

Age-Friendly Communities: Enabling is Sustainable

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ABSTRACT

The status quo of the built environment in our communities is not benign. The design of our housing stock, public spaces, and infrastructure is not designed for the age or ability continua. Many perceive that meeting the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities is catering to a discrete subset of the population. It is the exact opposite: we currently design and build for average reach and height, highest sensory abilities, and ignore much of the age spectrum. This is a critical mistake, as environments not designed for the lifespan push our citizens to artificially lower levels of functioning (environmental press) which have negative health impacts and increase need for services.

When a range of abilities and sizes is normal, and significant visual changes are present in most adults over the age of forty, why do we continue with this misconception? This is neither sustainable on the person-level nor on the environmental level.

BIOGRAPHY

Esther Greenhouse is unique professional--an environmental gerontologist and designer. Her professional purpose is to create a paradigm shift whereby society harnesses the power of the built environment to enable all people across both the age- and ability-continua to thrive. She is a nationally recognized expert on Universal Design and Aging in Place. A catalyst for change, Ms. Greenhouse applies the Enabling Design Approach in her work with communities as they evolve to meet the needs of both seniors and younger generations, to create successful age-friendly and multigenerational places. An award-winning and enthusiastic instructor and speaker, Esther leads dynamic and engaging workshops and trainings. She served on the American Planning Association's Aging in Community Policy Guide Task Force, co-authoring the Housing, Zoning, and Transportation sections, has written portions of the Livable NY Resource Manual, and teaches the NAHB/AARP Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS) courses (for which she was awarded CAPS of the Year). Her innovative perspective has resulted in invitations to contribute to the book *Independent for Life*, the 4-part PBS series "Design for a Lifetime", and the design of the nation's first elder-focused emergency department and is an Industry Scholar in the new Cornell Institute for Healthy Futures.