



May 21, 2021

Stephanie Taylor, MD, M Arch

## **Beyond the Dog Door**

In this time of a pandemic caused by an unpredictable and alarming virus and the resulting isolation of remote work, it is especially important to value the aspects of our lives that are good, kind and predictable. Hopefully, we are all thankful for our family members and colleagues, which, for some of us, includes a dog.

Dogs bring to us their total devotion (unless we are competing with a squirrel), their voiceless compassion, curiosity with the natural world, humor and profound intuition. Anyone who has ever lived with a dog has experienced their uncanny ability to sense one's mood. Responding to the true emotional environment rather than to false rhetoric, they know to vacate the room minutes before an argument erupts and when to provide quiet, comforting companionship. Present-minded, honest, loyal and attentive, dogs move, play, fight and love with authenticity that is timeless.

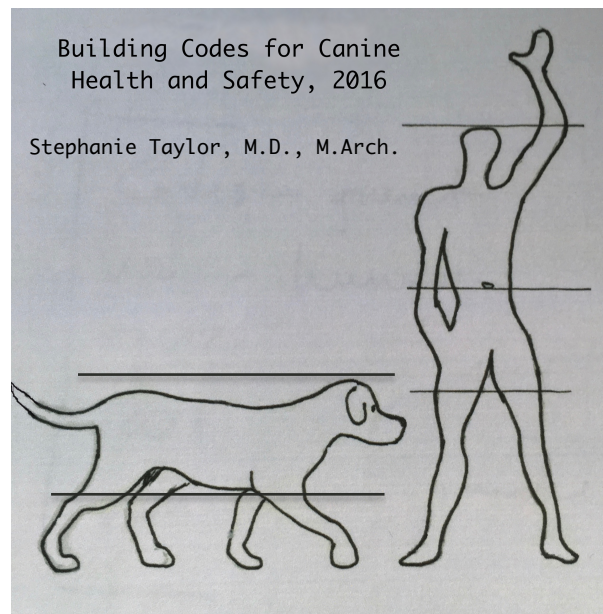
In 2021 there were over 63,000,000 US families that included at least one dog. Dogs also inhabit our working world. Healthcare providers have long recognized the therapeutic benefits of dogs. In 1859, Florence Nightingale wrote that patients should be allowed to care for dogs because it would help in their recovery. Today, Service Dogs assist people who struggle with physical and emotional disabilities, histories of trauma, and those in prisons. Therapy dogs calm patients in hospitals and nursing homes, reduce pre-exam anxiety in schools, and help children learn to read by listening patiently to reading aloud. Furthermore, children who have close contact with dogs have fewer ear infections needing antibiotic treatment, suggesting that dogs strengthen our immune systems by exposing us to their diverse and beneficial microbiome.

Humans and dogs are the only two carnivores that have co-habituated for thousands of years, yet we use few resources to design buildings to truly accommodate these devoted animals who are voiceless about their living and working conditions. Instead of worrying about dog hair, muddy paw prints, and barking, let's focus on designing spaces that respect both human and canine preferences. We can be guided by studies on wolf habitats and domesticated dogs to include canine preferences for elements such as surface materials, visual sightlines, eating arrangements, and indoor relative humidity and temperatures that support the wellbeing of both humans and dogs.



**The Civil Rights of Dogs:** It is the civil right of domesticated dogs to have building accessibility, comfort and care in their homes and places of work.

Le Corbusier penned the famous "Modular Man", for building designs scaled for Homo Sapiens. We should now add the scale for Canis Lupus Familiaris.



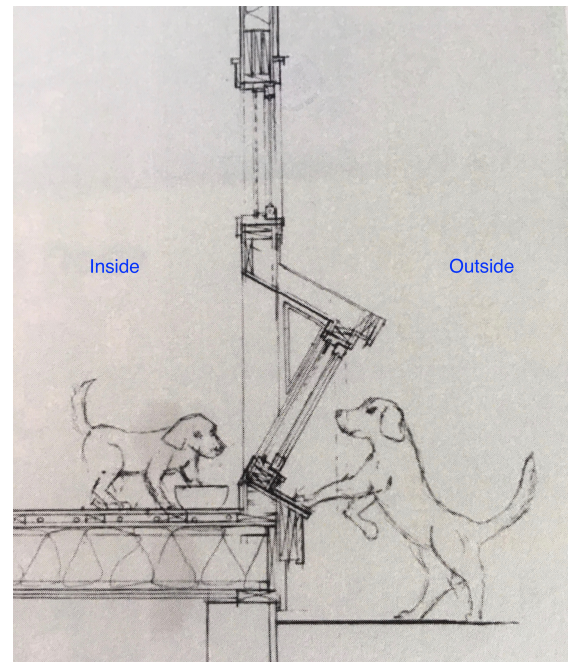
Building accessibility for dogs:

- Traction: flooring must be durable, pliant, and non-abrasive to paws
- Vertical access paths should have siding with closed stairway risers
- Wayfinding: at least two routes should be available to each location, preferably with a racetrack design
- Glazed fenestrations (windows): must be constructed at an appropriate height for a dog and slanted inward to minimize blinding glare from the sun
- Lighting: Down-lighting must be shielded from below for dogs looking upward
- Views: lookout perches must be available for both short and long-distance sighting



Window for a dog:

Anyone who has ever peered into a building with the sun behind them knows that you have to cup your hands around your face to prevent reflections of the sun from blocking their view. Paws cannot be used in this way, so windows for dogs must be installed at an appropriate height and angled to reduce sun



Physical Comfort and Care:

- Hydration: cold, fresh water always available
- Feeding: safe environment, no large dogs looking down on or crowding small dogs during meals
- Elimination of waste: access to toilet areas within 15 minutes of need for dogs over five months old, within five minutes for puppies less than five months old
- Exercise: adequate time and space available for daily playing and running
- Body temperature control: radiant heat and cooling sources, water available for swimming if possible
- Indoor humidity: maintain relative humidity from 40% – 60% to decrease dry mucus membranes, improve respiratory health, decrease dry skin and itchiness, and decrease static electricity shocks
- Resting places: quiet, comfortable beds with room for snuggling if desired
- Digging: designated areas with soft soil
- Chewing: non-toxic chew toys, no choking or gastrointestinal obstruction possibilities
- Respect for dog sensitivity to scents: no artificial perfumes in human or dog hygiene products or cleaning solutions
- Health and cleanliness: central vacuum system to reduce ambient dander, all dogs treated to control ticks, fleas or other causes of itching



Emotional Care:

- Respectful human companionship: abundant affection, no hitting or startling reprimands, appropriate training with positive reinforcement
- Canine-canine companionship: safe, dog-only times and places available
- Stress management: canine massage as needed

Safety:

- Automobile circulation must be securely separated from canine areas
- Toxins: no accessible toxic plants, no noxious off-gassing materials
- Heating and electrical appliances must be safely barricaded

**Conclusion:**

Architectural and engineering features of buildings cohabitated by dogs and humans should respect the intrinsic needs of both species. The human/dog relationship can be enhanced by thoughtfully designing spaces for both interactions and alone-time specific to each species.

To ensure that the unique needs of dogs are accommodated in spaces designed by humans, building codes for canine health and safety should be created and enforced.