

**NC Department of Insurance  
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**48” Minimum Width of Exterior Accessible Path**

**Code:** 2018 Building Code  
**Section:** 1104.2

**Date:** September 13, 2018

**Question:**

What is the correct exterior accessible path of travel? ANSI A117.1-09, Section 403.5 says 36” but the inspector is telling me that it is 48”. I have looked all over ANSI and have not found anything anywhere that gives 48” for a path of travel. Also, the 2010 ADA Standard requires 36”, so which is it?

**Answer:**

The 2018 NC Building Code (NCBC) is the scoping document for ANSI A117.1-09. Anything in the NCBC will override the provisions in the referenced standard per NCBC, Section 102.4.1.

NCBC 1104.1 and 1104.2 both specifically state in part: The clear width of the exterior accessible path of travel shall be 48 inches (1220 mm) minimum. Where handrails are provided, the measurement shall be between the handrails. Where handrails are provided, the width measurement shall be between the handrails.

Where there are differences between the 2010 ADA Standards and any model building code, such as the NC Building Code, whichever requirement is more restrictive takes precedence. In this case, the 48” NC requirement is more restrictive than the 36” ADA requirement.

The reason that NC has a 48” exterior path of travel requirement is to allow sufficient space for the following:

1. A person to walk with a guide animal.
2. A person to walk next to another person while supporting or assisting him or her.
3. To allow sufficient space for non-standard size mobility devices.

The 2024 NC Building Code removes the underlined language from section 1104.1 and 1104.2 because the 2017 edition of ANSI A117.1 has revised Section 403.5.1 to state: *The clear width of an interior accessible route shall be 36 inches minimum. The clear width of an exterior accessible route shall be 48 inches minimum.*

There are 4 exceptions that permit a reduced width. Exception 4 permits interior and exterior ramps to comply with section 405.5, thus allowing an exterior ramp to have a clear width of 36” minimum.

**Keywords:**

Walkways, pedestrians, bridges