

URM Policy Development Committee  
Communications Working Group  
Meeting 1  
February 27, 2023

Attendee	Organization	Title	Comms Capabilities
Becky Asensio	Seattle Public Schools	Capital Planning Manager	Website, socials
Moon Callison	OEM	Communications Manager	Website & Outreach
Paul Cathcart	Seattle Public Schools	Sr. Facilities Partner	
David Della	Eco-Ready LLC, former Council	Principle Owner	Community Engagement & Government Relations
Leslie Henderson	Federal Alliance for Safe Homes		Multi-hazard messaging
Amanda Hertzfeld	SDCI	URM Program Manager	
Rod Kauffman	BOMA	President	Professional network
Kji Kelly	Historic Seattle	Executive Director	
Curry Mayer	OEM	Director	
TJ McDonald	OEM	Hazard Impact Research Coordinator	
Kai Ki Mow	SDCI	Principle Engineer	
Lisa Nitze	Nitze-Skagen, ASAP!		
Francesca Renouard	Swenson Say Faget	Project Manager	1:1 relationships, website, social media
Mary Kate Ryan	Historic South Downtown	Community Preservation Associate	Website, Newsletter
Bryan Stevens	SDCI	Director Media Relations	Website, Social media, blog, targeted press interest, general broadcast
Jessa Timmer	Alliance for Pioneer Square	Deputy Director	
Nicholas Vann	DAHP	Deputy Historic Preservation Officer	Social media
Sabrina Villanueva	Clise Properties, Denny Triangle Neighborhood Association	Senior Director or Property Management; Board Chair for Seattle 2030 District	Professional networks
Eugenia Woo	Historic South Downtown	Director of Preservation Services	Community Engagement Team, social media, monthly Newsletter

Background on the meeting was discussed. The Communications Working Group is a result of the 2017 Policy Committee Recommendations and the 2021 Council passed Resolution 32033.

The Policy Committee Recommendations include:

- The development of a building owner education program intended to provide awareness of URM vulnerability and encourage retrofit.

The Resolution asks that the URM Program:

- Develop culturally and linguistically appropriate community outreach and engagement focused on communities of color and low-income communities who may be disproportionately impacted by earthquake damage to URM and the proposed retrofit requirement.
- Provide coaching for URM owners.
- Develop a communication strategy.

The meeting goal was stated to identify key stakeholders, engagement points, and desired outcomes.

Introductions of attendees included a description of their communications capabilities and resources.

A tentative timeline was discussed showing that in order for the mandatory retrofit ordinance to be adopted, the technical standard must be completed and communicated, multiple funding sources need to be identified, and the ordinance compliance requirements and options will need to be widely communicated. Given the potential for unintended impacts of the required retrofits, such as increased rents and tenant displacements, a communications strategy and supporting resources are critical. Additionally, educating building owners on building performance compliant with the minimum standard will also be important.

Prior for the ordinance to be adopted, it will have to be shared with city lawyers, and it will have to be approved by Council and the Mayor. The shared tentative timeline uses fall/winter 2024 as the earliest an ordinance could be adopted. However, with the turnover in council, this will likely be pushed. A communications plan that identifies key messages and timing of delivery, with intentional delivery methods, can help the program maintain visibility and remain a priority.

- The commercial real estate market was discussed in relationship to the timing of the URM ordinance. Currently, occupancy in commercial spaces are down because of remote work and lingering COVID effects. Income to building owners is decreasing, creating competition and stress for capital dollars. However, given the timeline for compliance, there may be a chance for the market to right-itself by the proposed compliance timelines.
  - Messaging with building owners right now may be challenging due to these finance challenges.

A simplistic communications plan template was shared with stakeholders, objectives, message content, delivery methods/venue, and frequency. Attendees were asked to provide comments, suggestions, and ideas:

- A suggestion was made that rather than use the term “minimum standard”, baseline standard or something similar should be used.
- A suggestion was made to add neighborhoods and their representatives as a stakeholder.
- While “building owners” is a stakeholder, they are not a homogenous group, they can be a collective of several kinds of owners, many of which don’t read English as their first language.
- To educate building owners on retrofit performance levels, it’s important not to confuse the building code Life Safety performance objective with the Alternate Method’s improving life safety of the building. The Alternate Method is for collapse prevention. Higher performance levels will require a Substantial Alteration. A graphic may help communicate this to building owners.

Communicating costs:

- Messages for building owners will need to very clearly address the costs of retrofits upfront. One participant shared that previous efforts failed due to:
  - The triggers that occur with other building systems and the costs associated with them, making it almost impossible to find a way to fund them. It would be wise for the city to limit code triggers, like energy, when these retrofits are conducted. If they do have to do these upgrades, there needs to be a funding source to support.
  - Increased rents of the people who need affordable housing/commercial space.
- Messaging will need to be provided once the technical standard has been developed to inform building owners of what is coming and to support them once adopted. Having a dedicated person to answer questions as well as a graphic to show how long permitting processes and construction will take will help assuage building owners.
  - SDCI commented that they will be hiring an engineer to support plan reviews and building owner questions. Additionally, prior to adoption, there will be a Directors Rule establishing the baseline retrofit for additional transparency.
- It was suggested that because all buildings are different, their ownership is different, and their situations are different, a helpful communications tool would be a model of four or five different structures and what it would take to comply and how much it would cost. It would help owners connect quickly. Having this out prior to the ordinance will help assuage building owner anxieties. Building owners are uncomfortable with the current uncertainties.
  - Energy upgrade teams are currently building 20 different models for costs to comply that will help connect building owners with what to expect.
  - SDCI commented that the NDC Report does include a few sample buildings and costs, and it is a goal to get those updated. Including additional structure types is a good suggestion.

## Positives of Retrofits:

- It was suggested that highlighting buildings that have retrofitted, in a positive way, can help encourage other building owners to retrofit as well as relieve anxieties of tenants.
  - Identifying case studies to showcase incentives used (like tax credits, special valuation, C-PACER) and who to contact can highlight retrofits and minimize assumptions about not being eligible.
    - Identified sub-task group for Case Studies to include Nicholas Vann, Rod Kauffman, MaryKate Ryan, and David Della.
- Advertising benefits of retrofits should include the opportunity to add housing or change uses. There are a lot of vacant and underutilized spaces not currently used for housing because the building isn't code compliant for residential. Advertising opportunities to increase affordable housing could be a selling point.
  - Streamlining permit processes for this type of work could help build support as well. This should be a topic for the IDT.

## Language Needs

- Messages need to be translated correctly and delivered by trusted messengers and provided through multiple delivery sources like websites, newsletters, public meetings, and social media. There are some tenants that don't use the internet.
  - Alliance for Pioneer Square, and other neighborhood organizations and business improvement areas, like SODO BIA, can help deliver and spread these messages. SCIDPDA and Interim CDA know many tenants and building managers. Alliance for Pioneer Square works with the Residents Association. These groups often conduct 1:1 meetings and meet business owners in their spaces. These groups can help convene meetings and/or serve as a representative with SDCI to build trust.
  - Cultural language newspapers are another resource for communicating these messages. They often have someone that can help get articles developed and properly translated.
  - Suggested approach of going group by group, asking them to help organize a meeting, and help find a trusted person who can speak the technical language. It is time-consuming, but effective.
    - Organizations like SCIDPA, CID, and Little Saigon, can help connect with groups, though it was emphasized by participants that the City needs someone trained in the technical, structural engineering world that speaks the language.
    - Family associations can also help. They have a different way of receiving communication and acting on it. People in these groups may also know an architect or engineer that can help translate as a trusted source. Some family associations don't interact with some of the organizations, but in their own right may be able to receive some information and get help acting on it.
      - Radio stations may also help spread the word in these type of instances. Example, Central District CPDA and Rainier Ave Radio.

- The office of immigrant and refugee affairs has a list of [ethnic media resources](#).
- Professional Societies may also be able to support.

#### Historic Structures:

- Messaging for historic preservation was discussed, as a secondary goal of the Resolution is to minimize demolitions.
  - It was suggested that a definition of historic structures be established. “Historic structures” is broad, while landmark structures and historic districts are easily defined. However, there are buildings outside of the current landmark list and outside of the existing designated local historic districts, that are character buildings and may or may not be eligible for landmark status. This does not mean that they aren’t significant.
  - Within the subset of 1100 URM’s, how many are landmarks? Which are planned for historic rehabilitation?
  - Historic buildings and energy codes was discussed as a concern. Are there opportunities for performance-based pathways for code compliance? Energy savings could be measured rather than prescriptive pathways.
    - It was suggested that this conversation be saved for the Building Owner and Tenant Needs Working Group.
  - Messaging to combat misinformation and anti-preservation will be important.
    - Opportunities to turn vacancies into housing, Preservation Green Lab Study on value of small buildings, and embodied carbon messaging could help support positive messaging and fight misinformation.

#### Connecting Contractors to Building Owners

- California retrofit programs have had success in building relationships between contractors and building owners by hosting workshops and trainings.
  - It was suggested that Seattle host trainings for contractors on the technical standard and compliance requirements. These trainings should include special considerations for historic and landmark buildings, like the Secretary of Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.
  - It was suggested to host workshops for building owners to meet with contractors and financiers, providing building owners with the opportunity to ask specific questions.
    - Attention should be given to ensure availability of culturally competent contractors. (SCIDPA has a list of contractors familiar with Pioneer Square tenants).

#### City of Seattle Interdepartmental Team

- The City has developed an Interdepartmental Team (IDT) to ensure internal support and alignment of programs.
  - It was suggested to ensure county staff involved with public health and restaurant inspections are included.

- It was suggested to have someone from SDOT on the IDT to support alignment with the Areaways Project occurring in Pioneer Square. This project involves some public-private funding and interest from Council.

#### Elected Officials

- Engaging and maintaining City Council support was discussed. While SDCI is required to provide updates quarterly to the Public Safety and Human Services Committee, there were questions about the expected turnover among council in the fall. It was expressed that the IDT will be discussing this issue.

#### Next Steps:

- Next Meeting: General Public Messaging:
  - where we are now, where we are going
  - reviewing Columbia City Pilot, other studies on perception, bias, etc. Public attitude/sentiment
  - Timing for messaging
- Sub-Group on Case Study Retrofit Examples