

SAN FRANCISCO
PRESERVATION BULLETIN NO. 3

**REVIEW PROCESS FOR THE SEISMIC RETROFIT
OF UNREINFORCED MASONRY BUILDINGS**

INTRODUCTION

Generally made of brick, Unreinforced Masonry Buildings (UMBs) are constructed without the benefit of reinforcement. Because this building type lacks structural support, UMBs are considered “hazardous” in an earthquake and often result in structural failure through the collapse of walls or the entire building. The Department of Building Inspection (DBI) maintains a master list of over 2,000 UMBs citywide. To determine the status of a UMB, call DBI’s Seismic Safety Division at (415) 558-6083.

SAN FRANCISCO’S UMB ORDINANCE

Adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1992, UMB Ordinance No. 225-92 requires the City to notify all owners of UMBs and requires all property owners to retain a licensed civil structural engineer or architect to file a Building Inventory Form with the City to identify the “hazard class” of a particular UMB building. The ordinance also requires all owners of UMBs to seismically upgrade buildings by February 15, 2006. Building owners are responsible for financing the cost of the work.

The UMB ordinance spells out four different alternative standards for seismic strengthening of UMBs. Each standard requires a different level of construction and range of costs. The ordinance also specifies conditions that must be met if either of the two less extensive and costly approaches is used to seismically upgrade a UMB. The Department of Building Inspection, who is charged with oversight and enforcement of the program, also has the authority to initiate abatement proceedings in cases where an owner fails to seismically upgrade a building.

UNREINFORCED MASONRY BUILDING SURVEY

In November 1990, the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (Landmarks Board) completed A Context Statement and Architectural/Historical Survey of Unreinforced Masonry Building (UMB) Construction in San Francisco from 1850 to 1940. The Landmarks Board prioritized the survey of UMBs into three groupings of buildings with “Priority I” resources rated the highest.

This survey, which was adopted by the Landmarks Board on February 6, 1991, is available for review at the Planning Department. The survey was also evaluated by the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) and determination of eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places was made by the OHP on many of the 2,000 buildings citywide. This thematic survey of UMBs was funded in part through the National Historic Preservation Fund Grant program as administered by the OHP.

FUNDING FOR UMBs

In 1992, San Francisco voters authorized the issuance of \$350 million in bonds to make loans available to owners of UMB buildings. From that amount, \$150 million was set aside for low-interest loans at 2.5 percent to retrofit buildings containing affordable housing. In exchange for a lower interest rate, the borrower is required to enter into a regulatory agreement with the City to ensure that the retrofitted units remain affordable to and occupied by low-income persons. The remaining \$200 million was used to retrofit all other types of UMBs. These loans carry an interest rate of 8.5 percent. All seismic safety loans are fully amortized over a 20-year term.

BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATIONS

Exterior alterations, seismic retrofit and/or demolition of UMBs must be evaluated by the Planning Department in order to determine the type of review process required prior to the authorization of a building permit application. Some projects, however, may be approved administratively. Seismic retrofitting of UMBs is guided by the Architectural Design Guidelines for the Exterior Treatment of Unreinforced Masonry Buildings During Seismic Retrofit, developed by the American Institute of Architects. To obtain a copy of the guidelines, contact the Planning Information Center (PIC) at (415) 558-6377.

OTHER INFORMATION

For additional information about the UMB program, contact the Seismic Safety Section of (DBI) at 1660 Mission Street, 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103, (415) 558-6083. For questions regarding the UMB Bond Loan Program, contact the UMB Seismic Safety Loan Program Administrator at 25 Van Ness Avenue, Suite 720, San Francisco, CA 94102, (415) 554-6936.

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