

The Florida Law

The Florida "Bathroom Law" instituted in 1989 is the first --and as of 2011, the only--U.S. law to mandate a basic access feature in all new homes throughout an entire state.

"(c) Single-family houses, duplexes, triplexes, condominiums, and townhouses shall provide at least one bathroom, located with maximum possible privacy, where bathrooms are provided on habitable grade levels, with a door that has a 29-inch clear opening."

In 1996, Eleanor Smith spoke by phone with Tom Stephens, a builder employed by Atlantic Design and Construction Company, building more than 50 houses per year. He noted that the law was widely enforced and that he had never heard of an exemption needed, and stated that the additional cost is virtually zero. He said his company's existing house plans already provided space for the wider door. In the few cases where the plan did not show sufficient space, they "bump the wall out", shaving a few inches from an adjacent bedroom. He stated that did not require the plans to be redrawn, just notations on the existing plans and the contractor giving clear directions to the framer. "Basically no charge," Mr. Stephens said..

See below a letter from the Bob Reifel, the company President and CEO, in which he calls the door requirement "an easy, cost-effective change."

2011 note re door widths: The current minimum standard for door widths is 32 inches of clear passage space, achieved by a 2'10" door. At the time of the Florida law, this width was not readily available; standard doors jumped from 2'8" to 3'0". However, a few years later 2'10" doors became readily available door wholesalers at little or no cost more than narrower doors because that is the minimum width required in all new multi-family residences, .

A Letter from a Florida Builder

Atlantic Design
1502 NW 6th Street
Gainesville, FL 32601

January 10, 1997

Concrete Change
1371 Metropolitan Av. S.E.
Atlanta, Ga. 30316

To Whom It May Concern:

This is in reply to your letter of December 30, 1996 (copy enclosed). Atlantic Design and Construction is a licensed Florida builder. We have our own in-house design and plan service as well as interior design service. We will build approximately 55 homes this year.

Please review the 7 baths enclosed. They were taken randomly from seven homes now under construction.

1. Door cost

I called our door supplier today for an updated cost list on raised panel embossed masonite interior doors, primed one coat:

Size Cost (include Delivery & tax)

2'0" door \$ 59.00

2'4" door \$ 62.00

2'6" door \$ 64.00

2'8" door \$ 64.00

2'0" doors are seldom used (the tub does not fit and a vanity is a real squeeze.) So 2'4" or 2'6" in the old days before handicap code we typically used 2'6". There is no cost difference between 2'6" or 2'8". Also hardware/paint are the same (less paint. More door=no change).

2. Framing cost

Plans 1, 2A, 3, 5, and 7 have no added framing costs.

Plans 2B, 4, 5 - notice the "X" on the tub wall. Here the tub is brought out 3 1/2 " so that the door and trim have enough room to clear the vanity. Note there is an added benefit of the tub faucets being easier for everyone to reach - pushed away from the toilet.

This 3 1/2" of framing costs approximately \$4.00 in material, and there is no additional labor or finishing cost. It could probably be done with scrap 2 x 4's that are 2'- 4' long at no cost.

3. Plan costs

New plans: no added cost - just something to be aware of.

Old plans: Most plans are constantly revised by clients even in "cookie cutter" type (plan 4) housing with on-site sales. Buyers constantly revise something, so there is a cost of maybe \$25-50 to move a Bedroom - Bath wall (etc.) on the plan. Usually there is no charge for this if any other change is made, such as the addition of a closet, switch sink, or cooking areas; moving or adding a window; or changing a window to a door.

I would imagine if the builders, developers, and designers were give 3-6 months notice, most of their plans would be revised anyway - so no added cost.

4. Other Benefits

-- Easier for subcontractors to move equipment, etc.

-- Most buyers today have older parents, friends, or relatives who may be in need of a walker, cane, or wheelchair.

-- There is peace of mind knowing that if they visit, or if you try to sell or rent to someone (as above), the plan accommodates.

In my opinion, the cost for this access is \$2-30. This is an easy, cost effective change.

Please note that I have enclosed a copy of Section 4.22.2 Dors#3 (pg. 58) from the Florida Accessibility Code for Building Construction, which governs residential code.

Let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Bob Reifel
BR/th

