URM Equity Analysis summary

Race and Social Justice Initiative is a Citywide effort to:
- END institutionalized racism in City government;
- CREATE a community that is enriched by its diverse cultures, with full participation by all its residents.

The analysis consists of a set of questions to guide us as we assess how our policies benefit and burden communities. It requires us to:
1. Apply racial equity tools to our programs and projects.
2. Build racial equity into policies and initiatives.
3. Partner across City departments and with other institutions and the community

Outcomes:

The Unreinforced Masonry (URM) retrofit policy is intended to increase public safety during earthquakes for all Seattle residents and visitors in and around URM buildings.

The results of this equity analysis have heightened our awareness of the disproportionate impacts of earthquake damage of un-retrofitted buildings on low income communities and communities of color in the absence of retrofits. Inaction on retrofit can have a devastating impact on these communities.

The analysis seeks to identify impacts and identify potential mitigation to reduce disproportionate impacts of the cost of retrofits and anticipated displacement for low income communities particularly communities of color when implementing a mandatory URM retrofit ordinance.

FINDINGS:

Key benefits and/or burdens for people of color

The URM Policy has the potential to be very beneficial to low income and/or communities of color. Experience with earthquakes in Seattle and other communities have shown that retrofitted URMs are less likely to be damaged in a moderate earthquake and thus have a lower potential for injuries. Retrofit of URMs would contribute to lowering inequities providing more protection during seismic activity similar to occupants in newer buildings that are up to current codes. Financial benefits are likely since retrofitted URMs can be quickly re-inhabited so that tenants can recover more rapidly. There are also potential avoided costs: property owners have recently been successfully sued for negligence in death and injury lawsuits in California. Thus the URM Policy can provide benefits property owners who represent communities of color.
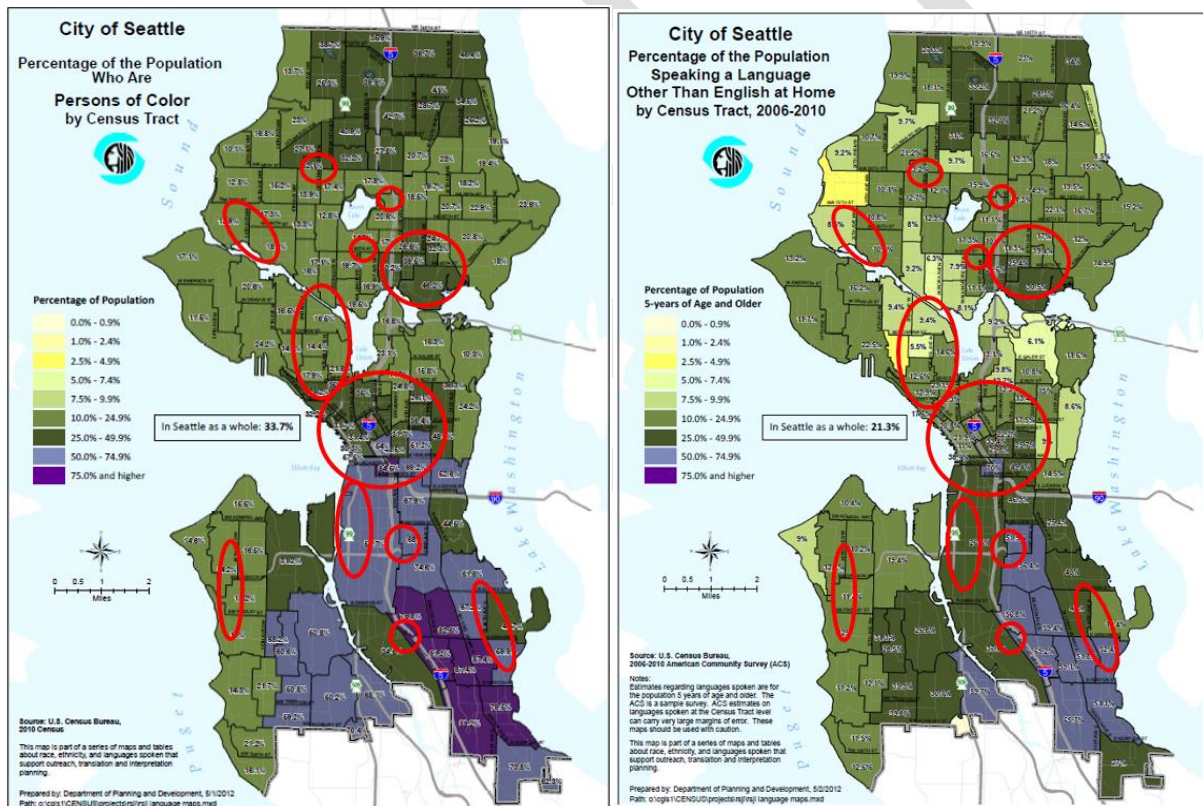
However, there are negative impacts or burdens associated with the policy implementation.   While the earthquake itself poses a race and social inequity in who will be adversely impacted by un-retrofitted URMs, requiring retrofits is likely to adversely affect the same population in a different way. Retrofits are costly and owners will need to recover costs of the work. The result will likely be higher commercial

and residential rent. This rent increase is in turn likely to add to displacement of these tenants and add to the overall gentrification of our neighborhoods.
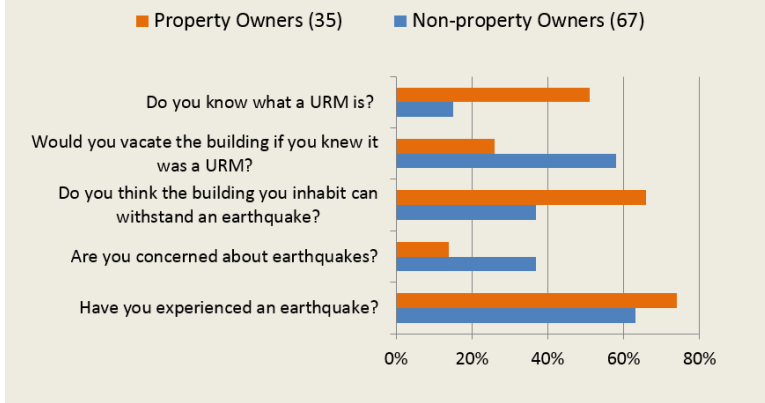
Demographic data and survey responses:
We used City information that, by census district, mapped areas where communities of color live and areas where languages other than English are spoken. We identified 12 areas where URMs are concentrated and overlaid that information on the maps.   We've also started to compare databases of URMs with the Arts and Cultural spaces in Seattle. After comparing half the lists, we found that the businesses are local and none are nationally owned. We also found via survey in Columbia City that there was a difference between building owners and tenants in the awareness of URMs, earthquakes, and potential safety issues.

Initial inferences are that URMs are located in many neighborhoods where communities of color live and work, where languages other than English are spoken, and where local business serve these communities.

Property Owners vs. Non-owners

- Property Owners (35)
- Non-property Owners (67)

Chart questions (y-axis):
- Do you know what a URM is?
- Would you vacate the building if you knew it was a URM?
- Do you think the building you inhabit can withstand an earthquake?
- Are you concerned about earthquakes?
- Have you experienced an earthquake?

x-axis: 0%, 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%

Stakeholder groups – November 2013 Columbia City Outreach and Education Pilot findings:
Stakeholder outreach and analysis is an important as part of a racial equity analysis to understand impacts to low income communities and communities of color. Information on the neighborhood and effective communication methods were obtained with the Columbia City Pilot. Our lessons learned from that Pilot provide insight into future stakeholder outreach. Some of what we learned:

- Community Liaisons, formerly Planning Outreach and Engagement Liaisons (POELs), are cultural leaders in immigrant and communities of color. Their outreach was most effective in reaching cultural groups
- Technical subjects are difficult for Community Liaisons to understand and explain to their cultural groups; it is best if City technical staff attend meetings with Community Liaisons to address more complex issues.
- The neighborhood survey – walkthrough – was a very effective education and outreach tool; a non-threatening approach
- Working with cultural groups is more time consuming than more traditional outreach. For example, presentations take longer if there is a translator, and accommodating cultural norms such as sharing a meal extends meeting times
- Finding a time when certain cultural groups can meet is a challenge. For example, early evening conflicts with family meals and many do not want to attend a meeting after dark.

POTENTIAL FUTURE ACTIONS:

What additional racial equity issues did this RET reveal? Consider how these unresolved issues present opportunities for structural transformation.

The initial research, maps, and surveys in Columbia City revealed that many low-income communities and communities of color live and work in URMs. Businesses in these URMs appear to serve these communities. Consideration of these issues may lead to changes.

Some Opportunities to explore:

- enhancement of the outreach we do with OEM to include more translators and community leaders,
- designing a permit assistance program that is tailored to communities of color, perhaps meeting them in their communities for permitting or providing a one stop permitting coordinator at the city,

- tracking the impacts to communities of color, the number of retrofits, number of people displaced, number of people benefiting from the retrofits, etc.
- design of an evaluation and communication plan for community members and elected officials.

Things that you will do differently or begin to do which will increase opportunity and/or minimize harm for people of color.

Some Opportunities to explore:
- Consider the demographics and ethnic mix of the people who live and work in URMS when we create the program requirements. Focus on creating mitigation tools for tenants in URMs with an emphasis on commercial tenants.
- The Pilot neighborhood walk-thru and survey were very effective at spreading the word and collecting information. Considering this approach for outreach in other neighborhoods with modified questions based on the Columbia City Pilot outcomes would provide information on what kind of outreach would be most effective in these communities.
- Continue building partnerships with community. Strengthen connections with cultural leaders in communities where outreach is difficult and continue supporting work at the State level to help with financing retrofits.

How is leadership ensuring that changes are implemented?
- Seattle DCI and OEM staff and leadership will continue to engage elected officials in program development to create mitigation for unintended negative consequences of this policy, such as displacement.