



Unreinforced Masonry (URM) Seismic Retrofit Project Communications Plan

Introduction:

Masonry buildings include some of the City's most historically significant structures, defining the character and culture of our neighborhoods and business districts. Unfortunately, URMs also pose considerable risk to the life and safety of the general public – and a potential negative economic impact – in the event of an earthquake.

Further, the City's existing URM retrofit requirements have been inadequate in addressing the problem. Portland City Council seeks to reduce the risk posed by URMs, and to do so in a way that is sensitive to the financial impact retrofits will have on building owners – both public and private. To this end, Council has directed staff to conduct best practices research and propose a mandatory retrofit policy – including code changes and an incentive program – by the summer of 2016.

Objectives:

- Educate URM building owners and tenants – and the general public – about the risk posed by URMs.
- Educate public about life-safety benefits of retrofitted URMs.
- Seek input from building owners and the community about a mandatory URM seismic retrofit policy and incentive program.
- Increase public awareness of the URM seismic retrofit policy.

Audiences:

- URM building owners (commercial, residential, industrial, faith community, schools, government, etc.)
- URM building tenants – both residents and business owners (e.g. Community Alliance of Tenants)
- General public
- Organizations/discipline groups (e.g. AIA Portland and Portland Business Alliance)

Messages:

- Portland faces seismic risk from both the Cascadia subduction zone as well as local crustal faults. Scientists have only known about this risk for the past few decades.
- Since Portland hasn't had any major earthquakes in its recent history, the city has a large building stock of URMs (about 1,800) constructed prior to the current code.

- Earthquakes from around the U.S. and elsewhere in the world confirm the vulnerability of URM buildings from collapse during strong ground shaking. Many cities in California have already adopted mandatory retrofit ordinances.
- The bottom line: retrofitting URMs will save lives, reduce injuries, improve Portland's ability to recover from an earthquake and preserve the historic character of the city.
- Current building policies have been unable to significantly reduce the number of URMs. City Council action is necessary to require the mandatory retrofit of URMs.
- Decreasing the number of URMs will help Portland become more resilient as a community in the aftermath of an earthquake by reducing the risk of injury and loss of life and minimizing damage to buildings in smaller earthquakes thereby displacing fewer tenants and allowing businesses to reopen in a timely manner.
- In May 2014, City Council launched the URM Seismic Retrofit Project to develop policies to reduce the risk posed by these vulnerable buildings.

Questions/Considerations:

- What's missing from the communications strategy? What's included in here that shouldn't be?
 - Audiences
 - Outreach material
- When do we want to start presenting the proposed policy to community groups?
- What activity/milestone dates can we add to the timeline?
- How do we want to connect with non-English speakers?

