

December 3, 2024

Subject: Support Letter for the City of Oakland’s Resolution on Multi-Story Non-Ductile Concrete Seismic Retrofitting

Dear Councilmembers,

SPUR writes in support of the City of Oakland’s proposed multi-story non-ductile concrete (NDC) seismic retrofitting resolution. Non-ductile concrete buildings lack the flexibility and reinforcement needed to withstand strong ground motion, making them highly vulnerable to collapse during earthquakes. We commend Councilmember Dan Kalb’s effort to protect Oakland residents in the event of a major earthquake by addressing these at-risk buildings. The proposed (1) study to develop mandatory standards, compliance timelines, and an inventory of NDC buildings is a valuable first step toward (2) developing an ordinance to retrofit these buildings.

The San Francisco Bay Area has a [72% chance of experiencing a magnitude 6.7 or greater earthquake](#) in the next 30 years. Right now, we are operating on borrowed time. Retrofitting non-ductile concrete buildings is crucial for enhancing public safety and community resilience in the Bay Area. Strengthening these buildings through retrofitting can significantly reduce the risk of structural failure, preventing injuries, saving lives, and minimizing economic losses. Additionally, retrofitting helps preserve critical infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, and emergency services, ensuring that communities can recover more swiftly after a seismic event. Mandatory retrofitting is a proactive measure that protects residents and the built environment from the devastating effects of earthquakes. Furthermore, it can limit the climate impact of an earthquake by reducing post-disaster debris waste (e.g. following the 2011 Christchurch earthquake almost [8 million tonnes of waste was generated by damaged buildings and infrastructure](#), equating to roughly 40 years of waste normally sent to landfill from the city), and the need for carbon-intensive new construction.

This is a great moment for the City of Oakland to launch this Study because Los Angeles has already adopted an NDC ordinance and San Francisco is currently developing a retrofit program. There is much that Oakland can learn from these efforts as they progress.

In addition to this effort, SPUR urges the City of Oakland to consider a similar study and inventory for Rigid Wall Flexible Diaphragm (aka “tilt-up” concrete buildings) that are also seismically unsafe. These buildings are generally single-story warehouse buildings that are generally easy and inexpensive to retrofit compared to NDC buildings. Thank you for your attention to this matter and your dedication to public safety.

Sincerely,

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