We just looked at the sidewalk just that goes to the front door in the middle of the the bungalow is is a sidewalk that follows the ground slope and gets to a set of steps for steps that lead to the lead to the front door, but another sidewalk, a very gentle slope it slopes to the side of the house.

00:43:48:24 - 00:44:15:46

Ron Wickman

And as as you get to the side of the house that there is it's hard to see in this photo, but there is a bit of a ramp. So it it steepens a bit. There's handrails there and that leads to a side door that provides you with on grade no step entrance at the at the side. So this was a subtle and nice way of of making the house accessible within the context that we were building in.

00:44:15:46 - 00:44:21:56

Karen Brown

And and again, people would not know that this was an accessible entrance, so.

00:44:22:00 - 00:44:23:01

Ron Wickman

Correct. Yeah.

00:44:23:01 - 00:44:30:04

Karen Brown

Well done. Yeah. All right. Last but not least, picture F now, this is definitely a newer home in a subdivision.

00:44:30:47 - 00:44:59:57

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So this is this is just outside of Edmonton in a neighborhood, St Albert. This house was actually built probably 20 years ago now. So this was interesting because it really challenged the builder who was not at all familiar with a lot of the concepts I was talking about. But this was a homeowner that uses a wheelchair and it's your sort of standard kind of spec home.

00:45:01:12 - 00:45:31:20

Ron Wickman

But we were able to do the the driveway and sidewalk with the front car garage this two story house has a front door that is back from the garage. So there's a good 40 some feet from the public sidewalk to the to the front door, which allows us to do a nice sloping concrete pathway that just leads to the door.

00:45:31:54 - 00:45:58:48

Ron Wickman

So this was something that took some doing just to convince the the builder that this is this is doable. And, you know, something that we need need to to make happen. And again, I would make a strong argument that one wouldn't notice that this house is any different than most of the houses on the block. This this house doesn't look a lot different than the other houses that are in the neighborhood.

00:45:58:48 - 00:46:14:58

Karen Brown

Right. It's it's lovely. And you could have an entire community of houses like that and nobody would know the difference at all. But people would experience the difference if they had mobility devices or if they were moving furniture, which again, is something you and I have talked about before, families and toddlers and so forth.

00:46:16:18 - 00:46:42:25

Ron Wickman

And You know, just sorry. It doesn't hurt to point out that in newer neighborhoods, a lot of newer neighborhoods, they have architectural controls that demand that you have at least three steps at the front door. So, you know, you can't build a house without steps. And I'd like to know I mean, I have my I have speculate that that's somehow that has to do with resale value and having no steps to the front door somehow reduces your property value.

00:46:42:25 - 00:47:18:23

Ron Wickman

I really don't know how, but certainly the attitude, right. So when we do build a house in a neighborhood like the last photo, typically you have to go to the developer of that subdivision and ask for special requirement or special relaxation of that, that specific architectural control. I just this past weekend, I was with a friend building in a newer neighborhood in Edmonton and we talked about that and he said, Yeah, we're going to we're just going to put a ramp in our in our garage because they wouldn't allow us to have it without steps.

00:47:18:23 - 00:47:34:39

Ron Wickman

He actually tried he said he said he tried with the developer and they said, we won't allow you to do this if you're just speculating that you might need you might be in a wheelchair one day. So if if you are in a wheelchair, then we'll probably grant you the relaxation. If you're if if you're not, then we won't.

00:47:34:43 - 00:47:34:59

Ron Wickman

Right.

00:47:35:02 - 00:47:36:31

Karen Brown

So it's like you have to bring a doctor’s note ...

00:47:36:32 - 00:47:37:09

Ron Wickman

Kind of says ...

00:47:37:11 - 00:47:38:01

Karen Brown

To the builder now.

00:47:39:36 - 00:47:43:55

Ron Wickman

So it says a lot about that situation. It's really, really kind of bizarre.

00:47:44:08 - 00:47:48:20

Karen Brown

Oh, my gosh. That's I mean, we're laughing, but that's pathetic.

00:47:49:59 - 00:48:07:21

Ron Wickman

It's yeah, it's it's one of those things, you know, having said that, I, I love doing these podcasts. I love talking to you about it. I feel like we're maybe making a bit of a difference. But then I tell a story like that and I just feel like, well, I made much progress in my 59 years.

00:48:08:58 - 00:48:28:28

Karen Brown

But I think that we you know, we can educate the public about this. You know, if you're if you're wanting to do renovations on your house, think ahead, which, again, we've said time and time before, don't think about the trends. Don't think about what's hot for you right now. Think about what your life will be like five years, ten years, 40 years down the road.

00:48:29:09 - 00:48:56:45

Karen Brown

And if you need a doctor's note to give to the builders, then maybe that's maybe that's what you should do. Can we return just a brief discussion about the house that had the ramp to the side entrance because I know that people who consider ramps in the front of their house, particularly the gaudy looking ones that we saw picture A do have security concerns.

00:48:56:45 - 00:49:16:40

Karen Brown

And that's a legitimate concern for people. I mean, I, I sort of hold the belief that everybody is entitled to walk through the front door. But if you're going to have a ramp that looks like the ones in picture A did then maybe security is something that you should put at the top priority instead of further down. What do you think about that?

00:49:18:39 - 00:49:48:01

Ron Wickman

Yeah, you know what? In my own in my own experience, I have to agree with you. I've had a number of clients who actually aren't totally influenced by the the thought that the ramp would look ugly in the front of their house. They're more concerned that the ramp would indicate that there's somebody inside who's vulnerable and kind of easy bait to rob and get in, you know?

00:49:48:01 - 00:50:31:28

Ron Wickman

And so security does become a big issue for for people thinking along those lines. It's not something I thought about much, you know, years ago. But clearly, that's that is something that people do legitimately have reason to be concerned about. So so, yeah, there are there are many instances where, where I have done a we could have done ramp in the front, but we didn't and we had to go wrap even all the way to the back of the house so that right to the back door, if there was no side door there or the side door didn't offer a good a good way to enter the house.

00:50:32:52 - 00:51:01:58

Ron Wickman

And then a lot of times we try to shield a ramp. So I might build a couple instances. I've built walls in front of the ramp. And again, this is only when we have the ability to do a short ramp. We can build a kind of almost like a landscape wall in front of the ramp. So it just looks like if you'll allow the vegetation to grow up the walls and it just looks like a hedge or something like that, and you don't even know that it's a ramp there.

00:51:03:03 - 00:51:14:20

Ron Wickman

So there there's always ways to kind of work around it. But it is it's definitely something that's that's become a concern for for a lot of people.

00:51:14:45 - 00:51:32:57

Karen Brown

Right. So the front door is an option, side door is an option, backdoor is an option, lift out of the garage into the the main floor is an option. So people do have a number of options depending on the type of house they live in.

00:51:32:57 - 00:52:03:03

Ron Wickman

Yeah. This is a this is also a good time. Just to just to mention, though, that in all of this, in my time working as a as an architect, the cost to renovate a house has just gone through the roof, so to speak. And, you know, there was a time when I used I do a lot of cost analysis of, you know, is it is it more cost effective to renovate your house or to build a new one?

00:52:03:33 - 00:52:29:57

Ron Wickman

And if you isolate the accessibility features, only, you know the cost to add all the extra features to, let's say, your typical spec house that's not designed to be accessible at all. And you add all the features that would allow it to be accessible, like the no step entrance, even the extra residential elevator to to gain access from one level to another.

00:52:30:51 - 00:52:59:59

Ron Wickman

The bathroom that's got the shower area that without curves, an accessible kitchen, three foot wide doors, all that kind of stuff. If you add all that extra cost to your your typical builders home that the total cost is still far less than if you bought a house, an existing home and tried to renovate it. So that wasn't always the case to some years ago.

00:53:00:37 - 00:53:27:38

Ron Wickman

Renovations were actually quite, quite cost effective. And the way to go now, I would argue that in more cases now you're better off just tearing your existing house down and starting over then to or you know, just selling it and moving then to try to renovate it. It's the cost of labour, so demolition costs are just so much more expensive than they used to be and cost of materials and so on.

00:53:27:38 - 00:53:58:47

Ron Wickman

So you know, you can imagine a renovation requires us to sort of tear the house apart and then and then rebuild it, right? Yeah. So, so all of this costs a lot of money and and still our governments aren't being very helpful. So there are there are some small amounts of government funding. There's a program called Ramp, which, you know, essentially, I guess the idea that you could they would help pay for a ramp.

00:53:58:47 - 00:54:22:50

Ron Wickman

But, you know, that that I don't know all the details of that program, but you have to meet a certain income level a like a low income level. So if you if you if you make more money than a certain amount, then you're not entitled to this, this grant money. But I still think it's only around $5,000 or something.

00:54:22:50 - 00:54:56:51

Ron Wickman

So these days that doesn't even get you a ramp period. You know, so you can't rely on on government funding to help you. And the only way, again, that's getting a little away, like further away from the ramp issue, but it's still really important is, you know, the government the government of Canada at least has really been pushing hard to get us to build more energy efficient housing, seeing the long term cost savings in all of that for for us as a society and overall community, but also individually, we'll all start to save money.

00:54:58:00 - 00:55:33:13

Ron Wickman

I, I can only argue that that's the same thing when it comes to building houses to be more adaptable and accessible. It just is. It's only going to benefit all of us. It takes a lot of energy to demolish a house and put in new materials. Like if you can make it so that you can just easily adapt, you know, if you just need to add a grab bar, you don't if you're in a wheelchair and you get hurt or if you if you're somebody that gets hurt and then you're in a wheelchair, or if you could just move into your house and at least be in the house and and live there while you

00:55:33:13 - 00:55:55:36

Ron Wickman

sort of strategize and figure out what you can do in the long term, that's that's a tremendous amount of savings that gets you out of the hospital setting and into your home. Like that's a that's just it just makes economic sense, too, right? But the government's just not quite there yet. They just they just don't see the, the benefits of that.

00:55:55:36 - 00:56:00:02

Ron Wickman

Or maybe they do. They just they just can't make it work administratively. I'm not sure.

00:56:00:24 - 00:56:40:53

Karen Brown

I think in a lot of cases it's a left hand, right hand issue, you know, so one ministry is focused on this and another ministry is focused on that. And you have to bring them all together under the umbrella of accessibility and make them see the logic and the cost savings to health care and so on. I mean, when you look at the latest statistics on disability that have been released by StatsCan and you see that over 40% of adults, 65 and older claim a disability and that the most frequently claimed disability is pain related, know people that people might say, oh, it's wheelchair, it's it's pain related.

00:56:41:38 - 00:57:09:18

Karen Brown

It's painful for people to live in their houses. I mean, let's extrapolate that. I know I'm it sounds like I'm connecting dots on things that are there, but they are people are reporting pain issues. And if that's the case, it's pain throughout their whole lives. So let's ease that pain. And if we do it early enough, maybe whatever the pain related issues are would have held off for some time if we didn't make them bend so far to plug something in or reach so high to to get something.

00:57:09:20 - 00:57:14:37

Karen Brown

Yeah. Struggle with houses that just simply don't match who they are and what they need.

00:57:15:38 - 00:57:50:18

Ron Wickman

Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah, you're right. And I just. Just this week, I already I mean, it's only Tuesday, but I've been I was just reading an article yesterday, a lady who's who's has a visual limitation and she she made an it raised an interesting point where she falls in this funny zone, where she's she's she's legally blind, but she can see enough that doesn't allow her some benefits some some financial benefits.

00:57:50:45 - 00:58:12:38

Ron Wickman

So she's she had wrote this whole article about how, you know, that even what the definition of a disability is and how you can gain access to funding and so on. But one thing she did raise in the article was she says one characteristic of disability has become nearly universal in Canada, and that's poverty. So so that's a big deal, right?

00:58:12:50 - 00:58:38:29

Ron Wickman

People with disabilities just don't have the money typically to be able to do a lot of this stuff. So it's it's sometimes easy for us on the outside to go, oh, well, you know, it's $5,000. That's not that much. Well it it is to somebody who makes $10,000 a year or something, you know, barely surviving or is on aid, you know, so it really is it really is is a problem.

00:58:38:29 - 00:59:02:06

Ron Wickman

And, you know, I guess for me, one thing that I would try to impress upon people, certainly within my profession of architecture is, is you have to do more than just read about it and understand what the codes are saying. You have to really get into the trenches and spend time with people who have disabilities, spend time with the issues.

00:59:02:34 - 00:59:25:01

Ron Wickman

I know it's an investment of your time and energy, but it's the only way to make it work. Right? And, and the same with government. It's easy to sit back and talk about policy and all that, but. But spend a day in somebody else's shoes, so to speak. Right. And they're in their situation and and and well actually do more than that.

00:59:25:01 - 00:59:46:57

Ron Wickman

Spend more than a day, I would argue a day just gives you an inkling of what it's like. But just spend the time really, really, really try to appreciate the situation that people are in. And and I think that's just that's what makes this whole issue so hard is builders, architects, decision makers, they just don't spend the time doing it.

00:59:46:57 - 00:59:58:06

Ron Wickman

And I and I don't think it's because they're cold hearted at all. I think it's because they've got other priorities that are higher, their list of priorities that they that they need to deal with. Right.

00:59:58:21 - 00:59:58:58

Karen Brown

I don't think it even enters their thinking.

00:59:58:58 - 01:00:18:32

Ron Wickman

And maybe it doesn't even enter their thinking, which is kind of sad in a way, too. But yeah. Yeah. I mean, you're probably right. There are some people there that I think once it's raised, I think then people go, wow, you know, that's a that does sound like a problem, but it's just it's somebody else's problem, I guess, you know?

01:00:18:34 - 01:00:36:16

Ron Wickman

So it it really it really it it's a it's a tough thing. But I think for myself, like so many others in this world, we just got to keep trying, right? So you just got to keep at it. And and and do what we can to get the word out there.

01:00:36:44 - 01:00:40:37

Karen Brown

Right. And the last word on ramps will go to you.

01:00:41:43 - 01:00:48:48

Ron Wickman

Last word on ramps to do everything in your power, not to have one or not need one.

01:00:50:13 - 01:00:53:56

Karen Brown

For sure. For sure. But but when you do need one.

01:00:54:05 - 01:01:32:12

Ron Wickman

When you when you do need one, consult an expert. Go to somebody that knows what they're doing. Do some research before you before you jump into it. And I know that's hard, too, because sometimes you don't have that luxury of time to to to be able to do that. So no reason. No reason, even if you don't need it right now, not to to spend a little bit of time learning more, more about the issues, because if it's not you directly affected, I can almost guarantee there's somebody in your life that would benefit from your knowledge, whatever knowledge you've gained.

01:01:32:12 - 01:01:32:30

Ron Wickman

Right.

01:01:32:59 - 01:01:33:24

Karen Brown

Right.

01:01:33:32 - 01:01:34:51

Ron Wickman

On. On the issue of ramps.

01:01:35:21 - 01:01:49:45

Karen Brown

Any questions can certainly be directed here to us hello at RenoStudios dot com and if I don't have the resources to answer your question, I will call Ron and see what he has to offer to the situation. But is that fair, Ron?

01:01:50:52 - 01:01:55:20

Ron Wickman

Sure, yeah. I'm always happy to try to field questions for sure.

01:01:55:38 - 01:02:22:45

Karen Brown

Okay, perfect. Well, we will wrap up this edition of Real Life Renos : The Podcast, and I will thank Ron for joining us and invite all of you to join us again for the next episode of Real Life Renos : The Podcast.