

Seismic Upgrades

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three committees," Even said. "Many of the members were architects, engineers, and others who could potentially benefit from the retrofitting upgrades."

These committees looked at standards and codes, financing, and policy. Even attended every committee meeting since 2016.

Even asked city staff what would happen if property owners couldn't afford costly seismic upgrades. The response was either sell or have the building demolished.

"This is unacceptable," Even said. "Their building list is anywhere from 20-25 years old. City staff made drive-by [inspections] and didn't even enter the buildings."

"[In Oregon] any contractor can state they are seismic experts. And then there are the displacements of residents and customers and the risk of exposure to lead paint and asbestos."

In order to provide financial support to business owners, the city proposes tax abatements but will need the sign-off of 75 percent of stakeholders who receive taxes.

"We do not want to be adversarial. We want the city to work with us," Even said. "And the thing is that even these mandates don't guarantee the buildings will survive. I have not met one owner who doesn't want safety for their business, customers, and staff."

Stuart Ellis, a long-time Multnomah

resident, asked what happens if the city adopts the new mandates.

"The business has approximately 10 years to get everything up to code along with coming up with most of the money," Even said. "After that there will be incremental fines and eventually, the city will deny building occupancy permits."

According to Ellis, "It seems unfair to put these owners through a process where there is no clear answer on how much they realistically can afford upgrades."

"I worry about the loss of old buildings with character as well as the loss of small businesses that may not be able to afford higher rents after buildings are upgraded."

Local property owners respond to mandate

Jim Wilson, who spoke at the neighborhood meeting, is a carpenter and owns a 1911 three-story brick building in northwest Portland.

"There are 11 units with 13 tenants," Wilson said. "I applied for a permit to repair my roof and hired day laborers. But requirements are now to tear it off, put a 14" thick reinforcement with foam insulation and tying it to the walls at a cost of approximately \$80,000."

"I'm also required to tie in all the floors and all walls at a cost of around \$180,000. This will displace my tenants."

Yves Le Meitour, property owner of the French Quarter boutique mall

in Multnomah Village, was at the neighborhood meeting. His property is on the city's list of unreinforced masonry buildings.

"I had an engineer examine my building years ago," Le Meitour said. "He installed rebar into the side of the building. The city said my building was secure."

"The city has to have the burden of proof on *them*, not me. I should not be required to hire costly engineers, again, at my expense."

Randy Bonella, Multnomah NET member, offers perspective

Randy Bonella is an active member of Neighborhood Emergency Teams, represents the Multnomah Village Business Association with the city, and coordinates projects for local businesses. He is also a past president of the Multnomah Neighborhood Association.

For the purpose of this story, Bonella spoke with his NET hat on and said he was not speaking on behalf of the business association.

Bonella, along with his wife Susan, have been training for the last ten years for first responder search and rescue and working on major disaster event preparedness.

"With Fire Station 18, we conduct full gear exercises every other month and attend NET meetings monthly," Bonella said. "I'm trained to save people."

"The retrofit mandate is not easy

to deal with but something has to be done. I don't want people to die.

"In the event of a Cascadia subduction zone earthquake, or even a moderate earthquake, today many buildings in Multnomah Village will fall down."

A number of the buildings in the village are made of a fired clay brick which is very strong but not flexible and due to the age is not reinforced.

"There could be a 10 year or longer economic recovery period after a very large earthquake if nothing is done," Bonella said. "The goal is to get back to business as soon as possible to keep the community thriving."

"What finally needs to happen is a strategy designed by the city that enables existing business owners to thrive and property owners to get the building retrofits done. Some property owners have been saving up money for the improvements."

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