

## Condo or Home Reno?

00;00;00;13 - 00;00;22;02

Karen Brown

Hello and welcome to Real Life Renos The Podcast. I'm your host, Karen Brown, and in case this is our first meeting, let me introduce myself. I'm an aging in place and accessibility strategist. That means I work with businesses and governments to make their buildings more accessible for everyone. I also work with individuals who want to stay in their homes, in their familiar communities for as long as possible.

00;00;22;05 - 00;00;44;10

Karen Brown

Since homes have never been built to work with us as we age or acquire disabilities, that means they need renovations. Sometimes small ones, sometimes large rentals. Real life rentals also means renovating the way we think about our lives. So some podcast topics are in that area. Today our guest is Ron Wickman, an architect who specializes in accessible design.

00;00;44;12 - 00;00;55;24

Karen Brown

If you are thinking about downsizing from a neighborhood home to a condo is the right move for you. Listen to this podcast and you might just think again. Hi, Ron. Welcome back. It's good to have you.

00;00;55;26 - 00;00;57;13

Ron Wickman

Oh, thanks. It's great being here.

00;00;57;16 - 00;01;27;03

Karen Brown

Terrific. Well, we've talked an awful lot about accessible housing and we've also talked about seniors wanting to stay in their own homes but needing to make decisions. You know, I, I came upon this, bunch of data talking about older adults. And it seems that they want to move. They want to downsize their heads immediately turn to condo living.

00;01;27;05 - 00;01;41;09

Karen Brown

In fact, in Toronto, high rises are home to 40% of the people over 65 years of age entering into. But that's not always the solution that people think it is. Can you talk a little bit about that for us?

00;01;41;11 - 00;02;11;03

Ron Wickman

Sure, yeah. Well, the first thing I can say is the the stats would be, and I don't know them, but they would be significantly different. Here in Alberta. So, we have a lot more, single family housing, stock compared to condo living. And there's been a bit of a slowdown with the pandemic and so on that's kind of slowed the, the, the progress of of apartment living, condo living.

00;02;11;03 - 00;02;39;07

Ron Wickman

But we're, we're, we're behind a city like Toronto or Vancouver or Montreal in terms of, of that kind of that kind of living. I did I did recently, listen to a podcast that was all about Toronto and listening to planners talking about how Toronto has been planned. So essentially, it is a city, a downtown core with tall buildings surrounded by single family houses, in essence.

00;02;39;10 - 00;03;05;11

Ron Wickman

And so there's lots of talk, in, in most parts of Canada. Kind of starting in Toronto, the Toronto area, talking about the missing middle and the missing middle would be housing. That is something between high rise condo living and, and, single family housing. So anything from a duplex up to a, a low rise apartment building kind of thing.

00;03;05;14 - 00;03;28;21

Ron Wickman

So that's certainly something that we've seen here in in Alberta, in Edmonton and Calgary, especially in Calgary, is just growing so quickly now, that, this kind of missing middle has been, kind of the talk of the town sort of speak. And that fits nicely in with,

something I've been thinking about for quite a long time, in fact, right.

00;03;28;21 - 00;04;02;03

Ron Wickman

Since 19, the 19 like 1990 and 91 when I graduated, from architecture school, and I didn't know. I didn't know the term missing middle. I don't think it had been invented yet. But essentially my, my master's thesis was about that topic, interestingly enough. So it was all about accessibility, but it was about accessible living. So could we create communities and housing that would be more effective for people with disabilities?

00;04;02;05 - 00;04;30;00

Ron Wickman

And my thinking was that at that time, and it still is today, that people living in, that, that, that live in a 3500 square foot house or something, you know, of that size, a single family house that suddenly find themselves either an empty nester couple or, like my mum is now just, an individual, in her, in her early 80s, living in a in a bigger house.

00;04;30;02 - 00;04;58;03

Ron Wickman

It's just a lot of upkeep. And it's a, it's it's hard to maintain the house and deal with the house and all that, but I know my mum would never want to move to the alternative, which here in, in Alberta would be, some kind of long term health care facility. So it seems like the options for the most part, most part have been stay in your house or move into some kind of care home.

00;04;58;05 - 00;05;11;18

Ron Wickman

And so there's all these options that we should be thinking about that are vastly different. And condo living has, has sort of presented itself as something that could be one of those, one of those types of dwellings.

00;05;11;24 - 00;05;20;14

Karen Brown

People think of it that way anyway, but it's not always suitable. This is not the forever home that some people imagine it's going to be, isn't it?

00;05;20;19 - 00;05;49;04

Ron Wickman

Correct. Yeah. So they like on the surface, it sounds great because you, you have, probably an underground parkade. So you can if you're, if you're somebody with a disability, especially in a winter city, which is mostly Canada, you can you can park underground, you can gain access to an elevator, and you can get to your, to your dwelling, and, so conceptually, that's that's great.

00;05;50;05 - 00;06;15;28

Ron Wickman

But it's the fact that the dwellings themselves, don't present themselves with any real, accessible or universal or inclusive whatever term you want to use, features that would, be adaptable to, different types of residence. So, somebody in a wheelchair, for example, somebody, with low vision, somebody with some, some hearing limitations, other mobility issues.

00;06;16;13 - 00;06;49;19

Ron Wickman

The housing stock just doesn't really, provide access to that kind of, living experience. It's just sort of based on, I guess, what the developers and builders have thought is most marketable. So they they do their homework and their research, and they figure out that if we if we build, dwellings that are of a certain size and a certain number of bedrooms and so on, then they'll, they'll sell and that's, that's the name of the game for the development world.

00;06;49;19 - 00;06;50;28

Ron Wickman

Right?

00;06;51;00 - 00;07;08;05

Karen Brown

Well, it is, but now can you tell us, because you know more about this than, than I would and our listeners probably would when a

condo is being built structurally, what's happening that makes it difficult to make changes?

00;07;08;07 - 00;07;39;12

Ron Wickman

Well, and high rises for sure. They're, they're built, in, in typically in concrete. So it is difficult to to deal with renovation work in, in, concrete structure, low rise housing is, is typically would would frame but it, it has mostly to do with our, our the fire rating. So every, every dwelling within a condo unit has to be fire rated from the other dwellings.

00;07;39;14 - 00;08;08;22

Ron Wickman

And so to do renovations, certainly renovations that, compromise the fire walls, become a challenge. It because it's not a single family house and one structure. You don't want to tinker with any kind of structural, issues. So you don't want to be removing walls that might be holding up many, many walls above it, that sort of thing.

00;08;08;22 - 00;08;46;23

Ron Wickman

So, they can be very complicated and expensive. So, you know, simple modifications like, taking out your kitchen cabinets and putting in new ones is not really a big deal. But it can be a big deal if you start to want to move sinks or stove locations where there's, an exhaust fan. If you want to move, a toilet somewhere else in your bathroom or expand your bathroom to make it bigger to accommodate somebody in a wheelchair, that, again, might not only affect plumbing electrical issues, but again, structural issues, may be a problem.

00;08;46;26 - 00;09;14;19

Ron Wickman

So all of these things, make it really difficult, from a, like a physical building point of view. And then the other part of it is that condo living, is is ruled by a condo association. So it's a board of, people living in the condo building that also act as a bit of a government that they decide what can and can't be done.

00;09;15;09 - 00;09;28;24

Ron Wickman

Within the the overall structure of the building and their, their decision making is, you know, primarily based on what is good for the collective or everybody, that lives there.

00;09;28;26 - 00;09;49;21

Karen Brown

Okay. So if they're making decisions based on what's best for the collective, and if 40% of people in condos in Toronto anyway are over 65, isn't it best for the collective to have some more inclusive design? So, I mean, you would think that your laughing, you would think so.

00;09;49;23 - 00;09;52;08

Ron Wickman

You would absolutely think so. Yeah.

00;09;52;12 - 00;09;54;22

Karen Brown

But then the design challenges come into play.

00;09;55;12 - 00;10;17;26

Ron Wickman

Correct. Yeah. And then just it, just all all these, I guess they can be somewhat, political, as well, if we allow one resident to do this to their dwelling, then we set a precedent for others to do the same thing. And, you know, it could potentially create chaos, I guess, in the minds of the condo association.

00;10;17;26 - 00;11;04;19

Ron Wickman

So, you're playing it safe is typically, is typically the the general nature of a condo association. Try to do as little as as possible. That would affect, the overall marketability of the, the condo building for everybody. And, the one, the one thing that I need to say about about condo living that in my experience as an architect who has worked on several projects involving, condominiums,

condominium dwellings, it's the outdoor access that has presented itself as the key major problem in all of this.

00;11;04;22 - 00;11;33;06

Ron Wickman

So if you live on the third floor, it's not uncommon for your, patio doors to be sliding doors that the, the, the threshold of that door might be anywhere from 8 to 12in above the floor level. And that might not seem like a big deal. Just have, like, a little ramp on the inside and a little ramp on the outside.

00;11;33;10 - 00;12;04;26

Ron Wickman

But when you consider that in 12in, you need a a, a 12ft ramp, a 1 in 12 ratio, 12in means, 12ft of ramp. Plus you need a landing. That's five feet by five feet. In fact, that's larger. Now it's, five feet, seven inches by five feet, seven inches. So that's on both sides. Basically, the ramping situation would take up most of your living room and most of your deck, to make that work.

00;12;05;00 - 00;12;31;01

Ron Wickman

And the the patio door is considered part of the, collective. It's part of the building. It's not the individual owner's property. So the bathroom is, the kitchen is, the bedrooms are. But the the the outer, the exterior of the building is not. So even trying to change out your patio door to be different than everybody else's patio door, it gets a tremendous amount of resistance.

00;12;31;12 - 00;12;35;17

Ron Wickman

Based on my experience working with condo associations.

00;12;35;19 - 00;12;45;09

Karen Brown

So the bathroom is yours, but because of the way that the building is built, the structural implications mean you really can't change it.

00;12;45;11 - 00;12;46;24

Ron Wickman

No.

00;12;46;26 - 00;13;14;29

Karen Brown

And the outdoor space and what leads to it is not yours. But they won't want something that looks different. So, you know, the this 40% of people over 65 who were thinking that a condo might be their savior in terms of downsizing, they need to maybe think a little bit more in the future, because as we all age, things come into play.

00;13;15;00 - 00;13;45;29

Karen Brown

Mobility issues, if you don't already have them, I mean, somebody with a wheelchair would find going into a condo very challenging right off the jump if that was their situation. But for people who think themselves to be in pretty good health, you start with hip replacements, knee replacements, back issues, other kinds of mobility issues which make just movement around your condo apartment very challenging.

00;13;46;06 - 00;14;21;02

Karen Brown

And if you can't access your balcony or deck anymore, that's a problem. So you have written, recently in an article that the best design projects start with collaborations. There seems to be a disconnect between architects and builders and developers in terms of what that collaboration might look like. Who are who are architects typically collaborating with?

00;14;21;04 - 00;14;57;09

Ron Wickman

The, architects will be collaborating with the developer or builder, of the project. So for the most part in a condo building, you know, you would never really the architect who designs the the project would never really know. A specific client, there would be a profile of a client. So the developer would present a what we'd call a program to the architectural team to design, any number of, of dwellings.



00;14;57;09 - 00;15;20;09

Ron Wickman

Right. So, 50 or 20 story building, with six units per floor. One being a one bedroom and five being two bedrooms, something like that. Just you'd be given you'd be given sort of the agenda as the architectural team and you'd have to put it together in a nice package, for the developers.

00;15;20;11 - 00;15;55;14

Ron Wickman

And then, often, more often than not, the developers like to try to then sell, a good number of the dwellings before they actually start construction so that they can sort of finance, finance the project. At least that's my understanding of it. As somebody that typically doesn't enter that world, as an architect, I'm usually the one that comes in way, way later, like ten years later when somebody with a disability has already purchased a condo and now they want to they want to modify it.

00;15;55;14 - 00;16;18;09

Ron Wickman

So, so, maybe a little bit different today. I think there's, there are more innovative ideas that are, that are probably happening with condo living. But by and large, that's the way it is. Right? So we don't as architects, we generally don't talk to the end user of any of the dwellings and, and in any way, shape or form.

00;16;18;11 - 00;16;42;08

Karen Brown

Right. One of my favorite sayings is when you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change. And I know we've touched on this before in one of our previous podcasts, but the idea of changing from a medical model of disability to a social model of disability seems to come into play here.

00;16;42;10 - 00;17;05;24

Ron Wickman

Yes. Yeah, yeah. And it's funny that it's still it's still a thing, right? This, this idea that the, the medical model. But I think that's the way a lot of, people in the general public kind of perceive things is

that, oh, if I get an accessible dwelling, it'll look institutional. And, you know, we'll have to.

00;17;05;26 - 00;17;31;02

Ron Wickman

I'll have to have all these ugly grab bars around, and it'll just like it just won't be very nice. Everything will be white and very clinical looking. And and so for developers that are even more knowledgeable about accessibility, they have trouble marketing something that they feel, should sell quite easily. But they often get more resistance than it's worth for them.

00;17;31;02 - 00;17;53;24

Ron Wickman

So then they go back to what they what works for them. Right? So it's a little bit of a double edged sword. So like certainly I would never want to be seen as somebody that is, you know, anti-development or hard on developers. It's just it's just sort of as a function of the, of the, the history of the way we've always approached housing.

00;17;53;27 - 00;18;21;09

Karen Brown

Right, right. Let's touch on some of the other difficulties for people of a certain age and people with disabilities living in high rises. When we think about reaching them in a medical emergency or disasters of some kind, I mean, I guess Hurricane Hazel was the last hurricane to hit Toronto in the 50s. But we do get tornadoes.

00;18;21;11 - 00;18;44;23

Karen Brown

Fires happen. Yeah. I don't really find. Maybe you do, but I don't that people who have disabilities and people who are older are somehow an organized group of people. For those who are charged with rescuing them.

00;18;44;25 - 00;19;21;06

Ron Wickman

Yeah, yeah. That's often that's often what happens. And I think, I think the, the, the 911, event really, was a, was a game changer

and, you know, on so many levels, but architecturally, there was a lot of discussion and talk about what to do in cases of emergency. So traditionally, you know, the elevator is something we don't use in a fire, a building that's, experiencing a fire, for example.

00;19;21;06 - 00;19;48;19

Ron Wickman

So we use the stairwells. And of course, if you're quadriplegic and a power wheelchair, that becomes, impossible to do, so that that's certainly something that, more people became aware of as an issue. And, and the result of that was, that in different jurisdictions, the building codes asked for what they call areas of refuge.

00;19;48;19 - 00;20;15;02

Ron Wickman

So they're typically in your stairwell, which is a fire rated space. And the landings of the stairs are, larger so that you could park yourself in a wheelchair. You'd have access to some technology, like a phone or, some kind of emergency call button, something like that. So you could you could wait in there and hopefully help would get to you.

00;20;15;24 - 00;20;37;03

Ron Wickman

Soon enough. But it would also the landings of the stairs would also allow people, getting, getting down the stairs to get by you. And so you wouldn't impede, the people, evacuating the, the building. In Alberta, we don't actually that's not part of our code right now. And B.C., I believe it is.

00;20;37;03 - 00;21;06;28

Ron Wickman

And I, I'm pretty sure it is in Ontario, although I'm. I could be corrected on that one. So, we don't have a harmonized Canadian, building code that, really speaks to areas of refuge and, that's that's a bit of a problem. I that's something as somebody who sits on the Barrier Free Design Committee or the accessibility design committee, in Alberta, that's something I've lobbied for for, almost 20 years now.

00;21;07;11 - 00;21;39;13

Ron Wickman

But it is it's just one of those things that just it does increase the size of the building and cost. And, and so there is some resistance from the, from the industry and to, into doing this. So it, it that's certainly one of the challenges for somebody especially with higher level of, a higher level of disability, like somebody who's quadriplegic, you know, even a power chair itself can be 350, 400 pounds, then that's not even including the individual that's in the wheelchair.

00;21;39;13 - 00;21;58;00

Ron Wickman

So it would be really, really challenging to try to get somebody else right. You literally have to take them out of their wheelchair and just carry them down. So this is this is definitely one of the one of the major, problems with, with, high rise living.

00;21;58;02 - 00;22;26;25

Karen Brown

Right? There's an article that I sent to you that I will include in our show notes. It was, a CBC article that talked about, a fellow who was in a wheelchair since the age of 11 had an accident at the age of 11 and is in a wheelchair. He seems to live independently, but in a high rise building and would the fire alarms went off one time, and it took 40 minutes for anybody to get to him.

00;22;26;27 - 00;22;55;03

Karen Brown

What a terrifying place to be in, for anyone. And I also see data from time to time about the length of time it takes for our EMTs to reach someone who's, for instance, had a heart attack. If they live on an upper floor in a building, and one of the issues is just them getting into the building, they start pushing buttons and trying to get somebody to let them in.

00;22;56;16 - 00;23;17;07

Karen Brown

And there is actual data I wish I could find it or that I could have found it in advance of this podcast. There is actual data that might

be outdated at this point, but that if you live above a certain floor, your chances of survival decline fairly rapidly. And it's it's for that reason people can't get to you.

00;23;17;09 - 00;23;41;06

Karen Brown

I sound like I'm trying to scare people off of condo living. I'm really not. It's just there. There's so much that people need to think about when they're looking to downsize and not just having them look five years ahead, but having them look a decade or two decades ahead to what their circumstances might be and what they might need.

00;23;41;08 - 00;23;46;00

Karen Brown

Yeah. Does it sound like I'm trying to scare? I guess it does. Well, but I don't mean to.

00;23;46;02 - 00;24;10;06

Ron Wickman

Well, I yeah, like, I mean, I, I know what you're saying and this is something that I, you know, I've encountered for a long time now too. So, you know, I can I at a kind of a higher level, sort of more a little bit of philosophy in my, in my approach to all of this in my early days, it was my, my approach was it's just the right thing to do.

00;24;10;07 - 00;24;31;28

Ron Wickman

Like it's it's just like to just be a good human being. And, and if you're an architect, design for people with disabilities. If you're a politician, make decisions that make life better for people with disabilities. It's just it's just the right thing to do. In the early days, I didn't think about, societal attitudes and beliefs.

00;24;31;28 - 00;24;57;18

Ron Wickman

I didn't think about money as much, at least not other people's money. Right. So, so you start to you start to live your life and you realize that there's, there's a lot of, complicating factors in this, the,

the kind of right thing to do sort of morphed into, being a safety issue. Not so much just getting people in a building, but also getting them out.

00;24;57;18 - 00;25;14;16

Ron Wickman

So you try to approach it from the point of view of, if we don't do these things, you know, really bad things could happen. And, and that is that it's kind of a message that, I mean, you just mentioned, it is something that we, we try to stay away from seeing too much of. But, you know, these are realities, right?

00;25;14;16 - 00;25;40;02

Ron Wickman

Like, and nobody really wants to think that they'll encounter at least a temporary disability at some point in their life, like a broken leg or broken arm or something like that. But, almost everybody, will probably have at least a temporary disability in their lifetime. And I would say it's got to be close to 100% of people at least have a friend or somebody they know with a disability.

00;25;40;02 - 00;26;10;12

Ron Wickman

So it's part of our world, all the time. And so it doesn't have to be just about doing the right thing or being safe. It can be, about just being, again, I guess, back to being a good human being as well, but just, just part of our life, just part of the way we think about about the way we, house people, the way we we work, the way we play all of that.

00;26;11;06 - 00;26;38;25

Ron Wickman

It's just a sort of a natural part of the way we, we, we live and interact with each other. Lately, I think, you know, around the recounts and the recounts and foundation and other groups have really been promoting the economic, advantage of doing this. Again, you mentioned, the large number of people who are over 65 and that's just ever increasing.

00;26;38;28 - 00;27;13;08

Ron Wickman

And the boomer population really, holds a lot of, and is dictated our economy for so long. So there can be a truly an economic case made for it and that'll, that'll kind of tweak the interest of, you know, our are people more interested in developing and building. So it it's it's it's kind of like we have to be able to approach all segments of society simultaneously to get everybody kind of, thinking the same way, but maybe from different angles.

00;27;13;08 - 00;27;42;26

Ron Wickman

Right. So some people will want to do things because it's right, the right thing to do. Some people want to do it because there's incentives to make some money. Some people will approach it from a safety point of view. And, and what we need more than anything, I think at this stage in our, in our, in the movement, if you want to call it that or in our life is we need more people with with the lived experience to be speaking out more.

00;27;42;26 - 00;28;12;23

Ron Wickman

So we need seniors, people who are over 65 people with disabilities themselves to be more vocal and explain to everybody else, what it's like living with a disability or being older and some of the challenges you might face and some of the things that can be done to make your life easier. I do think that at least 99% of our population are willing to listen and want to do something that, will make life better for everybody.

00;28;12;25 - 00;28;16;04

Ron Wickman

Sometimes we just don't know how.

00;28;16;07 - 00;28;30;19

Karen Brown

Right, I, I agree with you completely. And, you know, before this, we were having a little chat about the how but also about the fact that the people who are the decision makers don't really understand the why.

00;28;30;21 - 00;28;31;10

Ron Wickman  
That's right.

00;28;31;13 - 00;29;01;19

Karen Brown

Yeah. It's such an important thing for people to understand why things need to be a certain way and then how to make it that way. So, you know, it becomes something of a frustration. Certainly for me, I think for you as well, that when they don't understand the why, it just floats off into the netherworld. For them, it's they're sympathetic, but that's kind of where it ends it.

00;29;01;19 - 00;29;26;22

Ron Wickman

It's so true. It's so true. Right. And I just I can't help but think about, about my my father. Being a politician, he was, he was the. Why? I like you when he said I like I need the bathroom door to be wider because I can't get through. It's it's not somebody standing there, like, looking like they could get through that doorway.

00;29;27;10 - 00;29;59;11

Ron Wickman

Saying this at somebody in a wheelchair, like, physically showing you I can't get through, like, look at my wheels. Can't get through it. You don't need any more than that. Right? And that's why I go back to this comment that, for a long time now, I feel like I've been part of a group of advocates that, certainly don't have the physical disability, like being in a wheelchair, or being blind.

00;30;00;11 - 00;30;23;18

Ron Wickman

That can really demonstrate. So I think a lot of people sometimes listen to me and say, yeah, but what does he really know about this? Right. So they don't know that the, the number of hours I've spent, with people who have various disabilities, they don't know my experiences. They just hear what I say. But sometimes that's just not enough, right.

00;30;23;18 - 00;30;53;09



Ron Wickman

And so we have to demonstrate how to make it work. So again, you know, sort of jumping forward a little bit to our this concept of housing is, again, the architects sit in a boardroom with developers and they talk about how they can build this building, structurally, how they can make, things so that there's fresh air movement mechanically, how everything will work electrically.

00;30;54;11 - 00;31;14;17

Ron Wickman

And, I guess obviously they'll talk about how they can do it, right, so they can make some, some profit, but I can almost guarantee that there isn't somebody, or there aren't a couple of people in that boardroom that are sitting in a wheelchair or blind going, yeah, but wait a minute. This is what we need to do here too, right?

00;31;14;19 - 00;31;34;28

Ron Wickman

And remind everybody that there's this enormous aging population that, would really benefit from this kind of housing. And once they once they see what it's like, they'll they'll demand it for sure, right? So it's hard to demand something that you don't know what it looks like or what it feels like.

00;31;35;00 - 00;32;10;22

Karen Brown

Right. And, you know, my mind often goes to, people with autism that wasn't a diagnosis. We heard a lot about 30, 40, 50 years ago, or if anything at all. But now we have children who were diagnosed with autism, who are adults with autism, and their parents are aging. And so that gets into a whole bunch of perhaps sensory issues around the kind of housing that they need.

00;32;10;22 - 00;32;40;04

Karen Brown

Because not all persons with autism are going to have to live in group homes. Some of them can live quite independently, but the circumstances have to be correct. So, you know, we talk a lot about disability in terms of physical disability. But and we have certainly spent time talking about, people with disabilities, people

with hearing disabilities, but there's this whole other category that I think is set to come on quite strongly.

00;32;40;04 - 00;33;09;14

Karen Brown

In fact, the Rick Hansen Foundation has just added to their their roster. Criteria for sensory, I'm not quite sure how all of that is going to work out, because I think that people understand something about autism. Most of us now know someone with autism. But as the saying goes, if you know one person with autism, you know only one person with autism.

00;33;09;16 - 00;33;20;01

Karen Brown

Do you know, do you have a thought about where the sensory issues are going to play out, how they're going to play out in the years ahead?

00;33;20;22 - 00;33;50;15

Ron Wickman

Yeah, I do, I, I, I've been sitting on, on one of the tasks, task forces of of the recounts and foundation, the technical committee. So, I'm well aware of the, the time and energy that's been spent on, on upgrading the, the design standards and, requirements that are within the, within the foundation's, accessibility guidelines.

00;33;51;00 - 00;34;34;01

Ron Wickman

So there has been a lot of discussion about that. And I'm going to say not only not only that, but also, all kinds of different, disability is have come into to play as well. So, in many ways it, it, it makes it, you know, that much more challenging. Like it. I don't want to say we've opened up a Pandora's box, but it's like there's all these other disabilities that, our, our human conditions that we want to, we need to consider when we're designing and, something that I'm sure I've mentioned in previous podcasts, but, you know, as a, the designer, the our job is

00;34;34;01 - 00;35;00;09

Ron Wickman

to somehow figure out the sweet spot in all of this so you can design space that is better for somebody in a chair wheelchair, but might make it harder for somebody who's blind. So that that goes for any kind of disability. Right. So things might make improve. One, populations abilities. But might cause some issues for, for another, human condition.

00:35:00:11 - 00:35:27:05

Ron Wickman

So we have to become very knowledgeable. That's a, that's a hard job for us as architects as we, we have to have a working knowledge of all these different, all these different conditions and, and I, I know I spent a lot of time doing it, and I'm an architect who specializes in it, so, I'm not at the same time that I'm learning all, all I can about accessibility.

00:35:27:17 - 00:35:50:27

Ron Wickman

I'm not spending time learning about other important issues that go into creating creating a building, like mechanical systems and, and, and so I rely on other experts in that area. So, again, the whole idea of the recounts and foundation was to create a kind of, army, if you want to call it, of of consultants and experts that could really help in, in all of this.

00:35:51:23 - 00:36:14:13

Ron Wickman

But I do know that the, the issue around, I guess I like to refer to it as neuro neurodivergent now. But it's true. It's it's, you you do a space that's good for one person. You've done a space that's good for one person. So trying to find something that works for everybody, makes it really hard.

00:36:15:16 - 00:36:49:19

Ron Wickman

And and in a way, this is a little bit an aside or this is more of a design, comment that I want to make is, that, for me, anyway, it's almost kind of come full circle. Like when I entered this profession, I was largely talking about people who used wheelchairs and as

I'm, still in it and hope to still be in it for a long time, but I'm, you know, I've been around a while.

00;36;50;18 - 00;37;19;29

Ron Wickman

I'm kind of more. I'm kind of moving back to that area of design is trying to make what I would call almost like an inclusive, accessible design that primarily focuses on people who use wheelchairs because in architecture, that's the that's the most difficult population to design for. You got to get the space right, the amount of space that's required, everything else can follow.

00;37;22;02 - 00;37;51;12

Ron Wickman

Our choice of colors and textures and materials, our, our use of lighting, acoustics, all of these things can be done, but spatially, we've got to make we've got to make movement easy, easier for people who use wheelchairs. So one of the things that and again, this is just my comment, my opinion is as we introduce ourselves to all these different human conditions, it gets a little bit watered down.

00;37;51;12 - 00;38;16;21

Ron Wickman

It gets harder to do. Right. So we we've got to kind of stay on task and remain focused. And so, in one way, I want to encourage people to think about every, every condition you can think of and learn as much as you can. But at the same time you do at some point you have to start to prioritize this, who who your, your target audience is.

00;38;16;21 - 00;38;39;13

Ron Wickman

Right. So it's a it's a challenging thought that I'm saying and I hope I, I'm saying it in a way that's very, inclusive in my, in my language. Because I do I care about every condition I can think of, but I, I'm, I'm, I'm getting fearful that we're we're losing touch with just making things spatially, accommodating.

00;38;39;15 - 00;39;03;18

Karen Brown

I think you're absolutely right. Because you can fix everything else up to whatever standard is needed once you get the space right. So acoustics, you can deal with colors you can deal with. You're right. The materials, whether it's carpeting or flooring and, you know, whatever you're doing, you're absolutely right. I don't think that that's a contradictory thought at all.

00;39;03;20 - 00;39;28;03

Ron Wickman

Yeah, yeah, it's a it's important because I like what this is my experience as well as we we present all this information to a client who really has a limited working knowledge of, of disability. And just think how overwhelming that is for somebody like, like how do I weigh how do I digest all of this information in one sitting?

00;39;28;03 - 00;40;04;21

Ron Wickman

Right. And I've presented hundreds of times in, in my career to different audiences. And, this is the this is often the feedback I get is it's a great presentation. I've learned so much, but it was just too much just too much information. And so, I realize that sometimes I just have to, focus on one thing at a time for each, you know, each, article I write or presentation I do just to help the audience at least appreciate that.

00;40;04;21 - 00;40;40;12

Ron Wickman

And then they can they can hopefully move on from there. Right. So this is certainly something that I've been thinking a lot about in my, my work. Because, again, my, my work as an architect is very much focused on individual clients. So I'm working with somebody who might not have arms. And there's a completely different challenge there to designing, designing for somebody, with that condition compared to somebody who's in a power wheelchair or, you know, somebody who's we can talk about Alzheimer's.

00;40;40;14 - 00;41;01;12

Ron Wickman

You know, dementia, that sort of thing. There's so many different things. Right? So I kind of pick away, at each project, I do, offers me a different perspective. And then I try to bring it all back into my overall design, when sometimes, maybe I am designing a condo building where, I don't know, I don't always know the client.

00;41;01;12 - 00;41;03;05

Ron Wickman

At the end of the day.

00;41;03;08 - 00;41;19;00

Karen Brown

I remember asking you on one of our first early podcasts if you ever do design for something, but you don't tell them what it's for. And you said sort of sheepishly, why, yes, yes I do.

00;41;19;03 - 00;41;20;01

Ron Wickman

Yeah, yeah.

00;41;20;03 - 00;41;48;23

Karen Brown

Yeah. And I think but that goes to the point that you were just making that if you try to give everybody the whole ball of wax at the same time, it's, it's overwhelming. It's too much. But if you can focus on one thing and then understanding who the end users might be to whatever extent you can slide in some other stuff, be it color choices or materials to make things acoustically more pleasing, then that's what you do.

00;41;48;23 - 00;42;03;16

Karen Brown

And if they ask questions about that later on, then you can you can explain that later on because they've already accepted the big ball. Now it's getting them to understand and accept the other smaller pieces and and that there is a reason for it.

00;42;03;19 - 00;42;34;02

Ron Wickman

And that's a, that's a great, great segue into something that we should, remind, remind people of, if they haven't heard it before. I know I've said it in the past many times, but, there are there there are three key areas that we can really focus in on. And interestingly enough, if you get these three right in your housing design, it does actually benefit everybody.

00:42:34:04 - 00:42:52:13

Ron Wickman

And that is, what I call the no step entrance or like a wheelchair accessible entrance. So there's, if somebody in a wheelchair can get in, the front door, then anybody can. Like, there really is nobody that benefits from stairs that I can think of.

00:42:52:15 - 00:43:00:09

Karen Brown

No, nobody likes stairs. Not toddlers, not older people, not people with disabilities, not delivery people. Nobody likes them.

00:43:00:12 - 00:43:24:12

Ron Wickman

That's right. So I don't know why we, you know, and in condo living, usually naturally we don't have steps, right? Maybe we do. And then we have a ramp as well. Right. Because that's the building code. So so that is just something that we can say. Yes. It helps, those individuals who use wheelchairs, that's where the whole idea of the no step entrance came from was somebody who used a wheelchair.

00:43:25:07 - 00:43:49:16

Ron Wickman

Created this concept that we, we refer to as visit to ability, which is basically, getting into a single family house. Right? I'm, I, I'm in a wheelchair, and I can at least visit my friends. So if all my friends had visible homes, at least I could go visit with them. Might not be able to stay overnight easily, but I can at least visit them, so that no step entrance becomes vital.

00:43:51:01 - 00:44:17:18

Ron Wickman

And then, when you're inside a building, like a condo building, for example, and this naturally happens, is you need you need access to vertical circulation. So an elevator. So almost every building that's, at least more than four storeys will have an elevator. And most low rise housing projects now have elevators as well. So the elevator kind of takes care of that.

00:44:18:07 - 00:44:42:14

Ron Wickman

And I've mentioned this before. It's not that difficult these days to do a, a small project, a duplex or a fourplex or something, or even a, like a single family house. You can easily add a residential elevator. They're much less expensive than than your commercial elevator. And, and they're they can just be sort of out of the way.

00:44:43:02 - 00:44:52:27

Ron Wickman

It's basically you're just looking at a door, and you open that door and there's an elevator, elevator cab in there, and then more. Oh, sorry. More importantly.

00:44:52:29 - 00:45:17:13

Karen Brown

Can I if I can just interrupt? I know that on a previous podcast we did talk about home elevators and the fact that they have really not increased in price substantially. Correct. For many, many years. I mean, like everything you can buy the Cadillac with, you know, the music and the, the golden edges. I mean, you can do whatever you want, but a basic home elevator has not increased in price tremendously in many years.

00:45:17:13 - 00:45:23:10

Karen Brown

And that's one aspect of building where we've gotten a break. Yeah.

00:45:23:13 - 00:45:44:28

Ron Wickman

And that and that. And that's proof that, there's been there's been enough demand, over time that it's kept the cost sort of, you know,



a to 30 years ago, an elevator was about \$25,000. And and like you said today, you can they range anywhere from 25 to probably 45, depending on, you know, all the bells and whistles you want to have.

00;45;45;00 - 00;46;11;00

Ron Wickman

So today, getting a residential elevator is is more like going and buying a car. You know, you can you can get a Ford or a Chevy or, you know, whatever else is out there. So you can yeah, you can shop around and it's great. Right? You can. You have lots of lots of options available, depending on your situation and if you're willing to pay some money, you can have, like, literally like a glass tube in your house.

00;46;11;00 - 00;46;16;12

Ron Wickman

That's very expensive, but, sure looks, you know, space ag and.

00;46;16;17 - 00;46;19;10

Karen Brown

I was going to say Star Trek is what sounds like Star Trek to me.

00;46;19;10 - 00;46;48;18

Ron Wickman

Exactly. Yeah. And then and then, yeah. Just to to, to really emphasize the the third issue is the, is the bathroom, and, getting the bathroom right is, is really simply a means of, thinking of it as a wet room. So you just make sure the whole floor and the walls are waterproof and, and then, your shower area just is, has no curb, basically.

00;46;48;20 - 00;47;10;16

Ron Wickman

And so the the the floor in the bathroom, all slopes to a drain. And, if you want to stand in the shower, that's not a problem. If you want to, sit on a bench, that's also not a problem if you want a shower right from your wheelchair, that's not a problem. So other than maybe wanting to change out, you get.

00:47:10;16 - 00:47:34;02

Ron Wickman

You grow tired of your sink countertop. You want a different look? You can change that out. You could maybe change out the tiles if you wanted to over time. But, you know, effectively, you have something that is really can be part of your life forever. And you never have to change it. And, that, that just offers all kinds of choices in your life.

00:47:34;02 - 00:47:55;27

Ron Wickman

Now, I can I can stay here, I can move, but you're not you're not faced with a challenge that so many people I know are faced with, which is I can't keep living like this. I. I can't have a sponge bath in my living room. You know, any. You know, I've been doing this for three years, and I just can't live out of my living room anymore.

00:47:56;15 - 00:48;06;05

Ron Wickman

Something's got to give, right? And if they had, if they had a shower area that was already there, then that would just make all the difference in the world for them.

00:48;06;07 - 00:48;28;25

Karen Brown

I will point out to our listeners that you and I have done separate, in-depth podcasts on each of these three topics, so you can go back into our archives or just search for them, and you will find details and prices and all kinds of information about each of these topics separately.

00:48;28;27 - 00:48;59;00

Ron Wickman

Yeah. And I just, I the reason I was saying it today too is, is, is this idea that when I am now talking to, government, city planners, developers, rather than, just providing just tons and tons of information for them, I just go, here's the three things. Just, just listen to these three things and, and leave knowing that that's all you got to worry about for now.

00:48:59:02 - 00:49:17:16

Ron Wickman

And, and if you can get those things right, then then depending on your perspective and your and and how far you want to take this, that's up to you, right? You can do you can do it. You can start doing more research. You can come back to me, you can go to you can go to others. For more information.

00:49:17:16 - 00:49:44:25

Ron Wickman

You can you can do a web search, the information there's a lot of information out there now, but people have to get it their heads around the idea that there's some very simple things that you need to do, that are critical. And then after that, there's, there's lots of other things that, you can start to personalize, for your own, for your own, living experience.

00:49:44:27 - 00:50:09:14

Karen Brown

That's really good advice. And it certainly speaks to people who are looking to renovate their homes because they've decided they want to stay there. It applies to people who think they want to downsize and what they need to look for in a condo, if that's your choice or some other kind of accommodation. That these three things speak to everyone.

00:50:09:16 - 00:50:25:13

Ron Wickman

They do. They really do. Yeah. And I the more I see it, the more I talk about it, the more I believe it. Like it really. And and I've been working out this a long time. So it just, it gets proven to me over and over again that these, these things really do work.

00:50:25:16 - 00:50:26:08

Karen Brown

That's right.

00:50:26:11 - 00:50:42:22

Ron Wickman

And they're not they're not expensive. They're they just really do not add, obviously a residential elevator to a single family house. At that's cost, right? 25, thousand dollars, maybe \$30,000.

00;50;42;24 - 00;50;59;23

Karen Brown

But you also don't have to spend that money if you can live, if you've got a two story house and you can figure out the, the footprint on the main floor. That's fine. But you do need to have a way to get in and out of the house. And you do need to have a bathroom that you can use.

00;50;59;25 - 00;51;14;13

Ron Wickman

Yeah. Yeah. Right. You know, you know what else costs money. Windows. Windows. They cost money. Just, just have like one window in your bedroom and then call it a day. You'll save a lot of money on windows.

00;51;14;16 - 00;51;41;03

Karen Brown

Well and there but there are grant dollars available. I mean that speaks to energy saving and so forth, which reminds me that people can look for grant money to do these exact accessible renovations on their homes. You should you should check with your city, your county, and look at federal grants as well, because there's money out there. Not a lot.

00;51;41;04 - 00;51;56;03

Karen Brown

Not as much as I think either of us would like to see. Yeah, but there's money out there, so, you know, plan your work and work. Your plan is kind of an adage that applies to this situation, don't you think?

00;51;56;06 - 00;52;22;04

Ron Wickman

Yes. Yeah. For sure. And that, you know, so often I think what happens in this, in this world is, the world of disability is, is it usually hits people unexpectedly, like at times when they, you

know, they they're not ready for it. And, you know, either personally, our family member, a mom or dad has a stroke or, there's a car accident or a child's been born with a disability.

00:52:22:04 - 00:52:42:27

Ron Wickman

There's, you know, there's all kinds of things that just come very unexpectedly. And and then all of a sudden you find yourself just, at wit's end trying to figure out what to do and where to go. So, that's really, I think, certainly as, as an architect and, and consultant, I can do my best to help.

00:52:42:27 - 00:53:05:21

Ron Wickman

I, you know, I'm doing this podcast, do presentations, write articles, do as much as I can. But that's also where government can be, way more focused themselves. I know governments will say they care and they really want to do something, but often, they're words. Right. And and I don't always see a lot of action. To be honest.

00:53:05:24 - 00:53:35:25

Karen Brown

This is true. But we are each responsible for ourselves. And as we so often say to people, when I talk to individuals or groups, decisions will be made. At some point, decisions will be made. Either you can make them or other people will make them. Yeah. So I think it comes down to how much respect you have for yourself and how much you're willing to take the blinders off because people get frozen around these decisions not knowing what to do or where to go.

00:53:35:25 - 00:53:58:13

Karen Brown

They get frozen, and that's a perfectly human condition. But they need to stop that and figure out what their next five years, ten years, 20 years could look like, could look like their choice. At this point, it is their choice. Now. At some point it will become someone else's choice and then they may not make decisions that you like.

00;53;59;15 - 00;54;16;19

Karen Brown

Anyway, I think we've said a lot of very hopeful things for people there. There are certainly lots of options and that's probably a really good place to bring this particular podcast to an end. But as always, Ron, if you have any last words, I'll leave it to you.

00;54;16;21 - 00;54;50;12

Ron Wickman

Yeah, I just wanted to get back to the this, issue I mentioned about the missing middle. So, my final comment would be that, the industry has to, and this involves government as well, but we have to create a situation where there is more choice for people. So, I think, I think if we really do, and this is where architects can really play a vital role is really promote the idea of, of different types of living experiences.

00;54;50;14 - 00;55;17;27

Ron Wickman

So, we talked about condos, we talked about single family houses, but there's all this stuff in the middle, that, we need to pay more attention to and give more thought to, and, and certainly we we're seeing it here in, in Alberta with a lot of infill housing. So taking existing properties and repurposing them in ways that we can get more density, try to make things more affordable.

00;55;17;27 - 00;55;48;03

Ron Wickman

That's not always working as well as we hope. But, in all of that, we cannot forget that we are largely thinking about our population of people who are aging people with disabilities. We have an opportunity to really redo that housing in a way that effectively is more flexible, adaptable, accessible, inclusive, universal. We just have to, make it our mission to, to really make that happen, right?

00;55;48;05 - 00;56;10;09

Karen Brown

Absolutely. I agree with you 100%. Yeah. Well, as always, Ron, thank you very much for joining today on the podcast. I hope

we've said lots of wonderful things that will inspire people, maybe make them think and hopefully give them some things to consider as they plan their own lives over the next decade or two.

00;56;10;11 - 00;56;11;08

Ron Wickman

00;56;11;11 - 00;56;13;03

Karen Brown

Thank you.

00;56;13;06 - 00;56;14;03

Ron Wickman

Thanks.

00;56;14;05 - 00;56;22;14

Karen Brown

And thank you to those of you who are listening and watching us. I would like to invite you back to our next episode of Real Life Renos:

00;56;22;21 - 00;56;33;14

Karen Brown

The Podcast.

00;56;33;16 - 00;56;36;06

Unknown