

Outdoor Evaluation Tool (Version 0.1)

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This tool is designed to use evidence-based design principles to evaluate outdoor areas for seniors. Based on ongoing research and analysis, the tool is being updated periodically – check to see if a later version may be available. This checklist can help identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing outdoor areas, and plan future developments.

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INSTRUCTIONS - PLEASE READ BEFORE USING THIS TOOL:

- STEP 1.** **Choose** a specific outdoor area to evaluate, and use a separate checklist for each outdoor area. You can have different people evaluate the same area (making sure everyone has read the instructions first), and compare results afterward.
- STEP 2.** **Walk and sit** in the area a few minutes, imagining yourself as a senior resident with various sensory and functional disabilities, who may use a walker or wheelchair. Look at the area from various positions – and try out the furniture. You can help simulate this process by half-closing your eyes to reduce visibility, lower your viewing to wheelchair height, open doors with opposite hand, etc.
- STEP 3.** **Evaluate** the area based on how well it supports the activities or intent described in each item. Base your evaluation on *what you would reasonably expect to find* in a setting of this type and size. Consider the independence level of residents, the site context, the cultural and regional climate (for example, is security a major issue? Is rain or sun protection more important in your climate?) Fill in all boxes on the following checklists, for each of the seven main design principles.

How to evaluate each item:

- Enter a rating from 1 to 10 in each box.
- Rate each outdoor area based on *how well it meets the intent* of each statement.
- A rating of 5 would designate “average,” compared to other settings of this type.

The following ratings would mean:

- 10** = this area very successfully supports residents’ outdoor usage; cannot imagine any better
- 5** = this area meets some of residents’ needs, but not all; about average for this type of setting
- 1** = this area supports residents’ outdoor usage very poorly or not at all, could hardly be worse
- 0** = the feature is not found in this location **N/A** = the feature is not appropriate here

Location _____ Evaluator _____ Date _____

Describe area to be evaluated _____



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PRINCIPLE 1: INDOOR-OUTDOOR CONNECTIONS

Make outdoor areas extremely easy to see and reach, by making sure the doorway leading outside is very visible and convenient from the main places residents spend time. Develop comfortable sitting areas both inside and outside the doorway, inviting people to linger before and after going outdoors.

1. The outdoors can be reached directly from the main public areas.

The entry to this outdoor area is directly connected to the main lobby or the most commonly-used indoor activity spaces, rather than through private or less-commonly-used areas or hallways.

2. The doorway leading outdoors is highly visible and prominent from indoors.

The entry leading to the outdoor area can be easily seen and recognized from indoor common areas and circulation routes, even by residents in wheelchairs, or with impaired vision.

3. Residents can easily “preview” the outdoors, before opening the door.

The door and surrounding area have enough glass to allow residents (even those in wheelchairs or with impaired vision), to “pre-view” the outdoors before opening the door. Window sill should be as low as possible to maximize visibility from wheelchairs.

4. Residents can linger in comfort just *inside* the doorway leading out.

There is a comfortably-furnished indoor sitting space located adjacent or very close to the door leading to the outdoors, where residents can linger to look at the view, and consider going out.

5. Residents can comfortably linger in a developed space just *outside* the doorway.

The outdoor area just outside the doorway is inviting, paved, shaded, well-maintained, and comfortably furnished for outdoor sitting – making it easy to go outside “just for a moment.”

6. Residents can view this outdoor area from a commonly-used indoor sitting area.

There is at least one other important comfortable indoor sitting area that has good views of this outdoor space, *in addition to* the transition area next to the doorway.

7. The doors are very easy for residents to open.

The doors leading out are easy and comfortable for older people to operate, with lever handsets, and require minimal strength to open (evaluators should test this).

8. There is an automatic door opener.

There is an automatic door opener that residents in wheelchairs can easily reach and operate.

9. Residents using walkers or wheelchairs can easily navigate the door threshold.

The level change at the doorway is minimal (less than ¼” rise in two inches, with maximum 1/2” rise total). There are no noticeable features that make it difficult or unpleasant to cross the threshold. Ideally, *evaluators should test the door threshold* using a walker or wheelchair.

10. There is a wide and level paved landing on both sides of the door threshold.

The landings on both sides of the doorway have at least 18-24” space at the side of the door with the handle or latch, allowing wheelchair residents to easily operate the door.

11. The doors are easy for residents to pass through.

The door does not close too quickly, allowing residents plenty of time to pass through the doorway.



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PRINCIPLE 2: CONTACT with COMMUNITY

Develop outdoor areas that provide contact with the larger world residents have left behind, with opportunities to watch and/or interact with people, elements, and activities beyond the facility.

1. Residents can reach this outdoor area without going through the main front door.

There is at least one way for residents to reach this area, without using the main front door.

2. Residents can see off-site landscape features.

From this outdoor area, residents can glimpse natural elements that appear to be past the property boundaries, such as trees, hills, neighboring yards, or other natural features in the surrounding area.

3. Residents can see off-site urban/ suburban features.

From this outdoor area, residents can see parts of built elements that are clearly beyond the grounds of the facility itself, such as nearby buildings, neighborhoods, freeways, signboards, etc.

4. Residents can watch off-site centers of human activity.

From the outdoor area, residents can watch one or more neighboring places where people are walking around, such as a store, gas station, library, post office, schoolyard, playground, loading dock, building entrance, bus stop, etc.

5. Residents can watch off-site vehicular activity.

While seated in this area, residents can watch nearby parking lots, traffic passing by on streets and roadways, etc.

6. Residents can watch people driving up and parking (or can watch bus arriving).

From this outdoor area, residents can see at least part of the entry sequence, where vehicles approach and park, either in the parking lot or near the front door. If accessed by bus route, residents in this outdoor space can see the bus approach and stop to let people out.

7. Residents can watch people getting out of cars (or bus) and walking toward the door.

From this outdoor area, residents can watch people getting out of their vehicles (or passengers emerging from the bus or shuttle), walking toward the facility, and opening the front door.

8. From this area, residents can watch mail carriers and delivery services coming and going.

Outdoor area has a view of where mail and delivery service people park, and walk to and from their vehicle to enter the facility.

9. While SEATED in this area, residents can greet people arriving at the facility.

While seated outdoors, residents can say hello to people as they arrive at the main door to the facility, and/or when they are leaving.



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PRINCIPLE 3: SAFETY and SECURITY

Develop outdoor areas that allow residents to feel safe and secure, especially in terms of the risk of falling. Through planning and maintenance, minimize elements that may be hazardous or dangerous.

- 1. Paved areas are smooth, level, and non-skid.**
In this area, paved surfaces are smooth, level, and reasonably free from cracks or level changes that might cause problems for residents using wheelchairs and walkers. Any cracks are shallow and not accompanied by level changes. Surfaces are not slippery, even when wet.
- 2. Paved areas have little or no tree litter, leaves, or other debris.**
Residents do not need to worry too much about tripping or falling in this outdoor area, as it appears to be well-maintained on a regular basis, and there are few or no leaves, twigs, or plant litter on paved surfaces. Plants are trimmed back so they do not intrude on the pathways.
- 3. Paving will not reflect glare in the sunlight.**
In this area, *unless* well-shaded most of the day and most of the year, the paved surfaces are a muted color and finish that reduces glare on sunny days; could be asphalt, tinted concrete, etc.
- 4. Residents do not have to negotiate level changes.**
Any level changes in walking surfaces are minimal, and are made by low-slope ramps (preferably flatter than 1:20), with handrails, adequate landings, and non-slip surfaces.
- 5. Residents can reach this area by walking entirely on sidewalks or paved patios, etc.**
This outdoor area can be reached by walking entirely on connecting sidewalks, paved patios, etc. Residents do not have to walk through any part of the parking lot or driveways to reach this area.
- 6. From outdoors, residents can view indoor common areas, so they feel more secure outside.**
While outdoors, residents can maintain at least some visual contact with an indoor common area or main corridor, making it more likely that someone would notice them, in case they needed help.
- 7. When outdoors, residents realize they can be easily seen from the main indoor areas.**
A substantial part of this outdoor area can be viewed from a public area frequently used by residents and/or staff - such as lobby, activity area, nurse station, front desk, etc. (NOT from resident rooms).
- 8. Residents can feel secure from external dangers in this area.**
Taking the character of the surrounding neighborhood into account, this outdoor area seems fairly safe from external hazards and possible security threats such as errant traffic, teenage gangs, uninvited strangers, stray dogs, etc.
- 9. Seats are not likely to tip over, and have arms that support residents getting up and down.**
Benches and chairs have backs, and grippable arms that residents can use to support getting up and down from the seat (should protrude 2" beyond seat). The seats are at a height of 17.5" – 20," to allow residents to get up easily, and shorter residents' feet can reach the floor while sitting.
- 10. Lighting is provided to make outdoor areas visible at night.**
The outdoor area is well-lighted at night, to look more comforting, and so residents can realize it would be possible for them to go outside if they choose to.



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PRINCIPLE 4: COMFORT and ACCESSIBILITY

Design and maintain outdoor areas to accommodate the diminished physical, sensory, and functional abilities of residents, so they can spend time in outdoor areas with ease and comfort.

1. This area is designed to have a comfortable microclimate.

Based on this particular climate, the outdoor sitting areas are protected from the wind, and are bright most of the day, but without unpleasant glare. Ideally, at least some areas should be open to winter sun from the south, and part of each area should have shade overhead and from the west, to protect from midday and hot summer afternoon sun.

2. Residents can choose between sunny and shady places to sit.

Based on the conditions of this particular climate, this space has a balanced mix of outdoor areas in both sun and shade, with multiple places to sit in each.

3. Residents can use seating that is designed to be comfortable for older adults.

Outdoor seating is designed to be comfortable for older adults, with materials that do not get too hot or cold, such as exposed metal or concrete. Seats and backs have ergonomically-appropriate angles for sitting, and have cushions or pads. Materials may be wood, recycled/ manufactured wood, plastic, metal/ mesh, etc.; the suitability of materials will depend partly on climate and location of seating.

4. Residents have excellent views from fixed seating, if any.

Any seating units that are too heavy for residents to move are located where they look toward the best views and most interesting activities.

5. Residents in nearby rooms have privacy from nearby outdoor areas, if any.

This outdoor area is not so close to adjacent private rooms, that residents feel they must keep the curtains closed to avoid being seen by people using the outdoor area.

6. Residents in this outdoor area have privacy from nearby rooms, if any.

People using this outdoor area do not feel like they are in a “fishbowl”, surrounded by private resident rooms looking in at them from all sides. Where there are adjacent private rooms, there are sufficient plantings, distance, screening, and/ or level changes, etc., to prevent feeling exposed to scrutiny.

7. The design and furnishings in this area have a homelike character to the extent possible.

This area would likely be psychologically comfortable to residents, because of having a homelike or residential character, scale, and furnishings, rather than feeling institutional.

8. Residents are not exposed to noise pollution.

This outdoor area is relatively free from annoying sources of noise, such as air conditioners, motors, compressors, loud traffic, etc.

9. Residents can still use this outdoor area when it is raining.

At least part of this outdoor area has a covered place where residents can sit and watch or listen to the rain, while staying dry and comfortable.



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PRINCIPLE 5: FREEDOM, CHOICE, and VARIETY

Develop outdoor spaces that tend to foster a sense of freedom in residents. Support their autonomy and independence by providing a variety of locations, activities, focal points, views, seating, and walkways that residents can choose between.

1. Residents can reach this outdoor area by more than one doorway.

There are multiple ways to access this outdoor area, to help give residents a sense of choice.

2. Residents can obtain a sense of escape in this area.

This outdoor area affords residents a sense of escaping from the building, into an atmosphere that strongly contrasts with indoor areas.

3. Within this outdoor area, residents can choose among different places to spend time.

There are multiple “places” to occupy within this outdoor area, to provide residents with a sense of choice and variety as to where they can sit outdoors. These may be separate areas, or different parts of the same area.

4. Residents have their choice of different types of chairs and seating elements.

There are different types of seating available within this outdoor area, to allow residents to choose the type that best meets their preferences, size and body shape, and desire for privacy or socialization.

5. Residents can access inviting walkways from this outdoor area.

This outdoor area provides access to a paved and attractive outdoor walkway leading to other parts of the facility grounds, or at least beyond the immediate sitting area, to provide a sense of freedom.

6. Residents can easily change the position or angle of some of the seating elements.

At least some of the outdoor seating can be moved even by frail older residents, to allow placement at different sun angles, to create privacy or conversation groupings, etc.

7. Residents can see a rich variety of plants in this area.

This area contains many different types of plant materials, such as vines, shrubs, tall and short flowers, trees, ground cover, rather than only a few types and heights of plants.

8. Residents can focus on non-living elements with motion and interest.

From this outdoor area, residents can see, hear, and/or interact with features such as spraying fountains, windsocks, windchimes, sundials, gazebos, etc.



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PRINCIPLE 6: CONTACT with NATURE:

Develop outdoor areas that allow residents to enjoy an abundance and variety of nature elements, especially those preferred by older adults, such as flowers, greenery, trees, water, and wildlife.

1. Residents can see abundant greenery and other plant materials.

From this outdoor area, residents can see a substantial amount of plants and greenery, compared with the amount of hardscape elements such as paving, planters, walls, etc. Typically should be at least 50% - 70% greenery viewable in the field of vision (60-degree cone).

2. Residents can see a broad range of plants.

Residents in this area can view plants of many different types, shapes, colors, and forms of foliage, such as trees, shrubs, vines, tall and short flowers, ground cover, lawn, etc.

3. Residents can see trees and/ or other tall plants.

From this outdoor area, residents can see a substantial number of trees and other tall plants (at least 6' high), rather than only ground cover, small plants and shrubs. Preferably, some of the trees are close enough to paved areas, to allow residents to be under their canopies.

4. Plants generally look healthy, full, and vigorous.

The plants generally look lush and healthy, instead of sparse, frail, spiky, or spindly-looking plants, or those that might look unwelcoming to older adults.

5. This outdoor area has plants with color, flowers, fragrance and/or seasonal change.

The outdoor area contains at least some plants with flowers that would be clearly visible to elderly residents when in season. Some plants may show seasonal change of color or foliage, and may also be fragrant. Older eyes can see red, orange, and yellow, more easily than blue, lavender, and white.

6. Some plants can be seen at close-up face level by residents walking or in a wheelchair.

At least some greenery and plantings are raised to be high enough to see up close without bending over – with the foliage located at approx 2' to 5' above the ground - and close enough so residents can see, touch, and/or smell the flowers and leaves without leaving the paved areas.

7. Water can be seen, heard, possibly touched.

Residents can come into contact with water in this outdoor area, whether a small fountain, pool, duck pond, or even a well-filled birdbath, or a nearby viewable stream, river, or lake. They can view it easily from comfortable places, and in some cases can even touch the water.

8. Residents can see natural and/ or wild living creatures such as birds, wildlife, pets, etc.

From this outdoor area, residents have a good chance of being able to watch ongoing or occasional activity of wildlife such as squirrels in a tree, hummingbirds, a birdbath or bird feeder, butterflies attracted to butterfly plantings, fish or ducks in a pond, deer grazing in an adjacent meadow, cows or horses, pets or domestic animals, etc. – whatever might be found in this type of community.



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PRINCIPLE 7: SUPPORT for ACTIVITIES

Develop well-landscaped, safe, and comfortable walkways for residents to use. Also develop places that support other activities such as outdoor stretching and exercise, social events, water aerobics, caring for pets or domestic animals, gardening, individual and group games, etc., as feasible.

1. Residents can walk in a round-trip loop.

Most of the walkways in this area allow people to make “round-trip” loops around an element, rather than dead-ends that force them to turn around to come back the same way.

2. Residents can choose from walking routes of different lengths.

There are multiple walkways of substantially different lengths, depending on how far different people want to walk.

3. The walkways are wide and level.

Pathways are sufficiently wide, level, and smooth enough for elderly residents to traverse without difficulty, even with walkers or wheelchairs.

4. Along any walkways in this area, residents can sit and rest often.

Seating is available at frequent intervals along walkway -- approximately 50' between benches/ chairs, and 20' between landscape seating elements (e.g. planter edge), where residents might rest briefly.

5. Residents can connect to different paths while walking.

If there are multiple walkways, the majority connect with each other, so residents can go from one to the other. If there is only one walkway, it offers some sense of choice or variety in where residents can walk.

6. Residents can see pleasant/ interesting views from walking areas.

The views in this area offer some variety, and allow a sense of exploration and surprise, to give residents a reason to move between different areas.

7. Residents can walk under the shade of trees or building elements.

Substantial parts of any walkways are shaded from the mid-day sun by trees, awnings, buildings, etc., so residents will not have to spend too long in the hot sun, or be bothered by glare from the paving.

8. Residents can engage in other activities outdoors.

Space is provided for one or more other outdoor activities, such as horticultural therapy, gardening, horseshoes, exercise stations, a putting green, bocce ball, shuffleboard, croquet, swimming pool or Jacuzzi etc.