City of Seattle
Department of Construction and Inspections

Unreinforced Masonry (URM)

URMs are brick buildings constructed without steel reinforcements, ties, and connections in their bearing walls that are required by modern building codes. Most URMs were built before 1940.
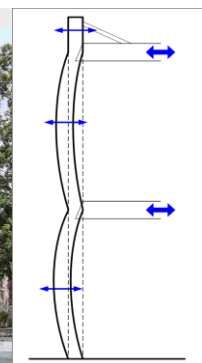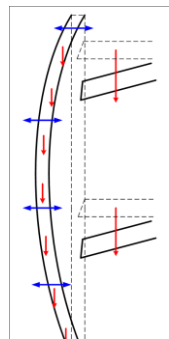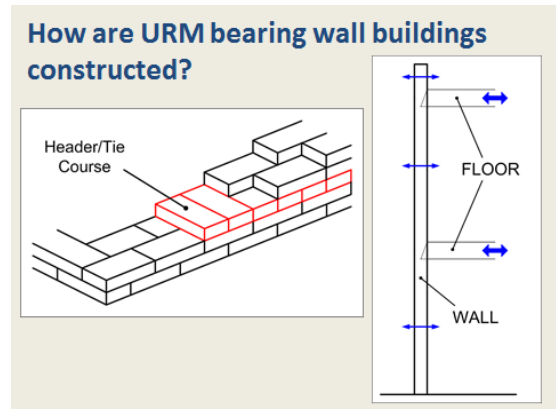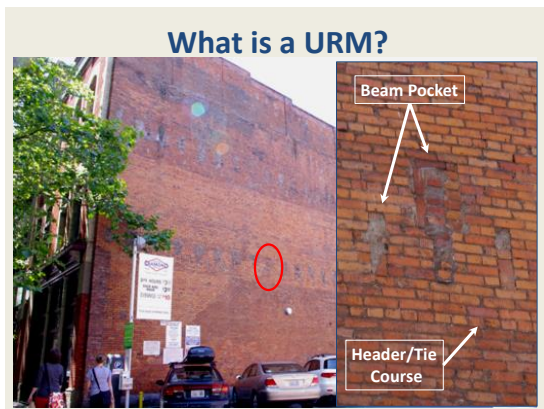
Why Retrofit URMs

- **Safety**: Falling bricks from these URMs pose a safety hazard to building occupants, as well as passers-by on the adjacent streets
- **Equity**: Many URMs house low-income and immigrant tenants and business owners, so these more vulnerable populations could be disproportionately impacted by the new policy
- **Economics**: Damaged URMs slow the recovery of neighborhoods by blocking off access points affected by the loss of these buildings resulting in loss of workplaces and jobs.
- **Environment**: Preserving these buildings would conserve energy by not building new structures and not adding the construction waste to our landfills.
- **Community Character**: URMs contribute to community character and their damage or loss is a loss of community history. In many cases, losing URMs damages historic character in the surrounding community, or their potential to serve as an anchor for recovery

Current City Policy

- We require seismic upgrades for projects that require a permit
- We require walls extending higher than the roof (parapets) to be braced
- We require a seismic assessment for a major renovation (substantial alteration)

Technical Committee

- Established the least costly, but effective, seismic retrofit standard to reduce the likelihood of URM collapses during an earthquake
- Created a retrofit standard intended to protect the lives of building inhabitants and those nearby
- The standard is not expected to prevent damage to the building in moderate-to-large earthquakes

What is a URM?
Beam Pocket
Header/Tie Course

How are URM bearing wall buildings constructed?
Header/Tie Course
FLOOR
WALL

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS: *Recommendations January 2013*

- **Threshold for retrofit requirement** – one- and two-unit residential structures are exempt
- **Timeline for retrofit** – 7-13 years, based on the risk category
- **Incentives tools** – to retrofit beyond proposed technical standard and assistance with the retrofit program
- **Enforcement** – to ensure compliance with program steps
- **Funding Options** – to help with retrofit costs

Figure 28 Number of Buildings in Each Risk Category

Number of Buildings in Each Risk Category

	C	H	M
Total	77	183	902

C = Critical Risk
H = High Risk
M = Medium Risk
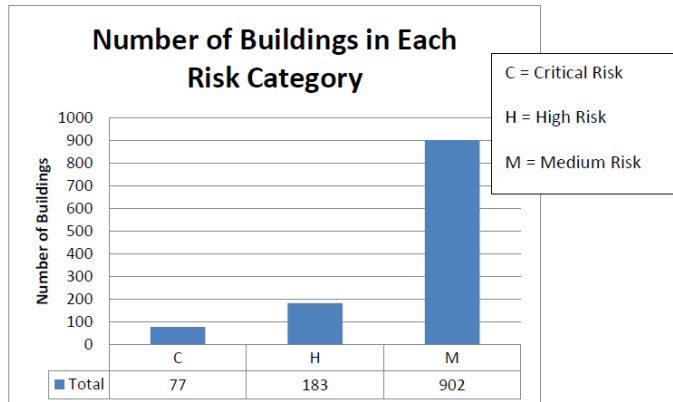
Number of Years to Complete Retrofit

	Critical Risk	High Risk	Medium Risk
Notification to Owners	0	0	0
Assessment	1	2	3
Permit Application	1	2	2
Permit Approval	1	1	1
Completion of Retrofit	4	5	7
	7	**10**	**13**

URM Policy Committee Draft Recommendations

Incentive Objectives   *Encourage retrofits beyond the policy's minimum requirements*
- Encourage early participation in the program
- Build broad-based support with effective outreach and education
- Make the program easy for building owners to understand and for the City to implement

Enforcement Concepts
- Use the established SDCI notice of violation (NOV) process
- Have strong penalties that increase the severity of fines for building owners who skip the process steps
- Send notice to tenants when the building owner is not in compliance with the program
- Post signs on buildings and on-line to recognize retrofitted buildings

Minimize the Cost of Retrofits   *Provide funding support options for property owners*
- Provide a listing of FEMA/CDBG/other grants; architecture/engineering grants and resources; and education funding
- Create general obligation bonds or a levy
- Provide tax incentives by offering a 10 percent building tax credit or a 20 percent historic building tax credit
- Create a city-revolving loan fund
- Offer transfer of development rights (TDRs) incentives

Outreach and Education - Columbia City Outreach Pilot November 2013
- To learn the most effective means of communication whether flyers, big or small community meetings, or one-on-one meetings
- Create an appropriate message to all audiences, including owners, tenants, and community
- Develop a tool kit including infographics

Program Development (anticipated schedule):
- Q4 – 2016: Reconvene URM Policy Committee to finalize policy recommendations
- Q1-Q2 - 2017: Final recommendations

SDCI - URM web pages

http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/codesrules/changestocode/unreinforcedmasonrybuildings/whatwhy/