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## Thomas Dolan Architecture : Building Issues

### Disabled Access

The Oakland Live/Work Building Code's treatment of Disabled Access is based on several basic principles derived from the UBC, Title 24 (The California State Building Code) and ADA (The Americans with Disabilities Act, Federal Civil Rights Legislation).

Any commercial building must be made fully accessible. A live/work unit which allows employees or walk-in commercial trade (not just by appointment) must be fully accessible where these activities occur because it is considered to be on the "commercial" end of the commercial/residential scale. This includes a fully accessible bathroom (or at least W.C. and lavatory), a level-in path of travel (including ramps if necessary) all the way from site entry to the unit's work area. At least one handicapped parking space is also required. The accessible bathroom(s) may be common in a multi-unit project. Both men's and women's bathrooms must be provided if more than four employees are present or four units with employees are built. 'Privately funded apartment buildings are usually required to have a fully accessible path of travel to all ground floor units and to any elevator-accessed floors. In addition -- and this applies to live/work units without employees or walk-in trade -- the units must be constructed as adaptable, which means that they would be able to be converted to accommodate a disabled person in a wheelchair if necessary. In practice, the result is somewhat larger bathrooms, a portion of the unit's kitchen counters able to be lowered to wheelchair height, and several other features.

There are some important exceptions to the adaptability requirements for live/work units without employees.

Townhouse units and multi-level units--which can mean live/work units containing mezzanines, sleeping mezzanines or built-in sleeping bunks--



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are exempt from accessibility or adaptability requirements within the unit itself, even if the building is elevator accessed to the main floors (but not all floors) of these multi-level units. Note that a mezzanine, sleeping mezzanine or built-in sleeping loft must have habitable space below it to qualify as such and to exempt the unit from accessibility requirements, in addition to the unit's not accommodating employees or walk-in trade. 'Live/work buildings with less than three rental units or less than four condominium units are exempt from accessibility and adaptability requirements.

Keep in mind that the foregoing is a concise summary of accessibility in live/work. The most important litmus test for accessibility is the amount of commercial activity, turning on employees and walk-in trade. The most important factor in "non-commercial" live/work accessibility is whether it is multi-level, in which case it is exempt.