

Outdoor Spaces

00:00:00:00 - 00:00:25:16

Karen Brown

Welcome to another episode of Real Life Renos The Podcast. Today we're joined by frequent guest Ron Wickman, who is an architect specializing in barrier free design. Ron joins us from Edmonton, Alberta. We are also joined by Robert Lipka. Robert has a master's degree in Urban and Rural Planning from Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada, and is a member of the Alberta Professional Planners Institute.

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Karen Brown

He's currently a principal urban designer with the City of Edmonton's urban design team, and has 20 plus years working in Edmonton, Toronto and Auckland, New Zealand, providing designs and reviews that focus on urban design, universal design and crime prevention through environmental design. I'm sure we could do a whole podcast just on Robert's experiences in New Zealand, but today we'll be talking about creating accessible outdoor spaces and the conversation veered off into the increasing prevalence of infill housing, some of them fronting on back alleys.

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Karen Brown

Can accessibility and appropriate outdoor living be created in these spaces? We'll find out. Welcome to Robert and Ron. I'm so happy to have our our three person podcast going today, because we're going to learn a great deal.

00:01:16:03 - 00:01:23:07

Robert Lipka

Well, thank you very much, Karen. It's nice to be in there. I'm looking forward to this chat. Perfect. Yeah.

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Ron Wickman

Yeah, yeah, thanks. And as always, I do enjoy this. I, I like the idea of, adding some more expertise into our conversations, for sure.

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Karen Brown

Absolutely. We want to talk a bit, at least in the beginning, about residential outdoor spaces. There are so many people who live in homes that are 5100 years old, and they want to stay there for as long as they possibly can. Perhaps they've been turned over in the family, but other people are making their own kind of home out of it.

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Karen Brown

The point is, the homes aren't being changed very much, and at the same time, we have newer subdivisions being built that look very different from the subdivisions that we all probably grew up in. Robert, what can you tell us about creating beautiful outdoor spaces in this type of an environment?

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Robert Lipka

Oh, that's a great that's that could be a really long answer to that one. But, first of all, I grew up in downtown Toronto, so I can't really relate to growing up in a suburb, thankfully. But, our suburbs here in Edmonton, over time have, have changed. and yes, when subdivisions were first happening in the 50s and 60s, there was a lot of space, around homes.

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Robert Lipka

sometimes the the homes were developed with, rear, alleys, rear lanes, where garage access was and you had a big backyard. and now over time, as things are changing and progressing in a lot of these, subdivisions, and because obviously developers are trying to, you know, eke out every a dollar they can.

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Robert Lipka

the, the size of lots is a heck of a lot smaller, than it used to be. And so, you know, you're getting, homes that are, not very wide are. So. Yeah. Well, they're the site is, is not very wide. And then the home basically takes up almost the entire width of the site. and you get a little tiny backyard, if you're lucky.

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Robert Lipka

if it's a front loaded garage, which a lot of them are, the cars will access from the street and you have a garage at the front in your houses in behind which, from an urban design perspective, is obviously not ideal as well. and then some of the, variations are provided in some of these subdivisions where you do have rear alleys.

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Robert Lipka

so the trying to go back in time and provide rear alleys on some of these newer subdivisions, and which is, you know, makes it a little bit more efficient. But the problem is, then you have a difficulty in accessing, portions of your property. give you an example. if you have a, you're, you're storing your, gardening implements, your lawn mower, etc., in your garage.

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Robert Lipka

some of these houses are so tight. on the lot that there's not much space in between a fence and the house itself. So it's difficult to move, a lawn mower or even some garden implements. from the garage to get to the front yard. so that makes it really difficult, if you can imagine, with somebody who has accessibility issues, somebody in a wheelchair mobility scooter has, some mobility challenges.

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Robert Lipka

Difficulty walking has to use a crutches or canes. That would be very difficult. so yeah, it's it's looking at, you know, people having to bring their, equipment, you know, down the alley, down the side

street, up the front street, and then get to their front of their house. also, you know, garbage collection is is difficult as well, too.

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Robert Lipka

whereas, a lot of these newer subdivisions, even though they have, rear alley access, most of the garbage collection is taken on the front of this house. So you can imagine somebody probably has their, you know, recycling bins and garbage cans in their garage, but the city's not collecting the garbage from the rear alley, like, you know, the neighborhood where I live in Westmount, that happens with some of these newer subdivisions.

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Robert Lipka

That's not happening. You have to bring all your garbage to the front of the house. And so that's really difficult because then you'd either have to bring it around the corner as I described, or bring it right through your house to get up to the front, to put your garbage at the front of the house. So for collection, and again, somebody who's, you know, who, who doesn't have any mobility challenges, that's hard enough.

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Robert Lipka

And imagine if you had a mobility challenge that would be extremely difficult to do. So there's a lot of things that are happening now, in subdivision design that are making it really difficult to, to age in place for people to live in these houses. you know, for their, for the entire life. And so that's a really important thing in planning that we need to consider.

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Karen Brown

There are safety concerns as well for, for everybody. I mean, those narrow spaces between houses, they're not usually lit. Whatever kind of a pathway they put down may not be suitable for somebody who needs a mobility device.

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Robert Lipka

Okay. Oh, correct. Like from a I have CPTED training. So crime prevention through environmental design and you look at some of these, units where, like you said, there might be a little walkway in between, but because the houses houses are generally two or even three stories tall, you can imagine how dark it would be in that little walkway in between the house, if you have one.

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Robert Lipka

and so, you know, people could be, you know, walking up and down the alleys or in the front of the street and, you know, sneak down these alleys to get into backyards and things. So there's definitely CPTED issues, you know, for people, you know, living in those homes. And then obviously, like I said, accessing, their properties, makes it difficult, especially if they have a mobility challenge.

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Robert Lipka

because of the tight nature of it. So, yeah, lighting would be important. putting appropriate fencing in location. So just makes it a bit more difficult for people to access. you know, if their work from a crime prevention, perspective. So there's a lot of things that this new type of development that's happening, the, the term used to be new urbanism.

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Robert Lipka

now they're calling it just, you know, basically building, lots that are just, you know, more dense. Right? So that's the city's pushing for greater density, which is great. but unfortunately, it doesn't work for, for for some people. Right. Like I mentioned, somebody with mobility challenges. These types of houses would be very difficult to live in.

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Robert Lipka

even visit, when I review applications at the city, I try to push for, If you cannot build a fully accessible home, at least, seek to

construct one that's visitable, right? Meaning that somebody could visit a friend. there would be a washroom on the ground floor of the of the unit, making sure that the doors are obviously wide enough to access the house.

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Robert Lipka

So it's not fully accessible, but at least it's visitable. And even, when I'm working with developers, to push for that is sometimes a challenge. so, yeah, things are getting a little bit better in that respect. especially some of the newer buildings that are happening downtown. that's been a bit easier to push for, but in suburbia, I'm still having difficulty pushing for those kind of elements in those right.

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Karen Brown

And visitable homes are something that Ron and I have spent quite a bit of time talking about. So let's bring you in on this, Ron, because with with the push to density, which Robert has mentioned, granny suites, secondary units, now we've got shared yards and the need for shared access. one person might need an accessible yard. Somebody else, maybe the primary landowner doesn't.

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Karen Brown

How do we maneuver around all of that?

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Ron Wickman

Yeah. So I just want to, pick up on some of the things that Robert said as well. and starting, starting with this concept of the visitor ability. We have talked in the past, Karen, you and I, about, about this issue of visitability. And we did look at it from the point of view of planning new subdivisions and, rules around, creating, housing, or creating a landscape that allows for easier, making it easier to have the no step entrance at the, at the front door and something that I've never really been able to get a handle on.

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Ron Wickman

And, and, Robert and I talk frequently, but I never really talk about this particular issue. But when it comes to the city, being involved in the development of new, new neighborhoods and suburban neighborhoods. does this does this city have any enforcement rules in terms of, a certain percentage have to be, or there's a certain density that's only allowed in a subdivision.

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Ron Wickman

So you have to have a certain proportion of like single family compared to multifamily. you have to have a certain proportion of, land type development as opposed to front car garages. Or does the developer kind of have free rein, which I've always thought was the case that the developer has to meet a certain criteria when it comes to water management and the the landscape.

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Ron Wickman

But once, once that's met, they can they can have as many lots single family lots as they want on the, on the, on the land and so on. So before I kind of get into the weeds, any more than that, I just wonder, Robert, if you have any comments about that, because certainly, when you get into areas like that have, architectural controls, often I'm faced with, with the fact that an architectural control is that you have to have at least fronts, three steps at the front door, which completely goes against visitor ability.

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Ron Wickman

And then we have to ask for special permission from the developer. And so it seems to me that the city kind of stays out of, really getting into looking at subdivision development with this kind of accessibility lens. Like, they don't they might promote it, maybe, but they tend tend to stay away from any kind of enforcement or, you know, strong, regulations.

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Robert Lipka

Yeah. No. All great questions, Ron. as I was indicated earlier, you know, we are getting, you know, improved, development of apartment buildings in such downtown and another, you know, more highly dense areas where you're getting apartments and, condominiums, where they are more accessible than they used to be, but unfortunately, single family housing.

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Robert Lipka

you're right, you're bang on like they there are, as far as I'm aware, I'm an urban designer. I'm not a planner at the city, so I'm not, you know, intimately familiar with the zoning bylaw, especially the new one. I have had some input into it, so I'm generally aware of it. And I'm pretty confident that there's not a lot of requirements for developers in those types of single family homes.

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Robert Lipka

So hence you're getting that problem where you mentioned about having, you know, three steps up to get to the front of the house. And of course, there's there's reasons for that. You know, we live in a winter city and, you know, for, you know, building basements and making sure they, they stay, you know, dry and all those things.

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Robert Lipka

but there are ways around it. Yes. It may cost more money in the beginning. but it's definitely, you know, worth it to look at, you know, developing homes that as you I know you are always pushing for you have, no step access, you know, into the front entry. but even if, like, I've seen some designs where maybe a side or even a rear entry can be designed so that it can provide a ramp right?

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Robert Lipka

so there are ways to do it. And I've shown, examples to developers of other cities, other winter cities that, that have similar issues that

we have in Edmonton. but unfortunately, as you know, we don't have a lot of influence on that in our access design guide. the document that, you know, focuses on accessibility, is unfortunately only solely focused on city projects.

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Robert Lipka

So any project that the city's working on, rec centers, swimming pools, library. And so everything that we build and everything that we maintain, technically is supposed to be fully accessible. that's going to take time because our documents, you know, about 4 or 5 years old. So, but yeah, it doesn't apply to private development, which is unfortunate.

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Robert Lipka

So as I said, we're getting it in some of the more dense developments, we're getting more accessibility considerations. But as you know, single family housing. I think unfortunately,

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Ron Wickman

And we really live in a, in a, in a world where the it's always considered the market will dictate. Right. So, builders will always developers will always say, don't make us do things. We'll do it when the market asks for it. And, we both sit on the barrier free design, council here in Alberta. And, I remember when I first started almost 30 years ago with the, with the committee, I was surprised to learn that the hotel industry in Alberta had lobbied to not have any real strong, accessibility rules around the the hotel suites themselves.

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Ron Wickman

So if any public washrooms have to meet code, the entrance has to meet code. But there was no demand or requirement to have any of the suites, hotel rooms accessible. And to this day, that is still true here in Alberta. We don't have any any, any rules around that. So when the industry says we'll do it when the demand is there.

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Robert Lipka

Yeah. are.

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Ron Wickman

They are they saying the demand is not there? Is that it.

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Robert Lipka

Is not happening? I as you know, I'm not from here originally. I when we moved when we moved back to Canada from New Zealand because I lived there for ten years, we moved back here in Canada in 2015. One of the first hotels we stayed in before we got this house, was just up just north from us here, near the old airport.

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Robert Lipka

And, they they only had one, room available at because it was, late in the evening and it happened to be the accessible suite. and that was the only choice we had was. Okay, fine. I felt guilty taking it, but there was nobody else, needed it. So we took it, and it wasn't accessible at all, like, I it was awful.

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Robert Lipka

It was poorly designed. So, Yeah, it's lovely to say they have accessible units, but I was really shocked. I've stayed in a few hotels now and throughout Alberta. having come from New Zealand, where they have a lot more stringent rules, especially for hotels like you think, tourism is one of their bread and butter, right?

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Robert Lipka

Like that's the key thing, where New Zealand makes, a heck of a lot of money is tourism. So they have a really strong process where, hotels, new hotels have to go through and accessible. They call it be accessible program and they get different levels. Right.

So you get like a gold, silver, bronze. And so you see the hotels that have gold are stunning.

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Robert Lipka

Like you go to them and they're so accessible. They're so well designed. most of the rooms are fully accessible, not just a few. so, yeah, it's we have a long way to go. Unfortunately, in Canada.

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Karen Brown

I'm going to speak on behalf of the home owners, and Ron and I have talked about that before, the homeowners and the homeowner wannabes who are the the people that they are waiting to hear from. They don't know what they want. They don't know what the options even are. They're not thinking ten, 20, 30, 50 years down the road.

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Karen Brown

So I feel that it's up to the developers to be leading the charge and seeing what the demographics are saying and building to suit that demographic. But can we pull it back a bit to the the design of these newfangled houses with the skinny lots and the infill housing and the granny suites in back? How do they create an accessible outdoor space for themselves in that sort of a physical environment that they don't have any control over?

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Robert Lipka

Right. Great. Great question Karen. Yeah. It's obviously, you know, having like I mentioned, some of the homes that I have, reviewed do actually have accessible rear entries, which is great. So if you have or even a, you know, a granny flat, where they have an accessible entry. And so, yeah, be nice that somebody who's living in that unit could actually garden.

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Robert Lipka

And so looking at putting in in the backyard, having some raised beds, making sure obviously they're there, you know, a good height, space around them so people can in a wheelchair mobility scooter could move, maneuver around them. you know, looking at, making sure that you have, you know, a water spout nearby. There's all these little things, obviously

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Robert Lipka

garden. I'm not an avid gardener. I usually things die in my in my hands. But anyway, I try to do my best. But, Yeah, my mom was wasn't very good gardener either. And she always told me, she said if things don't last, they just. That means it wasn't tough enough. And I don't want that in my garden.

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Robert Lipka

So rip it out. Started out some something different. And so yeah, that's how I that's my philosophy, is so, not the best gardener, but, yeah, there's a little obviously elements you'd like when you're gardening. If you have, if you're in a mobility, you know, a scooter or wheelchair, that you, would really appreciate, having and and making sure you have that a little bit extra space right around those, those areas having, you know, a hard, surface that doesn't have to be concrete, obviously from a, climate resilience perspective.

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Robert Lipka

we don't want to see too many, backyards filled with just concrete. if you could make sure we have a lot of, you know, grass and or at least some soil. And so, you know, just putting, a different type of material down, right? So you can move from the rear, entry door from your house and get to the garden.

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Robert Lipka

perhaps it's like a hog in or any type of, ground more often. Not really gravel, but something a little bit finer that actually gives you a decent enough base that you can run a wheelchair, mobility

scooter over them, things like that. just some of the aspects to, you know, to consider, lighting, and other, things that would be helpful for a garden like that.

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Karen Brown

Ron let's get you in on this because you're you're the architect who would be, involved in perhaps creating some of these homes, and you would be working with designers and urban designers, people like Robert, as well as the the city and the planners and so forth. What would you do if you were creating this sort of an environment?

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Karen Brown

Would you do anything different? Would you orient the houses differently? What would you do?

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Ron Wickman

Oh, wow. All right. There were a lot of questions there. yeah, I, I guess a couple things, just based on what we've been talking about. first, I think for the homeowner, you know, usually they, when they're planning their house to build their new house with a new home builder. the the work of the landscaping, for the most part, is left up to the homeowner.

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Ron Wickman

So the the builder will likely give you a, some concrete to get to the front door. They usually leave the backyard alone unless it's, unless there is a, a garage in the back, like, there's a lane. so you a front car garage. You might get the driveway enough and, and the sidewalk to the front door and then maybe a tree or something like that.

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Ron Wickman

And then you usually afterwards, you you do your own planning to to landscape. And again, it gets back to something you mentioned,

Karen, is, people, people generally don't know a lot about accessibility. certainly, if they don't have, the need to learn about accessibility. So if they're your average homeowner, they don't have family members with disabilities or friends, then they just it just doesn't dawn on them to even want to learn about it.

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Ron Wickman

So it's it is a big challenge. And I do think it's up to, the design industry, architects, urban planners, landscape architects, and then the developers and builders to also educate themselves and provide the, the, the base for people to, to work with. So, there are things that I think we can do in the planning stages that can really assist, assist the, the homeowners.

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Ron Wickman

So, one of the things I was thinking about as, as Robert was talking was some of the work that I've gotten involved with. And, I remember working on an infill, a duplex, where we, we couldn't achieve a no step entrance at the front. The the the lot was skinny. there wasn't much distance from the front sidewalk to the to the front door and, the, the existing, infrastructure sewer lines and so on were fairly high up in the, in, in fairly high up in the land.

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Ron Wickman

So we couldn't dig down far enough unless we, unless we lowered the, the sewer lines and so on, which is very, very expensive. And in this case, what we did was we, we had to build new garages from the lane. So we, we actually built the garages higher almost to the level of the main floor. And so, so the driveway to the the garage door was relatively steep.

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Ron Wickman

So we kind of make the car do the work and get you up to that level. And then and then that would provide easier access. that's great for the homeowner. but it doesn't make it so great for anybody visiting, right? Because they still have to find a way to

they if you were in a wheelchair visiting, you'd have to find a way to get up into the garage and then and then into the backyard.

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Ron Wickman

another example of a house I just finished, a backyard for for an existing home that was designed, that had been designed for somebody in a wheelchair. It's a again, it's an infill inner city, lot. The house was relatively accessible, but the whole backyard wasn't. So we we ended up doing, because of the big backyard.

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Ron Wickman

We did a tiered sort of like Lily pads, a tiered, decking situation. So, you'd come out onto a deck from the back door and, and that would be a bit of a deck and then a ramp down to another level, and then a ramp down to another to the ground level. And then we built a garage, to connect all of that.

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Ron Wickman

And so with the use of planters and so on, we, we kind of shielded the ramps, to, to and we did them with a very gentle slope with a one inch 20 slope. So they weren't really, considered ramps so much as they were just gently sloping pathways. So created a, quite a nice, quite a nice, backyard.

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Ron Wickman

Every everybody uses it in the same way and anybody can use it. This particular gentleman actually uses a power wheelchair. and, uses a, remote control on the on the wheelchair, and, can, can maneuver around, so, you know, worked out. It worked out really well, but it just gets back to always having to kind of adapt to the, situation.

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Ron Wickman

Right? So, we've just never been in a situation where we built houses to be more adaptable in the first place. And, I constantly

find myself in a, in a place where I'm trying to provide a solution to create accessibility in an existing home, whether it be the home itself or the outdoor landscaping that is, that is both functional, beautiful and and the hard one is economical.

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Ron Wickman

Right? So if you're starting from a really bad place, it's hard. It's hard to make it, inexpensive. Right. So I was trying to say, that's not my fault. The expense of the thing is not it's not something I created. Right.

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Robert Lipka

but. And touching on that, Ron's point, like, from a city's perspective, the thing that I get really frustrated with is that our great architects, like Ron, come and build these great houses and, accessory dwelling units in the back and all that stuff. But a lot of our rear alleys, as you know, Ron, especially in the older parts of Edmonton, aren't paved or are partially paved or are gravel.

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Robert Lipka

Right. So it's all fine and dandy to have this beautiful accessory dwelling attached to a house. and it's you. Designers like yourself make it beautiful, as accessible, but the person can't even get you know, to their their, their unit from the rear lane. I don't know how they would access some of these if there's not enough space, you know, to access it from the front.

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Robert Lipka

whether, you know, sidewalk is, So, yeah, the city I've been really pushing hard to make sure that we look at if we're going to permit these accessory dwelling units, which we're starting to do more of, which is great to get, you know, increased densities in these older, more established, stable residential neighborhoods. We we got to redo our alleys and make them more accessible.

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Robert Lipka
Yeah.

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Ron Wickman

And just just to get into the the secondary suites. Robert, you can speak to this as well because I'm not sure if this is unique to Edmonton or not, but we do have, we do have a particular, city by law that allows you to do a secondary suite over a garage, for example, a detached garage in the back that allows you to build something slightly larger than than, what is normally allowed, if you provide the accessibility features.

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Ron Wickman

So there's, it's a bit of a a carrot, I guess. You, you, you say you can build it bigger, but you then you have to, let's say, provide a residential elevator and make sure you have space to accommodate, a wheel and shower and maybe a little bit of a larger kitchen, that kind of thing. And so I, I know I got involved in that, when, when the city was at the planning stages.

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Ron Wickman

my, the feedback I've gotten so far is that not very many builders or developers have really taken advantage of that, that, regulation. But I'm not sure if it's if that is unique to Edmonton or whether other cities have adopted a similar.

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Robert Lipka

yeah. Well, like we've been doing it for a while now. I know in Toronto because I used to work for the city of Toronto many, many years ago. They've been doing that for, a long while. Vancouver also, has been doing that, getting more rear, you know, houses basically fronting until alleys and lanes.

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Robert Lipka

Right. and some of them, you know, you could knock down the garage and just build another house, there in some of those situations. But yeah, you're right. we do, there's a several of them in my neighborhood in Westmount here, which is exactly what you described having, a unit up above a garage.

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Robert Lipka

I, I think there is 1 or 2 that I'm aware of that do have, the lifts that they put in. But again, like I said, they're lucky in that the alley, that they live upon, is was rented recently redone a few years ago. So it's pretty smooth and easy to access, but there's a number of others.

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Robert Lipka

And including the alley behind my garage, it's got a lot of potholes. it's really desperately in need of a redo. and if you had a mobility scooter wheelchair. Good luck trying to get to your unit. using the alley. So. Yeah.

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Ron Wickman

Yeah. And I don't think we should, just leave the. You mentioned something about the, literally a new house that's fronting the lanes. that's certainly I think, something in here in Edmonton, people would not be very familiar with, but I do know in, in Vancouver and Toronto, they're actually, allowing, I don't know if everywhere in the city or just in certain parts of the city where you.

00:30:22:59 - 00:30:54:30

Ron Wickman

Yeah, literally you can build another house on your lot, which has its own, address and everything. right from the lane and, I think it's a great idea myself. I just, I know I live in a mature neighborhood myself, so not unlike you, I. I'm in Greenfield. Westmount is is a sort of similar vintage. I think that would be that that would certainly initially have some, some negative, feedback from people in the neighborhood.

00:30:54:30 - 00:31:18:24

Ron Wickman

I think they'd be worried about, you know, the lanes getting filled with cars, parking and, you know, people visiting that other house and all that kind of stuff. So we're, you know, we're not there. Edmonton. Calgary, you know, we're not we're not in the, in the, the place that Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal are in where, density is just become a really, you know, even a bigger issue than it is here.

00:31:18:29 - 00:31:24:08

Ron Wickman

But it's interesting because I think we'll be faced with those challenges, you know, in the next ten years or so.

00:31:24:12 - 00:31:44:34

Robert Lipka

Oh, yeah. That's why I keep, highlighting it to our, you know, internal team in that because I've seen what happened, you know, in Toronto and Vancouver and how there's that pressure. so now imagine if you have a house fronting on to the rear alley. Now you got to provide, you know, a decent alley. So it's smooth and easy to access.

00:31:44:39 - 00:32:07:36

Robert Lipka

You got to provide lighting, which a lot of our alleys don't have lighting, as you know. you know, even some, you know, perhaps even some, you know, some landscaping, etc.. So, yeah, it's going to make a huge, change to the way the city functions and, and how we're going to have to have make sure we have the budget, you know, to pay for these things if we're going to go to that level, we're not there yet.

00:32:07:36 - 00:32:18:31

Robert Lipka

You're right. In Edmonton, most of them are just accessory dwelling units, right? but in the future, yeah, you can see that pressure will come.

00:32:18:36 - 00:32:41:23

Karen Brown

This is going in a whole different direction that I even imagine talking about. How is this fronting on our region. And when you were talking I was thinking snow removal and garbage pickup and this whole business of dual addresses. And now you've got to name the lane. It's not just a bike lane anymore. It's actually got to have a proper name because it's somebody's address that just brings up a whole other world.

00:32:41:34 - 00:32:45:03

Karen Brown

You really actually see cities going in that direction?

00:32:45:08 - 00:33:07:54

Robert Lipka

Oh, there you have them. Yeah. There are, there are cities doing that now. So yeah. we have a long way to go, but but yeah, it's, it's something especially in the older neighborhoods, here in Edmonton. Like it makes total sense, because, especially, you know, the house that I, I own, like, the lot is very wide and it's very deep, you know, compared to, like, a house.

00:33:07:54 - 00:33:29:58

Robert Lipka

I grew up in Toronto. so there is a lot of space, that's not really utilized. Right. and so, you know, from a density perspective, it makes so much more sense to, to build, you know, get more people living in communities like where I live, because they have great access to public transport, they have great access to shopping and etc. they can walk.

00:33:30:03 - 00:33:57:54

Robert Lipka

It's the true, you know, nowadays, in urban design terms, it's the 15 minute city. That's the big spiel. But I always say I, I grew up in a five minute city, so, 15 minutes is nothing new to me. you know that that's been that way, you know, in Toronto for a very long time. so, yeah, Edmonton's you know, obviously in another, level,

it's going to take, you know, much longer to get to that point, but it will happen eventually.

00:33:57:59 - 00:34:00:56

Robert Lipka

you know, we can't keep building out.

00:34:01:01 - 00:34:25:05

Karen Brown

I saw, a real estate advertisement the other day. For some reason, it made it into my newsfeed because real estate ads normally don't. But this was a realtor who had used artificial intelligence to show what I imagine was a garage of some kind accessed by a back alley. And it was just a very large, concrete, low ceilinged building.

00:34:25:12 - 00:34:39:01

Karen Brown

But he had used AI to show you the possibilities, and it was just gorgeous. But then, of course, you get to the end of the pictures and you see the reality of it, and it would. It was very dank and dreary.

00:34:39:06 - 00:34:41:14

Robert Lipka

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:34:41:19 - 00:35:03:01

Karen Brown

Yeah. But I there you go. You got to watch it. any final comments about the use of any kind of special tools or artistry to, to create beautiful, accessible yards and outdoor spaces for people in the new housing environment. Anybody have a comment on that before we close out there?

00:35:03:03 - 00:35:28:22

Ron Wickman

Just, I just wanted to mention one thing, and I'd like to, get into it in more detail. probably later in the year. Karen, but I'm, we're just kind of, waiting for the weather to, to get a little bit better. But, I

happen to be in a situation right now that I think could provide a bit of an example of what all of this could potentially look like.

00:35:28:22 - 00:35:50:56

Ron Wickman

And it, I live in, in, the deep or not, deep South, the deep South of the mature neighborhood of Edmonton. So, we're kind of bordering between, sort of new suburbia and mature neighborhoods, and, and my mother lives in the house that, I grew up in. They built in 1967 for my father, who used a wheelchair.

00:35:50:56 - 00:36:16:27

Ron Wickman

So the house itself is a small bungalow, but it's quite accessible. And she's, 81 now, and she's, you know, I really want her to be able to age in place, and and, we're at a better starting point than a lot of houses because we have the, we have the accessible house already. she had some issues with, waterproofing the foundation, failed in the basement, got flooded, and all the rest.

00:36:16:27 - 00:36:45:15

Ron Wickman

So, we have this opportunity this summer to spring and summer to do a whole new landscaping. And I'm really thinking my mom's. She's in in a position where she can she can age in place and she can stay at home, and, we can do the landscaping so that it's really, positive for her. And then just to the south of her is a large green belt that the city, over time, has developed to have a nice, hard surface pathway.

00:36:45:20 - 00:37:08:01

Ron Wickman

People walk their dogs. There's there's a there it is a green belt, but there's the, the probably a six foot wide sidewalk that runs all along there. A lot of people use it, you know, with baby carriages and bikes and strollers and and wheelchairs and so on. And right beside my mom's house, we just finished, a house that has been designed for a couple that wants to age in place.

00:37:08:01 - 00:37:35:12

Ron Wickman

So it's, was a tear down, brand new house. right beside, there's a house across the street that was modified for, somebody who uses a wheelchair. And then just up the street is, a new, basically a house being built. it's a corner lot, but it, the garage suite, if you want to call it, is it looks like a house, basically.

00:37:35:12 - 00:37:58:05

Ron Wickman

So it's like two houses on the lot. And so this all of a sudden I find myself in this little corner of Edmonton, this small little dot in Edmonton that has all this great opportunity to demonstrate what, what a great little, city, environment could be for, for everybody and including people with disabilities, including people who are aging.

00:37:58:10 - 00:38:20:37

Ron Wickman

And so I'm excited about the prospect of being able to work on that. And I you know, I just part of that is just to reinforce something that we said earlier is when the city's planning all this stuff, and it's just such a great thing that we have Robert, working with the city. somebody has got to be asking those questions like, what are we doing about our aging population?

00:38:20:37 - 00:38:32:49

Ron Wickman

What are we doing about people with disabilities that that can never get lost? And it seems to when there isn't somebody at the table that's asking those really, very basic questions. Right. But they're so important.

00:38:32:54 - 00:38:53:10

Robert Lipka

Yeah. No, you're right, Ron, it's like there's only a few people in our organization that really, get involved in these kinds of things. And thankfully, there are a number of us in the organization that are keep pushing for these kinds of things. And, you know, so it's going to take time. But at least we have some of the background documentation and policies now.

00:38:53:15 - 00:39:13:33

Robert Lipka

Now it's about delivering it on the ground. But speaking of on the ground to answer Karen's question, well, just to add another thing, I grew up, like I said, I grew up in downtown Toronto. My backyard was basically five meters by five meters. So that was it, a tiny little, backyard, compared to, you know, was the suburbia, in suburban backyards.

00:39:13:38 - 00:39:50:20

Robert Lipka

And so my mom was able to, to she did a lot of horizontal growing, right, vertical growing. Right. so yeah, there obviously, you know, growing things, you know, that climb. Right. vegetables and etc.. so I think there's people, who, you know, and mobility scooter, wheelchair, that, you know, have some mobility issues can, can still, you know, safely and easily use a, a, you know, a, you know, a raised, planter bed and even do some, you know, vertical, you know, growing cucumbers, etc..

00:39:50:20 - 00:40:09:58

Robert Lipka

So there's a lot of things you could do in a small space. That's what I'm trying to get to. so I think, so I think that, you know, it just takes a bit more, you know, thought, and, and there's a gentleman next to me. He used to grow orange is he had orange tree in his garage, so it was incredible.

00:40:10:00 - 00:40:26:27

Robert Lipka

So he had this beautiful garden, this veggies, all the vegetables. And then he would say, oh, hurrah! Do you want an orange? And he's going to his garage because he had like, it all he did and everything. And he was growing oranges. He was from Italy. He was a great, great guy. And so yeah, he would share his oranges with the with the neighbors.

00:40:26:27 - 00:40:31:32

Robert Lipka

So, you can grow things in a lot of interesting places. So yeah.

00:40:31:37 - 00:40:56:51

Karen Brown

Take heart. There are solutions. Well, that's what we're all about is providing people solutions. So and that's a great way to bring the this particular podcast to a close run. Thank you as always for joining me. And Robert, what a treat to have you here. We're going to keep you around and do another podcast with you. So for those who have enjoyed Robert's take on things, just wait for the next one, because we're going to delve increasingly into his area of expertise.

00:40:56:56 - 00:41:04:34

Karen Brown

So thank you all for joining us, and I look forward to seeing all of you again on the next episode of Real Life Renos

00:41:04:42 - 00:41:14:39

Karen Brown

The Podcast.