

CITY OF SEATTLE

RESOLUTION 32033

A RESOLUTION declaring the City Council’s and the Mayor’s intent to consider strategies to ensure that all unreinforced masonry buildings in Seattle are seismically retrofitted.

WHEREAS, Seattle has over 1,100 unreinforced masonry buildings (URMs), which are buildings typically built prior to 1945 with brick or clay tile bearing walls where the parapets and walls are not secured to the floors and roofs; and

WHEREAS, URMs are vulnerable to damage or collapse during earthquakes, potentially endangering people within the buildings if walls fully or partially collapse and pedestrians if parapets break away and fall into the street; and

WHEREAS, the February 2001 6.8 magnitude Nisqually earthquake injured about 400 people and caused around \$2 billion in property damage, including over \$8 million in repair costs to URMs in Seattle; and

WHEREAS, of the buildings The City of Seattle (“City”) determined to be unsafe following the Nisqually earthquake, two-thirds were URMs; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, Seattle’s Office of Emergency Management reported to the City Council (“Council”) that within the next 50 years, Seattle has an 86 percent chance of experiencing another 6.8 magnitude earthquake and a 33 percent chance of an 8.0 magnitude earthquake; and

WHEREAS, the City’s February 2020 list of confirmed URMs reveals that many of these buildings are located in Seattle’s historic neighborhoods, with the highest concentrations in Capitol Hill, Pioneer Square, and the Chinatown/International District; and

1 WHEREAS, of the confirmed URMs in Seattle, over 70 are identified by the City as critical risk,
2 which are schools and emergency service facilities, and around 180 are high risk, which
3 are buildings over three stories in poor soil conditions and buildings containing public
4 assembly spaces with occupancies of more than 100 people; and

5 WHEREAS, the City has a long history of attempting to address the safety risks posed by URMs,
6 beginning with the Council's adoption of a structural standard for all URMs in the 1970s,
7 which was later repealed due to the costs of implementing the upgrades; and

8 WHEREAS, the City convened URM Policy and Technical Committees in 2008 to develop a
9 cost-effective seismic retrofit standard and a mandatory retrofit program based on the
10 proposed standard; and

11 WHEREAS, in 2011 the URM Technical Committee recommended adopting a modification of a
12 standard based on a retrofit standard commonly used in California, but the URM Policy
13 Committee did not provide a recommendation; and

14 WHEREAS, at the request of the Council, the City convened a new URM Policy Committee in
15 2012 to recommend elements of a mandatory city-wide URM retrofit policy; and

16 WHEREAS, the URM Policy Committee released its final recommendations in 2017, which
17 recommended a timeline of seven, ten, or 13 years for completing URM retrofits, based
18 on vulnerability and use of the structure, and outlined a process for completing
19 mandatory URM retrofits; and

20 WHEREAS, the City does not currently require a major seismic retrofit of URMs that are not
21 undergoing a substantial alteration; and

1 WHEREAS, the City funded a report by the National Development Council, released in May
2 2019, on potential financing and funding mechanisms for seismic upgrades, which
3 estimated total costs for retrofitting privately owned URMs to be \$1.28 billion; and

4 WHEREAS, in 2020, the Washington State Legislature passed and the Governor signed into law
5 House Bill 2405, which established a voluntary commercial property assessed clean
6 energy and resiliency (“C-PACER”) program that may be used to finance energy
7 efficiency and seismic retrofits for commercial and multifamily buildings; and

8 WHEREAS, on November 16, 2021, the King County Council adopted the framework for a C-
9 PACER program, authorized by Revised Code of Washington Chapter 36.165, and the
10 program is anticipated to begin accepting applications in early 2022; and

11 WHEREAS, the City recognizes that the greatest barrier for building owners is the cost of the
12 seismic retrofits and that many building owners will need support accessing financial
13 assistance for the program to be successful; and

14 WHEREAS, near-term investments in seismic retrofits will contribute to Seattle’s recovery from
15 the economic impacts of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (“COVID-19”) crises and make
16 Seattle more economically resilient in the long term; NOW, THEREFORE,

17 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE, THE**
18 **MAYOR CONCURRING, THAT:**

19 Section 1. The Council recognizes that the primary goal of a URM retrofit program
20 should be to protect life safety by reducing the risk of injury from collapse of URMs in the event
21 of an earthquake. Additional goals of the program should be to preserve Seattle’s historically and
22 culturally significant landmarks and structures that contribute to neighborhood character,

1 improve the City’s resiliency to earthquake events, and minimize the impact of a URM retrofit
2 program on vulnerable populations to the extent financially feasible.

3 Section 2. The Council is ready to consider the Mayor’s recommendation for a program
4 that phases in a mandate for seismic retrofits of URMs in Seattle. The program should include:

5 A. A definition of URMs;

6 B. The type of seismic retrofit standard required to bring URMs into compliance,
7 acknowledging that there might be different standards for different types of buildings;

8 C. A system to categorize building types and/or uses that prioritizes key buildings and
9 services;

10 D. A timeline for compliance;

11 E. An enforcement strategy; and

12 F. A variety of potential funding opportunities and financial incentives to reduce the
13 financial burden of required seismic retrofits for URMs.

14 Section 3. The Mayor shall direct the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections
15 (“SDCP”) and the Office of Emergency Management (“OEM”) to pursue the following actions
16 that will result in implementing a mandatory URM seismic retrofit program:

17 A. Provide ongoing funding for any additional staff necessary to establish and maintain
18 the program and for technical experts who can assess and approve proposed upgrade plans;

19 B. Work with other City departments to identify funding for and complete a seismic
20 assessment of City-owned URMs and develop cost estimates for seismic retrofits;

21 C. Continue culturally and linguistically appropriate community outreach and
22 engagement, with a focus on communities of color and low-income communities who may be

1 disproportionately impacted by earthquake damage to URMs and the proposed URM retrofit
2 requirement;

3 D. Work with the Department of Neighborhoods to design and implement a process to
4 coordinate and streamline URM retrofits and permitting in historic districts and for landmark
5 structures;

6 E. Work with the Office of Housing and the Human Services Department to coordinate
7 the timing of retrofits in URMs containing affordable housing or emergency shelter;

8 F. Work with other City departments to develop strategies to mitigate displacement and
9 higher commercial and residential rents as a result of URM retrofits;

10 G. Collaborate with Seattle Public Schools and private schools to develop an agreement
11 on deadlines to complete retrofits for their URMs;

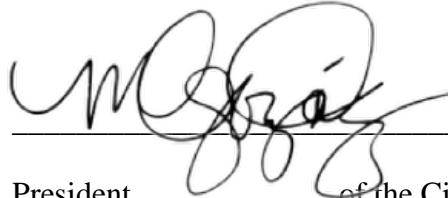
12 H. Work with a public development authority or nongovernmental URM contractor to
13 develop resources to provide coaching for owners of URMs and serve as a general resource for
14 residents and building owners about the program;

15 I. Prepare a communication strategy; and

16 J. Submit legislation establishing the mandatory URM retrofit program for Council
17 consideration.

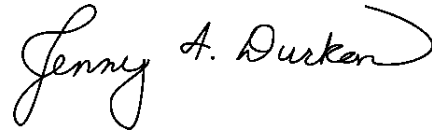
18 Section 4. The Council requests that SDCI, OEM, and other City departments as needed
19 report quarterly to the Council on progress made toward completing the actions described in
20 Section 3 of this resolution, and the timeline to complete anticipated actions, with the first report
21 due on August 1, 2022.

1 Adopted by the City Council the 13th day of December, 2021,
2 and signed by me in open session in authentication of its adoption this 13th day of
3 December, 2021.

4 

5 President _____ of the City Council

6 The Mayor concurred the 15th day of December, 2021.

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8 Jenny A. Durkan, Mayor

9 Filed by me this 15th day of December, 2021.

10 

11 Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

12 (Seal)