



The Pulse of Earthquake Engineering

Earthquake Engineering Research Institute

EERI Provides members with the technical knowledge, leadership and advocacy skills, collaborative networks, and multidisciplinary context to achieve earthquake resilience in their communities worldwide.

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PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Seattle Adopts Historic URM Retrofit Legislation

*Contributed by **Amanda Hertzfeld** (M.EERI 2023; Co-Chair, 2024AM Organizing Committee)*

Effective November 15, 2024, [Seattle will join the ranks](#) of the 200+ Californian jurisdictions with URM retrofit laws. Included in the city's adoption of the 2021 existing building codes is a definition of "retrofitted URM", codification of the Alternate Method for retrofit (akin to California's Bolts+ reduced retrofit standard), and compliance benchmark dates for previously completed retrofits. Together these codes provide a voluntary pathway for changed status in the city's [URM database](#). The long-term goal remains adoption of mandatory compliance with these codes, and the city is pursuing supportive resources prior to enforcement.

Discussion of URM retrofits has been ongoing since the 1970's, but the balance of costs, equity, affordable housing, and historic preservation have made development of

retrofit requirements particularly sticky. Seattle inventoried its URM buildings after the damaging 2001 Nisqually earthquake, an effort spearheaded by Nancy Devine and Jon Siu. With an emphasis on public safety and in partnership with Barb Graff, the city's former Director of Emergency Management, they used the URM inventory to facilitate recommendations for adoption of a mandatory retrofit program with a reduced retrofit standard to minimize both construction costs and risk to the public. In 2021, the city adopted a resolution formalizing support of this effort, establishing a pathway for future mandatory legislation.

A technical team, comprised of a public-private partnership, updated the proposed reduced retrofit standard to reflect improved understanding of the local seismic hazard and current building codes. This effort was supported internally by Kai Ki Mow, Nathalie Boeholt, Kevin Solberg, Dennis Pradere, **Amanda Hertzfeld** (M.EERI 2023), Susan Chang, and Pao Huang, and externally by Beatriz Arostegui (MKA), Greg Coons (SSF), Wes Neeley (PCS), Andy Quinn (BCQ), Francesca Renouard (SSF), **Peter Somers** (M.EERI 1994, MKA), David Sommer (Degenkolb), Abby Van Harpen (MKA), and **Bryan Zagers** (M.EERI 2007, CPL). Integration into the city's existing building code was navigated by Ardel Jala, Micah Chappel, and Greg Gilda.

Derek Ohlgren is now leading development of the city's procedures to obtain and process documentation of compliant retrofits. The city is also pursuing a series of federal grants. Thanks to Erika Lund, a phased approach is underway to develop a retrofit reimbursement program modeled after the success of Berkeley, CA. An HMGP application was just submitted to work with the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) to develop business cases and financial incentives for URM retrofits.