

# SLO Council gives big builders a stay from retrofits

**Robert A. McDonald, San Luis Obispo New Times, 2-18-10**

The San Luis Obispo City Council voted unanimously Feb. 16 to give the developers of Chinatown and Garden Street Terraces until 2015 to retrofit their unreinforced masonry buildings to the city's seismic earthquake standards, while other building owners in the city are required to comply with safety rules by 2010.

One of the unreinforced masonry buildings is 1119 Garden St., a two-story brick building owned by Westpac investments that houses Downtown Brew, an often packed bar. The building had the sixth highest hazard rating of all unreinforced masonry buildings in a 2007 list compiled by the city. The building will be part of the Garden Street Terrace project when built, locking it into the extended deadline.

The developers' buildings would presumably be refitted before 2015, however, as they find enough money to build their projects. The old buildings will be part of the new structures.

Owners of eight other buildings that have made "substantial progress" toward refurbishment may be fined up to \$500 a day if they don't make the city's July deadline or at least satisfy the city's criteria for advancement, according to a city proposal approved by the council.

The Chinatown and Garden Street Terrace properties have had no refitting work done according to city officials.

The Chamber of Commerce Seismic Task Force—a group made up of building owners, businesses owners, and engineers who worked with the city to produce the seismic update report—said the city should give a five-year extension to, in their words, honor the time, effort, and money put into these projects by the developers.

"Nine [property owners] wanted an extension to July 2010 because of economic [hardship]," said Mike Spangler, a business owner who has yet to retrofit his building. "Yet you give these developers five years and they have done nothing to make their properties safer."

A city chart estimated that the Chinatown project will be built sometime between 2012 and 2014. Garden Street Terrace's timeline puts it at 2014.

The city's staff recommended a July 2010 deadline for the retrofit of the Springfield Baptist building at 2747 Broad St. The council gave the church another year to bring the church building up to code. The church is currently trying to sell because the congregation can't afford the retrofit.

The city identified 126 mason buildings as potentially hazardous. As of January 2010, 95 buildings have been brought up to code, eight were demolished, and eight were reassessed or found to be exempt according to city documents.