

Summary of CAPSS Advisory Committee Meeting
October 8, 2008

Prepared by Laura Samant and Tom Tobin

1. Liability Issues

Advisory Committee member Ronald Kahn prepared a draft letter to the City Attorney asking for clarification of the following legal issues:

- If the City has a list or inventory of soft story buildings are owners legally required to disclose being on this list at the time of sale?
- If this City adopts a mandatory retrofit program, are building owners required to provide notice of hazard to tenants and others who enter their building?
- Do members of the CAPSS Advisory Committee and CAPSS staff have statutory immunity?

Committee members were given a copy of this letter, which will be submitted to the City Attorney by Mary Lou Zoback, committee chair, on behalf of the committee.

2. DBI Database of Multi Family Buildings

DBI is working to complete its database of multifamily buildings. The ATC team needs this database as quickly as possible.

Concern was expressed that there are no standards in place for building owners who retrofit now, and they may be required to retrofit to a higher standard at a later time. Passing a retrofit standard for soft story buildings is critical.

3. Incentives

The ATC team distributed a memorandum with a “straw man”, dividing incentives to encourage seismic retrofit into two categories: those that make sense for San Francisco, and those that do not. The ATC team asked committee members to review this memo and send feedback via email or phone following the meeting.

4. Joan MacQuarrie on Berkeley’s Soft Story Program

Joan MacQuarrie, Berkeley’s Building Official, discussed Berkeley’s program for soft-story buildings and answered questions from the committee. Key points of Berkeley’s program are described in a memorandum prepared by the project team, available at <http://www.sfcapss.org/advcommittee.shtml>.

Additional information about Berkeley’s soft-story program that Joan discussed include:

- Berkeley’s program includes buildings with 5 or more residential units and 2 or more stories.

- Building owners are required to look at all four ground floor walls when they evaluate their building, not just the side that is “soft” or open. Sometime, this requires destructive testing, such as pulling up sheet rock to see if there are anchor bolts.
- Berkeley’s goal is to preserve housing, but no direct link was made between their performance objective and the technical standards they use.
- 43 owners have retrofitted or are in the process of doing so. Costs of these retrofits have not been analyzed in a formal way yet. The median retrofit cost is \$25,000.

She also discussed Berkeley’s successful transfer tax incentive for seismic retrofits. Every year, about \$1 million is rebated to building owners through this program.

Joan was asked what should would recommend to San Francisco, based on her experience. She recommends a mandatory retrofit program, because significant evidence shows that voluntary programs do not have good results. She will be requesting a mandatory retrofit ordinance in Berkeley in winter 2009.

She was asked whether standard details work for multi-family structures. Joan replied that they would not; unique engineering solutions are required for each building.

5. Performance Objective

The overall objective of a mitigation program in San Francisco was discussed. SPUR’s goal of having 95% of residents shelter in place within a set number of hours after an earthquake was discussed as a long-term goal.

One committee member expressed concern that the objective of the current building code, to which new buildings are built, is to preserve life safety. It does not make sense to propose a retrofit standard that is higher than current code.

Another committee member requested a sub-committee focused on repurposing the existing, unused bond funds for retrofits of unreinforced masonry buildings. The project team will communicate with specific committee members about this.

The project team was asked to evaluate the overall cost to all building owners of seismic retrofits, and to compare it to the approximately \$300 million available for loans.

6. Next Meeting

The date of the next CAPSS Advisory Committee meeting was changed to November 5th. This is a one time change. All other advisory committee meetings will remain on the second Wednesday of each month.