

INFORMATION STATEMENT FOR APPLICANTS IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA  
**ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCES**

The City of Philadelphia encourages you to make your property accessible to people with disabilities, and has prepared this statement to assist you through that process.

The information in this statement is provided for general guidance only and is intended to supplement, not replace, case by case information provided by City departments and City representatives. Specific questions should be directed to your Department of Licenses and Inspections plans examiner. This Information Statement is intended to assist you in identifying the most practical way to provide access to your property, and then to assist you in completing the building permit application process for an entrance ramp in as timely a manner as possible. Therefore, you are encouraged to follow the steps below in the order in which they are presented.

## **I) PLANNING YOUR ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE**

### **A) Options to Consider**

The City recognizes that because each property is unique, the best way to design an accessible entrance may not be the same for each property. Therefore, before submitting your plans to the Department of Licenses and Inspections, the City encourages you to consider the following options when planning your accessible entrance:

- 1) Would it be possible to build a ramp inside the building?
- 2) Would regrading the sidewalk to create an accessible entrance be preferable to building a ramp?
- 3) Would obtaining an easement from a neighbor give you the necessary space to build a ramp? (**NOTE:** In this instance, the applicant should consider utilizing materials that can be removed and replaced with relative ease, such as wood, in case the neighboring property is sold and the easement is lost.)
- 4) If providing access to the main entrance is not readily achievable, are there alternate entrances to consider? (**NOTE:** In this instance, signage should be provided at the main entrance directing people with disabilities to the accessible entrance.)

### **B) Consultation with a City Plans Examiner**

Once your plans have been submitted to the Department of Licenses and Inspections in accordance with the steps outlined in Section III, your project will be assigned to a plans examiner. This plans examiner will be available to meet with you to discuss any questions you may have about your project, including how you could make your property accessible.

### **C) Entrance Ramp Variance Process**

In order to maximize the number of accessible properties in Philadelphia, the following is a list of situations under which the City, through the Accessibility Advisory Board, will consider granting a variance from the applicable entrance ramp design standards, which are outlined in Section II:

- 1) If the site constraints do not permit a ramp with a slope of 1:12, the applicant may apply for a variance for a ramp with a slope no steeper than 1:10.
- 2) If the site constraints do not provide enough room for a landing at the top of the ramp, the applicant may apply for a variance for a ramp without a landing at the top, if an automatic door opener is installed with a button on the handrail at the bottom of the ramp.
- 3) If the site constraints do not provide enough room for a landing at the top of the ramp, the applicant may apply for a variance for a ramp without a landing at the top, if a bell is installed on the handrail at the bottom of the ramp alerting employees/residents inside that an individual with a disability is waiting outside for assistance.

If you choose to go through this process, you must first submit your plans to the Department of Licenses and Inspections in accordance with the steps outlined in Section III. Because your plans will show a ramp which does not fully comply with the applicable accessibility standards, as a matter of procedure you will receive an "Initial Refusal." Once the "Initial Refusal" is received, you may then submit your application for a variance to the Accessibility Advisory Board. (**NOTE:** All variance requests will be considered on an individual case by case basis.)

## **II) DESIGNING AN ENTRANCE RAMP**

### **A) Ramp Placement Considerations**

*The City requires the applicant to make every effort to design the ramp within the property line, or within the building itself, whenever possible. Designing a ramp which will encroach on the public footway should be the last alternative considered.*

### **B) Ramp Design Specifications**

The applicable standard in the City of Philadelphia is CABO/ANSI A117.1. According to this standard, a new ramp must contain the following features:

- a slope no steeper than 1:12 (**NOTE:** If the site constraints do not permit a ramp with this slope, see Section I.C.)
- a minimum clear width of 36 inches

- level landings at the top and bottom of each run (**NOTE:** If the site constraints do not provide enough room for a landing at the top of the ramp, see Section I.C.)
- landings at least as wide as the widest ramp run leading to it
- a minimum landing length of 60 inches clear (**NOTE:** Although not required in the CABO/ANSI A117.1 standard, the City encourages the applicant to design the ramp on the latchside of the door whenever possible in order to minimize the size of the landing.)
- switchback ramps require a minimum 60 inch by 60 inch landing where the change in direction occurs
- ramps with a rise greater than 6 inches or a run longer than 72 inches must have handrails

(**NOTE:** The above provisions may be subject to modification based on case by case design reviews.)

### **C) Ramps on the Public Footway**

If the applicant determines that using the standards listed above will not allow for the design of a ramp within the property line or within the building itself, the City will consider allowing a ramp to be designed and constructed on the public footway under the following circumstances:

- 1) If the **clear** public footway (taking into account location of sidewalk furniture, obstructions, etc.) would be at least 72 inches wide after construction of the proposed ramp, and all other requirements have been met, the applicant will only need to wait for utility approval (see below) before being issued a building permit for the ramp.
- 2) If the **clear** public footway (taking into account location of sidewalk furniture) would be less than 72 inches wide after construction of the proposed ramp, each such proposed ramp will be subject to an individual case by case review before a building permit may be issued. In addition, any applicant proposing to construct a ramp which, after construction, would leave less than 72 inches of **clear** public footway must submit, in conjunction with the application for building permit, a feasibility study by a registered architect or engineer clearly showing that placement of the ramp within the property line or within the building itself is not feasible.

Since utility conduits and pipes are located beneath sidewalks throughout the City, installing a ramp on the public footway is not always feasible. If a ramp is proposed that would block access to such utilities, and acceptable designs or materials cannot be utilized, the Department of Streets must recommend that the building permit be denied. (**NOTE:** In this instance, you may wish to arrange for a consultation with your City plans examiner to identify alternative ways to create an accessible entrance - see Section I.B.)

Even if approved by the Department of Streets, a ramp that encroaches on the public footway is subject to removal or dismantling by the owner and at the owner's expense if any repairs to the infrastructure are necessary. *For this reason, the City encourages the applicant to utilize materials that can be removed and replaced with relative ease when constructing a ramp on the public footway.*

### III) APPLYING FOR A BUILDING PERMIT

#### A) Department of Licenses and Inspections

You must complete a building permit application from the Department of Licenses and Inspections and submit three (3) copies of a detailed sketch of the ramp along with a plot plan of the property indicating the location of the proposed ramp. At the discretion of the plans examiner, you may also be required to submit architectural plans of the property. Applicants are urged to work closely with the Licenses and Inspections plans examiner and a design professional to ensure that the best design solution is found. (**NOTE:** Approval of any building permit application is strictly conditional on the accuracy of all documents required for submission in conjunction with the building permit application.)

- 1) The **sketch** required as part of the permit application process must detail the following elements:
  - length of ramp
  - width of ramp
  - slope of ramp
  - change in elevation
  - surface
  - ramp landing dimensions
  - ramp foundation details
  - handrails (including type and mounting mechanism)
  - distance to the ramp from the face of the curb
  - distance to the ramp from the nearest intersection
  - the existing physical and legal width of sidewalk
  - all sidewalk furniture and/or obstructions (street lights, fire hydrants, signs, planters, trees, etc.)
- 2) A **plot plan** is a dimensioned and scaled drawing that shows the details of the property, including all lot lines and all structures as seen from above. The lot dimensions can be obtained from the property deed. Often, a property owner can prepare the plot plan, but complex plot plans may require the certification of a registered architect, engineer or land surveyor. The plot plan required as part of the building permit application process must contain the following information:
  - outline of the property with dimensions

- outline of existing structures on the property with dimensions
- outline of the proposed ramp with dimensions and distances to the lot lines
- name and address of the owner
- signature of the owner
- signature and seal of the design professional

## **B) Compliance with Applicable Codes**

If the proposed ramp meets all applicable codes, the building permit will be issued. If it does not meet all applicable codes, your application will be directed to one or more of the entities described below. The Department of Licenses and Inspections cannot issue a building permit unless the necessary approvals are obtained. Upon obtaining a recommendation from any of the entities listed below, regardless of the outcome, you must return to the plans examiner at the Department of Licenses and Inspections for final review.

### **1) Department of Streets**

If the proposed ramp would encroach on the public footway, approval must be secured from the Department of Streets. As mentioned in section II.C.1. above, if a proposed ramp would leave at least 72 inches of **clear** public footway after construction, approval will be granted if there are no utility conflicts. In order for the review to take place, you must apply to the Board of Highway Supervisors within the Department of Streets. You must submit the following documentation:

- a Licenses and Inspections application for building permit
- a completed Board of Highway Supervisors application
- thirteen (13) copies of a sketch
- a check for \$5.00 payable to the City of Philadelphia
- photograph(s) (non-returnable) showing all sidewalk furniture and obstructions
- if the proposed ramp would leave less than 72 inches of **clear** public footway after construction, a feasibility study by a registered architect or engineer must be submitted clearly showing that placement of the ramp within the property line or within the building itself is not feasible
- if the proposed ramp would encroach on a neighbor's property, a permit will not be issued until the applicant submits proof that easement(s) have been obtained
- a copy of this signed and dated Statement (see last page)

### **2) City Planning Commission**

If the proposed ramp alters the facade of a property located in the area of Center City governed by the zoning overlay district as detailed in Section 14-1607 of the Philadelphia Zoning Code, approval must be secured from the City Planning Commission. In this case, copies of the application, sketches and plot plan will be submitted to the City Planning Commission.

### **3) Historical Commission**

If the proposed ramp affects an historic property, you must obtain approval from the Historical Commission. In this case, copies of the application, sketches and plot plan will be sub-

mitted to the Historical Commission.

**4) Accessibility Advisory Board**

If the proposed ramp does not meet the applicable accessibility codes, you will be directed to apply for a variance from the Accessibility Advisory Board.

**IMPORTANT!**

*You may appeal refusals* by the Department of Licenses and Inspections, the Department of Streets, the Board of Highway Supervisors, the City Planning Commission, the Historical Commission, and the Accessibility Advisory Board in accordance with the usual appeals process.

*You may also request a reasonable accommodation* under the Americans with Disabilities Act if your property is non-residential, or under the Fair Housing Act if your property is residential. For further information, contact the Accessibility Compliance Office at 686-9006.

**III) FEDERAL TAX INCENTIVES FOR BARRIER REMOVAL**

Commercial property owners who must comply with the barrier removal provisions of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should be aware of the following tax deductions and credits. The descriptions provided below are for general information only and should not be relied upon as authority for acting or refusing to act. For further information, contact either the local IRS Office or Office of Chief Counsel, Internal Revenue Service, 1111 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington D.C. 20224; (202) 622-3110. Toll free assistance is available for all federal tax questions at 1-800-829-1040.

**A) Businesses/Private Entities/Places of Public Accommodation**

Section 190 of the IRS Code allows an annual tax deduction of up to \$15,000 each year for any taxpayer who removes barriers to individuals with disabilities in an existing place of business or trade. Ramps, grading, entrances, doors and doorways, and floors are among the design areas covered.

**B) Eligible Small Businesses**

Section 44 of the IRS Code can be elected in more than one year, and allows an eligible small business to elect a non-refundable tax credit equal to 50% of the amount of the eligible access expenditures between \$250 and \$10,250 for any tax year. Eligible small businesses had gross receipts the previous year that did not exceed \$1 million, or had no more than 30 full time employees and elect the application of the accessibility credit

for the tax year. Eligible access expenditures include removing architectural barriers, such as a step, that prevent a business from being accessible to individuals with disabilities.



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I have read and understood the above Information Statement on Accessible Entrances.

(name - **print**)\_\_\_\_\_

(telephone)\_\_\_\_\_

(signature)\_\_\_\_\_

(date)\_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:** Please return a copy of this signed and dated Information Statement with all other materials submitted with your application for a building permit for the ramp(s) in question.

03/22/01