



May 7, 2020

Mayor Ted Wheeler  
Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty  
Commissioner Chloe Eudaly  
Commissioner Amanda Fritz  
City of Portland  
1221 SW 4th Avenue  
Portland, OR 97204

RE: Database of unreinforced masonry buildings

Honorable Mayor Wheeler & Commissioners,

The Portland Business Alliance (the Alliance) is greater Portland's Chamber of Commerce and represents the largest, most diverse network of businesses in the region. The Alliance advocates for business at all levels of government to support commerce, community health and the region's overall prosperity. We represent more than 1,900 members, from 27 counties, 13 states and virtually every industry sector. More than 80% of our members are small businesses.

We write today to express our support for the request from the NAACP Portland Chapter, and several other organizations, to abolish the current city database of unreinforced masonry (URM) buildings. The Alliance has supported, and continues to support, the concept of maintaining a well informed and consistently updated database of building conditions based on shared agreements. However, the current list has so many problems and exacerbates harm from past injustices and inequities, we believe the city needs to take the actions called for by the NAACP and start over.

The problems with the current URM database are numerous, including the following:

1. The current list appears to go directly against the city's policy of applying a racial equity lens to policy decisions and implementation. The very purpose of maintaining such a list must be clearly communicated and be in alignment with the city's racial equity goals, which it clearly is not in its current form.
2. If the purpose of this list were to be developed and agreed upon - with equity at the forefront - between the city, impacted stakeholders, and the community, there would also need to be a plan to develop the initial list, ensure it is "ground truth" and based on clear criteria. This list should also be regularly maintained and updated on to ensure its accuracy. This does not currently appear to be happening. This only reinforces the perception that this list targets certain communities. Additionally, building owners have told us they have non-URM buildings, or buildings that were reinforced to past standards on the list, but the process to remove them is very difficult to fulfill.
3. The maintenance and publication of this list with no specific plan to provide financial incentives and assistance to local building owners to upgrade their buildings gives the strong impression its only current purpose is to shame building owners into taking action many simply cannot afford.

The Alliance is strongly committed to continuing to be a partner in the city's vital emergency preparedness planning work. Clearly, the entire community has a vested interest in developing a plan to ensure the entire inventory of buildings in Portland are improved to meet minimum standards of earthquake safety as quickly as

possible. This is not a problem that can be solved by one sector alone. We must do the difficult work to develop a strong private, public partnership – including help from the state and federal government – to bring URM's up to modern standards. In our last communication to the city, dated 5/15/18, we expressed our opposition to the placarding proposal (which we appreciate was put on hold), and suggested alternative forms of public disclosure that would be tied to a financial plan.

The Alliance would consider supporting the development of a new list, one that is tied to a robust set of financial incentives and assistance, and tracks shared progress on a city-run, public-private retrofit program, with improvements listed, and anticipated dates of completion. This would be a much more positive, community focused approach with shared accountability and metrics. We will also continue to advocate for state and federal assistance in solving this problem with Oregon's leaders and congressional delegation.

We are committed to working in partnership with Rev. Mondaine and the Portland NAACP on this issue and will follow his lead on any further discussions regarding the URM list. We urge you to work with the coalition of organizations who joined their call to abolish the current list and begin again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AH', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Andrew Hoan  
President & CEO