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Update of URM Seismic Retrofit Requirements

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Background:

Masonry buildings include some of the City's most historically significant structures, structures that define the character and culture of our neighborhoods and business districts. Unfortunately, unreinforced masonry buildings (URM) also pose considerable risk to the life and safety of the general public and building occupants in the event of an earthquake. Not to mention the resulting economic impact caused by business interruption, snarled transit systems and shuttered buildings.

Further, the City's existing URM retrofit requirements (codified in Title 24.85, established in 1995 and amended in 2004) have been inadequate in addressing the problem. Since its implementation in 1995, only 15 percent of the URM building stock has been upgraded. This pace of retrofits would have to quadruple to meet the goal of the Oregon Resiliency Plan to improve vulnerable buildings within 50 years.

The Portland City Council seeks to reduce the risk posed by this portion of the City's building stock, and to do so in a way that is sensitive to the financial impact building retrofits will have on building owners – both public and private. To this end, City Council has directed staff to conduct best practices research into how other cities have addressed this problem and to return to Council in the summer of 2016 with policy recommendations including proposed code changes and incentive program(s) to support implementation.

The guiding principles for the development of the URM retrofit recommendations are:

1. Protect the life and safety of the general public and building occupants.
2. Support Portland's disaster and economic resiliency.
3. Preserve public and private investment in the City's infrastructure.
4. Lessen the financial impact and incent quick execution by building owners.
5. Preserve the historical nature of URM structures, to the greatest degree possible and practical.

To assist in this effort, the City has assembled three advisory committees to provide expert input and guidance in the development of the staff recommendations – a Retrofit Standards Committee, to provide input on code change recommendations; an Incentive Committee, to provide input on a suite of incentive programs to encourage action on the part of building owners; and a Policy Committee that will act as the public body to gather public input on the final recommendations.