



Memo

Date: December 8, 2022
To: Seattle City Councilmembers
From: Nathan Torgelson, Director Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections
Subject: 4th Quarter 2022 Update on Unreinforced Masonry (URM) Program Development

Resolution 32033 requested that the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI), in partnership with other City departments, design a mandatory Unreinforced Masonry (URM) retrofit program with the primary goal of protecting life safety given the dangers of collapsing and damaged URM buildings in an earthquake. Additionally, the strategy should work to preserve structures and landmarks that are historically significant, enhance the City's resiliency to earthquake events, and minimize the impact such a program is likely to have on vulnerable populations.

Work is to be undertaken with other departments, as well as external partners, to help develop the standards of the program, detail a communication strategy for the community (including building owners as well as those living in current URM buildings), and identify funding for – and carry out – a seismic assessment of City-owned URM buildings and develop cost estimates for these seismic retrofits.

Since the adoption of the Resolution, SDCI has begun this work through two separate tracks – policy development and the hiring of a URM Program Manager, and technical standard development, including an update to the Draft Technical Standards for these buildings.

URM Program Manager Role

Through funding allocated to the Department in the City's 2022 budget, SDCI created a position description and work plan for the new URM Program Manager role. This position will be directly responsible for drafting a mandatory URM retrofit ordinance and developing, implementing, leading, and managing a mandatory retrofit program based on recommendations provided by the URM Policy Committee and other stakeholders.

SDCI has hired Amanda Hertzfeld to fill the URM Program Manager role, and she began work on November 28, 2022. Amanda comes to SDCI after 12 years with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) where she supported URM risk reduction strategies for state and local governments.

URM Technical Standard Task Group

A group of subject matter experts, led by SDCI, has been working on the technical front as a parallel track to the ordinance and administrative effort of the overall URM endeavor. Particularly, since Q3 of 2021, this group has been working on updating the Draft Technical Standard for retrofits previously published by the URM Technical Committee in March 2012. The update is necessary to better align with the latest building codes and structural design standards that incorporate the latest research and science as it relates to ground motion hazards and structural retrofit methodology.

The URM Technical Standard Task Group currently consists of nine practicing structural engineers from the local engineering community with expertise in the technical challenges and design standards dealing with URM retrofit projects and are passionate about the subject. Four SDCI structural engineers who are part of the URM Subject Matter Expert Group also serve on the Task Group.

The Task Group continues to work toward the goal of updating the Draft Technical Standard for retrofits. It held its initial kick-off meeting on July 19, 2022, where two sub-task groups were identified to address specific portions of the technical standard that needed in-depth review. These sub-task groups held multiple meetings between the larger group meetings. The Task Group held its second meeting on October 11 where updates of early investigations by the sub-task groups were provided to the overall group to align understanding and facilitate further investigatory steps ahead. The group is currently focusing on clarifying the technical details and qualifying-building criteria involved, with a goal of keeping the intent of the original Technical Standard in providing an option for limited retrofit via an Alternate Method. The next Task Group meeting is currently scheduled to take place on December 12, 2022.

Next Steps

We look forward to presenting before the Council's Public Safety and Human Services Committee on December 13, 2022.