



STAFF REPORT

AGENDA NO: 10b

MEETING DATE: January 4, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

Date: January 4, 2021

**From: Kevin Gardiner, Community Development Director – (650) 558-7253
Rigoberto Caro III, Chief Building Official – (650) 558-7270**

Subject: Update on the Soft Story Buildings Ad Hoc Committee

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council receive an update on the City’s Soft Story Buildings Ad Hoc Committee, and provide additional suggestions to consider as appropriate.

BACKGROUND

“Envision Burlingame” is the combined update of the Burlingame General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The Draft General Plan was released in August 2017, and the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in July 2018. The City Council certified the EIR and adopted the General Plan on January 7, 2019.

The General Plan includes the Community Safety Element (Chapter VIII), which establishes goals and policies designed to protect public health and safety, provide for sound emergency preparedness planning, and build in resiliency. Among the hazards addressed in the Community Safety Element are seismic safety hazards, which can be influenced by ground shaking, topography, groundwater conditions, and type of building construction.

General Plan Goal CS-7 calls for protecting people and buildings in Burlingame by reducing the risks associated with geologic and seismic hazards. Among the polies supporting this goal is Policy CS-7.2: Residential Upgrades:

Require that any residential facility that is being increased more than 50 percent assessed value or physical size conform to current life-safety engineering standards throughout the entire structure. Encourage owners of residential buildings with known structural defects such as unreinforced garage openings, “soft story” construction, unbolted foundations, and inadequate sheer walls to take steps to remedy the problem by retrofitting buildings to meet current life-safety engineering standards. Form an ad hoc committee to investigate and describe the seismic risk posed by pre-1980 wood frame “soft story” buildings in Burlingame and to evaluate the costs and benefits of potential actions that could be pursued by the City. The ad hoc committee shall report its findings to the City Council before the end of 2020.

The formation of the ad hoc committee was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruptions to City services, but in recent months staff has been assembling a proposed committee (in coordination with Burlingame Neighborhood Network (BNN) representatives), and conducting preliminary research. Staff expects the ad hoc committee to be formed and have its first meeting in late January or early February.

DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this study, a "soft story building" is considered a structure with wood-framed construction built with two or more stories situated over an open parking, storage, or commercial level. The open level typically has disproportionately large openings (such as carports or garage doors) compared to the upper levels, and the upper levels are often supported only by slender columns. These characteristics make the building "top heavy" so that there is a variation in lateral stiffness, making the building vulnerable to damage from the lateral motion of an earthquake.

One of the foremost events which brought to light the dangers of structural system failure due to soft story irregularity can be witnessed in the aftermath of the 1989 Lorna Prieta Earthquake. This natural disaster caused considerable damage in the Marina District of San Francisco and exposed the vulnerability of buildings with this design characteristic.

In preparation for the study and the work of the ad hoc committee, Bureau Veritas North America, Incorporated (BVNA) prepared a preliminary report. BVNA provides structural analysis services for the Building Division and is very familiar with the physical characteristics of Burlingame and its building stock. The report includes a preliminary survey of *potential* soft story buildings in Burlingame based on a visual assessment of the buildings from the right of public way conducted by a qualified structural engineer. However, the report notes that further evaluation and analysis will be required before a final classification can be made. Based on the visual assessment, the survey includes a preliminary list of 140 multiunit residential and 15 commercial structures that could be considered at risk for potential soft story failure. Single family dwellings were not included in the inventory as they do not present the same potential risks as multiunit residential or commercial buildings.

The survey is intended to be used as a tool by the ad hoc committee and officials in furthering their efforts to retrofit at-risk properties. As the survey was limited to a visual assessment, additional analysis and information is required to validate if the buildings identified should be classified as soft story. Additional information that would support the City in the classification of these identified structures as soft story includes, but is not limited to, the year of construction, engineering details on the existing structural system for each, and information related to possible improvements made by the property owner.

The work plan for the ad hoc subcommittee will be to focus on policy recommendations such as incentives and requirements that would compel property owners to retrofit existing buildings to address soft stories and related structural issues. The committee will reference soft story ordinances from other comparable municipalities to help devise recommended policies and programs that may be suitable to Burlingame, and shall report its findings to the City Council.

The intention of the ad hoc committee is that it reflect the broad range of interests represented in the multiunit residential and commercial property sector, and that it be constructive and collaborative. While individuals have been identified and invited for most affiliations and areas of expertise, as indicated in the list below some individuals have yet to be identified. Councilmembers may choose to suggest individuals, and/or other areas of expertise or affiliations to be added.

Proposed Soft Story Buildings Ad Hoc Committee

Name	Area of Expertise/Affiliations
Dena Gunning	Community Risk & Resiliency Specialist, CCFD
Janiele Maffei	Chief Mitigation Officer, California Earthquake Authority
Dominic Chu	Structural Engineer
Peter Sung	Structural Engineer
	Building Contractor
Terry Nagel	Burlingame Neighborhood Network (BNN)
Justin Moresco	Civil engineer with expertise in seismic mitigation
Randy Grange	Architect
	Apartment Building Owner
	Residential Realtor – Multiunit
Ron Karp	Commercial Building Owner or Broker
Ryan Guibara	Commercial Building Owner/Developer
	Banking/Finance
Lisa Lohmann, Farmers Insurance Group	Property Insurance
Rhovy Lyn Antonio	CA Apartment Association
Gina Zari	Government Affairs Director, San Mateo County Association of Realtors (SAMCAR)
Georgette Naylor	Chamber of Commerce
Rik Kasuga	Burlingame CERT Coordinator
	American Institute of Architects (AIA)
	Planning Commissioner(s)

FISCAL IMPACT

None.