

L.A. City Council embraces Mayor Eric Garcetti's quake retrofit plan

Rosanna Xia and Rong-Gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times, 1-15-15

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's ambitious plan to require thousands of earthquake-vulnerable buildings to be retrofitted was welcomed Wednesday by the City Council, which began the process of drafting an ordinance.

Many council members expressed support for seismic strengthening, but said they needed to figure out a way to ensure the upgrades are affordable.

Councilman Gil Cedillo endorsed Garcetti's goal of mandatory retrofits to protect residential buildings and lives.

"There's no question about it. It has to be done," said Cedillo, who is asking the city attorney to begin drafting a mandatory retrofit law. "It's been demonstrated that voluntary programs don't work."

Cedillo will be a key person overseeing how the council takes on the mayor's seismic proposals. The Housing Committee, which Cedillo chairs, is likely to take the first look at the proposed ordinance, since a large number of the buildings that need retrofits involve residential units. A well-crafted plan would benefit all of the city, he said.

"If we do this right ... the retrofits can create jobs, and preserve housing, and stimulate economic growth for the region," Cedillo said.

Councilman Mitch O'Farrell said that of all the decisions weighing on the council, "this is the one that should have the greatest sense of urgency."

Many property owners and tenants who spoke to the City Council said they supported retrofits but asked the council to ensure that the process wouldn't be an overwhelming financial burden.

There's no question about it. It has to be done. It's been demonstrated that voluntary programs don't work.-
City Councilman Gil Cedillo

"The cost cannot only rest on the back of tenants," said Carlos Aguilar of the Coalition for Economic Survival. "We urge funding sources to be found to alleviate the burden on property owners and tenants, or that at least a shared-cost mechanism be found."

Chuck Betz, 84, has lived in the 10-unit building he owns in Sherman Oaks for almost four decades and said he supported making it safer. But, he asked, how could he afford to do so without draining his retirement or pushing out longtime tenants through costly rent increases?

"I'm in favor of the retrofitting, of making the building better, but we don't have the money to pay for it," he said. "It would take over 10 years to get my money back, and I'm not going to be here in 10 years."

Many noted the public's willingness to consider mandatory retrofits.

"Normally, people run to their corners of interests and say, 'Oh, not the tenants!' 'Oh, not the landlords!'" Cedillo said. "And in this instance, people were actually articulating thoughts about how they could

comply and fulfill their duty."

U.S. Geological Survey seismologist Lucy Jones, whom the mayor brought on last year as his earthquake advisor, will join Cedillo and Councilman Mitch Englander to meet with legislators in Sacramento next week. Ideas for paying for retrofitting include a state bond measure and giving owners who retrofit a break on property taxes.

Other motions introduced Wednesday include two by Councilman Bob Blumenfield, which ask for a study on financial aid programs for owners and a draft ordinance requiring new cellphone towers to resist strong quakes.