

Summary of CAPSS Advisory Committee Meeting

November 5, 2008

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The meeting began with introductions.

Participants asked about the recent measure to waive all permit fees for voluntary retrofits of soft story buildings. This measure did not pass through the Board of Supervisors. Laurence Kornfield said that this measure was not “rejected” but that the Board of Supervisors would like to wait for the complete program for addressing risk of soft story buildings was put together.

Laura Samant made a presentation about the activities of the project team.

The committee began a discussion about the process that would be used to comment on and vet policy recommendations. The project team said they would have a draft of recommendations in early January. The idea of discussing the policy recommendations in small group meetings in January was discussed. The project team said that it would discuss its initial recommendations with DBI and resolve any issues before making the recommendations public and providing them to the Advisory Committee. After discussion with the Advisory Committee, the project team would revise the recommendation in concert with DBI. DBI would submit the report and recommendation to the Building Inspection Commission before the end of January. The issue of when the recommendations would be presented to the Building Inspection Commission was discussed and whether the project team could present reviewed recommendations to the BIC at its January meeting. The possibility of the BIC convening a special meeting right before the January 30th deadline was discussed.

A committee member asked whether there were lessons about this type of structure from the 1906 earthquake. The group discussed this issue.

Tom Tobin discussed the planned workshop for December 10th. The purposes of this workshop would be:

- to inform the advisory committee of the project team’s findings about the impacts of earthquake damage to these buildings
- seek insights from advisory committee members about what these impacts mean to San Francisco
- Seek discussion and consensus about issues that are important to consider in policy recommendations.

The workshop would be structured to encourage interaction and to get feedback from committee members.

The group discussed issues about the workshop including its location and participants. Committee members suggested that both housing and small business issues needed balanced representation. Others mentioned that it was important to have an ethnic and geographic cross section of people participate in the process. Suggestions were to invite the code enforcement outreach group, BOMA, restaurant association and chamber of commerce. The San Francisco Apartment Owners Association representative confirmed that this group represents both large-scale owners of numerous buildings and owners that own only one building.

Committee members requested more information about the analysis that would be presented at the workshop. Team member Simon Allejandrino described the social and economic analysis that the team was doing. Committee members asked whether the PEER Tall Buildings Program report on willingness of owners to pay for additional seismic safety was being considered.

Impacts of retrofits on tenants were mentioned. Owners could use retrofitting as an opportunity to displace tenants. Committee members noted that retrofits to soft stories would often only require work on the ground floor, which means there would be fewer tenant displacements than with unreinforced masonry buildings. A committee member cautioned that a policy that includes retrofits that require tenant displacements is “a can of worms”. Another committee member discussed that special moment frames, required in buildings of four stories or more, require some intrusion to tenants because they need to be welded from the upper stories.

It was mentioned that any seismic retrofits that require exterior modifications would have CEQA hurdles and/or require historic review.

A committee member emphasized the importance to differentiate between the current retrofit requirements in section 104f of the building code and a less-burdensome retrofit to remedy the soft story condition.

Laura Samant presented a memorandum with some preliminary data analysis of where multi-family buildings are located and other characteristics. This analysis defined buildings with greater than 80% open on one side or greater than 50% open on two sides as having significant ground floor openings and most likely vulnerable to shaking damage. Committee members questioned this definition and asked to see the complete range of openness.

A committee member noted that there was a significant number of these buildings built in the 1920's and in the 1960's, and that these buildings probably had very different architectural and structural characteristics. He noted that older buildings were not necessarily more vulnerable because they use better quality materials.

Committee members requested more data and analysis before the December 10 workshop. These could be posted online. Project team members said they would try to provide this.

