

Single Stair Buildings

HB 5148 by Talarico



Single stair buildings are a widely used building form that allows for small multifamily apartment buildings to fit into existing neighborhoods. While these buildings are common in most of the world, their usage is limited in the United States

Key Takeaways

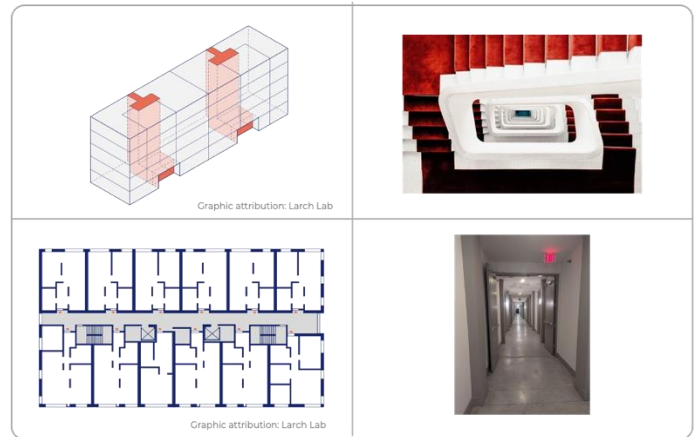
- Single stair buildings **infuse cities with lower cost homes**, but their construction is hampered by regulatory barriers
- Existing model codes used by municipalities** prohibit the construction of single stair buildings taller than three stories
- Single stair buildings are an alternative to large apartment complexes

HB 5148 empowers the construction of single stair buildings meeting designated safety standards within many Texas communities

HB 5148 claws back authority from the International Code Council to allow the housing market to respond to the varied needs of Texas families

To improve housing affordability, Texas must embrace innovation in housing design and build more of everything

Single stair buildings are small scale apartments that are built with a small number of apartments per floor, all served by a single stairwell. This building typology is used widely across the globe, but in the United States they have a limited presence due to restrictions imposed by the International Building Code- a model design and building code that is used almost exclusively in the United States. **The IBC dictates that for apartments over three stories tall, each unit is required to have access to two stairwells.**



To meet the multi-staircase requirement, apartment complexes are built using double-loaded corridors with apartment units on both sides of a windowless hallway. To offset the loss in rentable space that is taken up by the second stairwell, double-loaded corridor buildings must be large. **The single-stair prohibition means that multi-family apartments are only economically feasible at great density.** Conversely, single-stair buildings are smaller and fit on lots that could not accommodate large complexes. They can achieve 95% floor plate efficiency and exist more cohesively within existing neighborhoods. They have better cross-ventilation and energy efficiency, and, with access to more light on multiple sides of a unit, can accommodate units with more bedrooms, to better accommodate families.

HB 5148 creates a new market for housing in Texas

The potential for single stair buildings is great. The Seattle single-stair project pictured to the right contains 23 units on a 3,760 sq ft lot. If just one percent of the 247,485 single family residential properties in the city of Fort Worth (whose smallest single-family minimum lot size is 3,500 sq ft) was upzoned to allow for a similar building to be built, **nearly 60,000 homes** could be added to Fort Worth alone.

