

“My decision to purchase an EasyLiving home was based on my personal experience with parents that had health issues. My mother had polio and my father was in a wheelchair. I realized how difficult it was for them to access things in their home. My desire was to have a home with easier mobility with wider entry ways and a zero step entrance. Our builder was extremely accommodating and actually installed certain enhancements that could be used at a later date.”

- Nancy Glenmore-Tatum, EasyLiving Home Owner

1. Brief Description of the EasyLiving Home Program

Science and technology is allowing more Americans to live longer and better with disabilities, but little education or information is available on the ways new single family homes can also be improved to increase accessibility and usability. The EasyLiving Home^{cm} Program was formed in Virginia by a coalition to address this problem of educating home buyers and supporting builders of accessible homes. The EasyLiving Home^{cm} Program is a certification program designed to encourage builders of single family homes to voluntarily implement specific features to make a home accessible, cost effective and convenient for everyone. Whether you are a person in a wheelchair or just planning to grow old in your home, the EasyLiving Home program creates a welcoming, comfortable place to live. Builders simply register with EasyLiving Home and are provided guidance on standards to build their homes to become EasyLiving Home certified. Following registration and completion of building, EasyLiving Home inspectors visit the home to verify compliance of the minimum EasyLiving Home requirements and present a certificate and seal. This seal provides the buyer with the comfort of knowing that the home has met the rigorous standards of the EasyLiving Home Program, assuring that people of all abilities will be able to visit and enjoy the home. The seal also provides the builder another way to market the home. This underlines the future goal of the program, which is to grow the EasyLiving Home^{cm} name has a special marketing campaign nationwide. By increasing the visibility of the EasyLiving Home^{cm} program, it will help educate both home buyers and builders about the importance of having an accessible home.

VHDA was the first housing authority in the nation to help start an EasyLiving Coalition.

Virginia has also developed a unique tax credit program that allows home buyers to get a \$5,000 Virginia Tax Credit as part of the Virginia Livable Home Tax Credit Program (LHTC), further acknowledging the importance of building more accessible homes in the Commonwealth.

2. Why it was Undertaken

There were a limited number of accessible homes in Virginia and no basic standards or guidelines to help buyers understand the accessibility of homes. Therefore, an EasyLiving Summit was held in Richmond, Virginia to bring together an array of agencies, organizations and individuals interested in accessibility, visitability and learning about the EasyLiving Home certification. As a result of the Summit and with the collaborative efforts of the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, the Home Builders Association of Virginia, VHDA, and AARP the EasyLiving Home Coalition was formed. The Coalition’s goals were to increase the number of single family homes accommodating the needs of people at all ability levels and to educate the community about how and where people with disabilities can purchase accessible homes.

3. What the EasyLiving Home Program has Accomplished

With the participation of VHDA, the EasyLiving Home^{cm} Program is Virginia's first viable program that works to increase the production of accessible single family homes in Virginia. Even despite the poor home building economy, 12 homes have been certified and 13 builders have enrolled in the program.

The Virginia coalitional has also been able to save the EasyLiving Home trademark when the housing bust threatened the effort. Maintaining this marketing tool is important to developing a strong method of communicating the program.

The coalition worked with Virginia's legislative Housing Commission and the Governor's Housing Policy initiative to get an existing state tax credit for accessibility improvements first expanded to include new homes constructed through the Easy Living Homes Program, and then to substantially increase to the amount of the tax credit from \$500 to \$5,000.

4. Why the EasyLiving Home Program is Meritorious and Meets NCSHA Judging Criteria

Innovative

As mentioned earlier, VHDA was the first state finance agency in the nation to start an EasyLiving Coalition. EasyLiving Home^{cm} is a voluntary certification program addressing an emerging market. This is the first program of its kinds to build a collaborative relationship among such diverse groups as the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, AARP, Home Builders Association of Virginia, Center for Independent Living, and Area Agencies on Aging. This innovative program results in new single family homes that are accessible to everyone with and without disabilities.

Replicable

The EasyLiving Home^{cm} program can be easily replicated by other HFAs. By forming a coalition as VHDA has done, other HFAs can be successful in forming EasyLiving Home^{cm} partnerships in their state.

Respond to an important state housing need

As our state and national population ages, the AARP reports that some 85 percent of people between the ages of 55 and 65 report a strong desire to remain in their current home, yet 90 percent of these homes cannot support the activities of daily living that these people require. Single family homes have never been user friendly to people with different abilities. So, Virginia's EasyLiving Home^{cm} program begins to build community relationships by providing a proven way to meet the needs of ever more diverse communities.

Demonstrate measurable benefits to HFA targeted customers

Since Virginia's first EasyLiving home was certified, approximately 12 homes have been certified and 13 builders have enrolled in the program.

Proven track record of success in the marketplace

Since EasyLiving Home certified its first home, interest from all segments of the building community has been strong. Centers for Independent Living and Area Agencies on Aging staff

are being trained about EasyLiving homes. Also, the Home Builders Association of Virginia is sponsoring “Getting Acquainted Training” in each of its regional chapters to sign builders up for the program.

Provide benefits that outweigh costs

When an EasyLiving home is designed and built, the cost differential is less than two percent more of the original building cost.

Demonstrate effective use of resources

VHDA contributed \$5,000 to the Coalition’s initial start up fund and has supported the program with staff time and other non-financial resources. With the initial funds, the Coalition has hired Habitat for Humanity Virginia as its administrative agent to take calls and dispatch Centers for Independent Living inspectors from across the state. Funds also come from registration fees from the builders and certification fees from the inspections. The return on investment is the creation of a voluntary program that will create homes that can be visited – and lived in – by people with disabilities. There are no laws or regulations compelling builders to build single family homes that are accessible. EasyLiving homes are an easy solution that does not involve government oversight or regulation.

Effectively employ partnerships

With the partnership of the Board for People with Disabilities and VHDA, a collaborative effort was started with other organizations like the Home Builders Association, AARP, Department of Housing and Community Development, and Habitat for Humanity Virginia to develop a significant and unprecedented coalition to create accessible and affordable single family homes.

Achieve strategic objectives

Since its creation and despite the poor home building economy, the EasyLiving Home^{cm} Program has certified 12 homes and has 13 builders.

Conclusion

For Virginians getting older or who have a disability, building or finding a new affordable home can be challenging. The current marketplace is ill-prepared to provide the types of features and designs that are needed to make homes accessible for all people. With the help of VHDA, the first EasyLiving Home coalition was formed to develop strong partnerships within the home building community, so that home buyers and builders could start learning about accessible homes and their advantages. With more boomers aging, the demand for accessible homes is only going to grow. The statistics from the Virginia Department of Aging indicate that within the next 30 years, people over 60 will account for more than 25 percent of Virginia’s population.

The EasyLiving Homes program will be there to support this growing number of access-minded Virginians by providing information to builders and home buyers. The program not only maintains the requirements or features an accessible home should have, but creates a certification process to protect consumers. Also, VHDA was the first state finance agency in the nation to start an EasyLiving Coalition. By educating people about the importance of having a home that is accessible to everyone, the program works to prevent more costly modifications later and allows disabled homeowners to live the life of their choice.

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What is an EasyLiving Home^{cm}?

EasyLiving Home^{cm} is a certification program designed to encourage builders of single-family homes to voluntarily implement EasyLiving Home^{cm} features, which make a home cost effective, attractive, accessible, visitable and convenient for everyone. Whether it is strollers, grocery carts, wheelchairs, 330-pound football players or heavy furniture and equipment, all will move easily in an EasyLiving Home^{cm}. The sale and resale value of a home is enhanced when it contains EasyLiving Home^{cm} features.

EasyLiving Home^{cm} features are:

- *Easy Access* with a step-free entrance from a driveway, sidewalk or other firm route into the central living area.
- *Easy Passage* because the exterior door that provides the step-free entrance and EVERY interior passage door on the main level (including bathrooms) is at least a 3'0" or 2'10" door, or a 2'8" pocket door, or other solution that provides 32 inches of clear passage space. Closets are not required to meet the 32-inch clear passage standard, but this can be an added advantage where feasible.
- *Easy Use* with no less than one bedroom, a kitchen, some entertainment area, and at least one full bathroom with sufficient maneuvering space . . . all on the main floor.

Two-story homes are eligible for EasyLiving Home^{cm} certification because the designated features refer only to the story served by the step-free entrance. Additional Universal Design features can be incorporated if the builder and buyer desire; however, the basic features listed above are the minimum requirements for certification. Since Fair Housing regulations cover multi-family dwellings with four or more units, EasyLiving Home^{cm} limits certification to single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes and townhouses.

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Construction Guidelines for EasyLiving Home Features

THE MAIN FLOOR

The main floor of an EasyLiving Home™ includes at least one full bathroom, one or more bedrooms, a kitchen, and an entertainment area such as a living room or den. There must be an accessible path throughout with no steps between rooms.

DOORS

The exterior door that provides the step-free entrance and EVERY interior passage door on the main level (including bathrooms) must be at least a 3'0" or 2'10" door, or a 2'8" pocket door, or other solution that provides 32 inches of clear passage space. If desired, the door to a bathroom can be hinged out, like a closet door, to provide more interior space. Closets are not required to meet the 32-inch clear passage standard, but this can be an added advantage where feasible.



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EasyLiving Homes in (top) Alpharetta, Georgia, built by Bonhambuilt Inc.; (middle) in Hahira, Georgia, built by Tricon Development, Inc.; and (bottom) by Wendt Builders in Snellville, Georgia.

ONE STEP-FREE ENTRANCE ON AN ACCESSIBLE PATH

Accessible Path means that the entrance is approached by a firm surface such as a sidewalk or a garage floor. *Step-free Entrance* means that the main floor of the house can be entered with no step higher than a 1/2-inch threshold. (An “ADA” or “handicap” threshold is readily available for pre-hung doors at major door suppliers.) The slope leading to the entrance should be no steeper than 1:12 (12 inches of length for each inch in rise) and less steep than that when possible.

Generally, the slope will not need to be a ramp but can be achieved by grading so that a sloping sidewalk meets the porch. This sidewalk method is particularly easy when building on a concrete slab, but can also be achieved through grading for homes with basements or crawl spaces.

There are instances when lots are steep and require a driveway that is considerably steeper than 1:12. In those cases EasyLiving Home features can still be met if the walk leading from the driveway to the entrance is 1:12 or less, or if a step-free entrance is constructed from the garage to the home.

If a lot is considerably higher at the back than the front, the builder may choose to locate the step-free entrance at the side or back of the house. This is an acceptable alternative to a front entrance when topography so indicates.

When selecting the step-free entrance from the garage to the main floor, the builder has several options. If the floor of the garage is nearly the same grade as the main floor, a relatively short concrete slope can be constructed. For very low rises (less than six inches), a slope steeper than 1:12 is acceptable. For example, a rise of one inch can have a slope 3 inches long; a rise of two inches, a slope 5 inches long; a rise of three inches, a slope 8 inches long; a rise of four inches a slope 12 inches long; and a rise of five inches, a slope 18 inches long. The reason a steeper slope than 1:12 ratio is feasible in these cases is that the back wheels of a wheelchair or the back legs of a walker are still on level ground while the front wheels/legs are on the slope, which alleviates the danger of uncontrolled rolling or tipping.



(left) The builder has incorporated a landscape design to create a step-free entrance. (center) A front door step-free entrance. (right) A step-free entrance from a driveway.

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EasyLiving
Home™ 

How You Can Certify Your Home

After you have reviewed this EasyLiving Home^{cm} information packet, you may contact the EasyLiving Home^{cm} office at 804-643-EASY (3279) for answers to any questions you may have. Then just complete the enclosed Enrollment Form and send it with your check to:

EasyLiving Home^{cm} VA
707 East Franklin St.
Richmond, VA 23219

You will receive by return mail an EasyLiving Home^{cm} Builder Manual which includes information and guidelines to assist you in building and marketing your EasyLiving Home^{cm}.

When your EasyLiving Home^{cm} is complete, all you need to do for certification is contact the EasyLiving Home^{cm} office to schedule an appointment. A compliance visit will be scheduled at your convenience and simply involves a quick check of your homes for EasyLiving Home^{cm} features. After verifying the features, you will be presented a certificate and seal for each EasyLiving Home^{cm}.

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"I was lured to the Woodberry subdivision because of the security wall and gate, hardwood floors and other amenities. At first I didn't even notice the wider doors and level entrance. Now, I think they are great extras. I'm just 44 now, but I'd like to stay put here and the EasyLiving Home^{cm} features will allow me to do so."

Rhonda Buckley, Homeowner, Snellville, GA

"The EasyLiving Home concept gives all of us an opportunity to take housing designs to the next level at a very minimal cost. At the same time, it provides a more livable and more visitable home for everyone. I would encourage all of those who work to provide housing for the citizens of the world to incorporate these life-enhancing design features in their homes."

*Millard Fuller, Founder
Habitat for Humanity
International*

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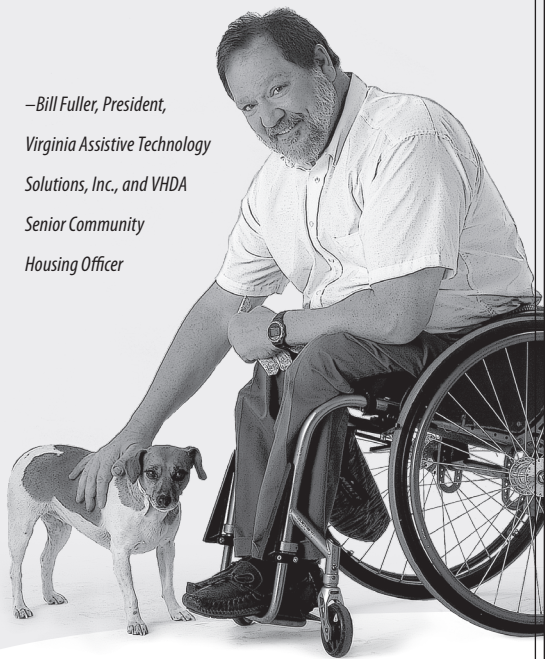
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Financing Available for EasyLiving Homes in Virginia

“EasyLiving Homes
are designed to
be convenient for
the entire lifetime
of the owners.”

*—Bill Fuller, President,
Virginia Assistive Technology
Solutions, Inc., and VHDA
Senior Community
Housing Officer*



VHDA is proud to support and offer financing for EasyLiving Homes^{CM}. For information, please contact Bill Fuller, Ph.D., at 804-343-5754 or Bill.Fuller@vhda.com.



Virginia Housing Development Authority



First EasyLiving Home Opens in Virginia

VHDA partners with Virginia Assistive Technology Solutions, Inc. to bring certification program to the Commonwealth.

Encouraging builders to include cost-effective features that enhance the accessibility and visit-ability of homes is what the EasyLiving Home^{CM} certification program is all about.

Pioneered in Georgia, the program is new to Virginia. The Commonwealth's first EasyLiving Home was scheduled to be certified in a ceremony in Richmond this March by the nonprofit Virginia Assistive Technology Solutions, Inc., (VATS).

The voluntary certification for everyday construction encourages inclusion of cost-effective features that make new homes welcoming to residents and visitors of all ages, sizes and abilities without sacrificing style or substantially increasing construction costs. Key features of an EasyLiving Home include:

- A step-free entrance.
- Easy passage inside with ample hallway space and door widths.
- A first floor that includes the master bedroom, kitchen, entertainment area and bathroom with ample maneuvering space.

“This program helps both the disability and aging communities to break into the mainstream housing market and influences how architects and builders design and construct new homes.”

Organizations such as the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) and the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD) were involved in the effort to establish the certification program in Virginia and have representatives on the Virginia Assistive Technology Solutions, Inc., board of directors.

“EasyLiving Homes are designed to be convenient for the entire lifetime of the owners,” said Bill Fuller, president of the VATS board and a VHDA senior community housing officer.

“This program,” added Teri Barker Morgan, a VATS board member and VBPD program manager, “helps both the disability and aging communities break into

the mainstream housing market, and influences how architects and builders design and construct new homes.” Morgan attended an EasyLiving Homes conference last year, saw its potential and worked in tandem with her VBPD colleagues to help make it happen in Virginia.

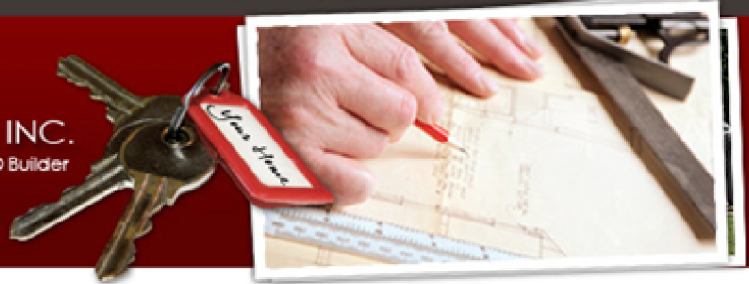
The 3,145 square foot, five bedroom house was built by Stephen Thomas Homes, whose president Steve Thomas had also been following the progress of the EasyLiving Home program as it was developed in Georgia and then adapted by other states.

To learn more about the EasyLiving Home program, including designs and features, visit easylivinghome.org.

Example Web site of an EasyLiving Builder

HOME ABOUT MPSC EASY LIVING FLOORPLANS SALES INFO CONTACTS

MPS CONTRACTOR, INC.
Certified Easy Living Home® Builder



What is an Easy Living® Home? - from EasyLivingHome.org

EasyLiving Home® is a proven, successful program conceived and developed cooperatively by organizations representing the building industry, government and accessibility advocates. This program represents the most successful attempt to date to promote change in construction practices without adversely affecting either the builder or the new home buyer. We are changing the way people think by increasing convenience, safety and inclusion - one EasyLiving Home® at a time.



Here's how the program works:

- EasyLiving Home® provides a few basic specifications to its member home builders and remodelers to incorporate into their plans.
- When the home is complete, an EasyLiving Home® representative physically inspects to ensure that the specifications were followed and expectations met.
- The builder is provided EasyLiving Home® certification for the homebuyer and a seal of approval to proudly display on the certified home.
- Home buyers can rest assured that a home displaying our seal will be easy to live in, easy to visit and easy to sell.

For more information about the EasyLiving Home® program, visit www.easylivinghome.org

MPSC Easy Living Plans



Virginia Coalition Members and Partners:

Home Builders Association of Virginia

Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development

Virginia Housing Development Authority

AARP Virginia

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (Virginia's DD Planning Council)

VA Habitat for Humanity

NewWell Fund

Stephen Thomas Homes

Virginia's Centers for Independent Living

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Eligibility

Individuals or licensed contractors filing Virginia income tax returns who have incurred costs for the purchase/construction of new residential units with accessibility or universal visitability features, or for the retrofitting of existing residential units with these features, on or after January 1, 2008 are eligible for the program under the following guidelines.

- 1 Eligible purchase or retrofitting expenses cannot be claimed by more than one taxpayer.
- 2 Eligible housing units must meet the following requirements:
 - New residential units must include at least three features of the universal visitability standards, or include at least three accessibility features.
 - Existing units being retrofitted must include at least one accessibility or visitability feature.
- 3 All accessibility and universal visitability features must be completed in conformity with the provisions of Virginia's Uniform Statewide Building Code.
- 4 Accessibility features that are provided in order to comply with existing Fair Housing, Equal Opportunity, Americans with Disabilities Act, or other local, state or federal requirements are not eligible for tax credits.
- 5 Additionally, accessibility features that are funded through the Granting Freedom Program, Indoor Plumbing Rehabilitation program, Community Development Block Grant program, or other local, state or federal programs are not eligible for tax credits.

Costs for accessibility or visitability features must be incurred by the applicant in order to claim the tax credit. <http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/LHTC>

Application process

Applications are due each year by February 28 for work completed during the year prior.

Documentation must be submitted with the application. In the case of the purchase of a new residential unit, a copy of the executed sales contract must be attached.

For retrofitting, a scope of work, work specifications, construction contracts, invoices and/or cancelled checks documenting the type of work, cost and payment must be provided.

Applications can be found online at www.dhcd.virginia.gov/LHTC.



For more information about the Livable HomeTax Credit program, visit www.dhcd.virginia.gov/LHTC or call (804) 371-7124.

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is committed to creating safe, affordable, and prosperous communities to live, work and do business in Virginia. DHCD partners with Virginia's communities to develop their economic potential, improve the quality and affordability of housing, provide for basic building safety, and increase their capacity to address community development and housing needs.

By partnering with local governments, nonprofit groups, state and federal agencies, and others, DHCD is working to improve the quality of life for Virginians.

Livable Homes TAX CREDIT

www.dhcd.virginia.gov/LHTC

Program



**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**
Partners for Better Communities
www.dhcd.virginia.gov

The Virginia Livable Home Tax Credit

The **Virginia Livable Home Tax Credit** (LHTC) program is designed to improve accessibility and universal visitability in Virginia's residential units by providing state tax credits for the purchase of new units or the retrofitting of existing housing units. Tax credits are available for up to **\$5,000** for the purchase of a new accessible residence and up to 50 percent for the cost of retrofitting existing units, not to exceed \$5,000.

Any tax credit that exceeds the eligible individual's tax liability may be carried forward for up to seven years. If the total amount of tax credits issued under this program exceeds the \$1 million allocation in a given fiscal year, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development will pro-rate the amount of credits among the eligible applicants.



According to the U.S. Census, more than 950,000 Virginians have one or more disabilities. By the year **2025**, more than **25 percent** of Virginians will be over the age of 60, and the number of Virginians aged 85 or older will increase five times faster than the state's total population growth. For these citizens, their families and their friends, the focus on accessible housing is growing increasingly important.



Improve accessibility and universal visitability

Accessibility

Accessible housing standards vary depending on whether the unit is new or if an existing unit is being retro-fitted to provide accessibility. Accessibility features that meet existing standards include:

- accessible route to a zero-step entrance on a firm surface no steeper than 1:12 from a driveway or public sidewalk;
- zero-step entrance;
- doors with at least 32 inches of clear width;
- hallways and passages with at least 36 inches of clear width;
- accessible light switches, electrical outlets, and environmental controls;
- accessible bathroom; and
- accessible and usable kitchen facilities.

Sensory modifications include alarms, appliances and controls designed to assist sensory disabled persons. These modifications must be structurally integrated into the unit and may include such items as built-in appliances. Universal visitability standards are similar to accessible housing standards and must:

- provide at least a one zero-step entrance by an accessible route on a firm surface no steeper than 1:12 slope proceeding from a driveway or public sidewalk
- include an accessible bathroom (can be a half bath/powder room) on the same floor as the zero-step entrance; and
- include doors with at least 32 inches of clear width and hallways/passage ways of at least 36 inches of clear width to the accessible bathroom and eating area.

LHTC