

DATE: October 1, 2008

TO: ABAG Regional Planning Committee

FROM: Linda Min, Tranter-Leong Management Intern

RE: Progress Report on Existing Long-Term Disaster Recovery Planning Efforts by Local Governments

Background

The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) conducted a survey to assess the state of readiness by local governments for long-term recovery after an earthquake or other catastrophic disaster. Long-term recovery refers to the repair and rebuilding process that will need to be undertaken by government departments such as Planning, Finance, Housing, Public Works/Building, Redevelopment and Emergency Management to start restoring their community. The results of the survey provide an assessment of what disaster recovery plans are and are not in place in Bay Area jurisdictions.

While hazard mitigation is essential to minimize the damage of disasters to communities, having a comprehensive plan for the long process of recovery is often overlooked. Hurricane Katrina's aftermath clearly shows the consequences of not preparing for recovery. New Orleans is still struggling to rebuild its communities.

With the upcoming 140th anniversary of the last major earthquake on the Hayward Fault on October 21, 2008, now is an opportune time for Bay Area governments to re-examine how they are laying the groundwork for a multi-faceted recovery process. This report provides the first review of the survey's findings on the status of recovery efforts. The final results will be released on October 24, 2008 at ABAG's Fall General Assembly and at the Earthquake Hazards in the Eastern San Francisco Bay Area Conference, October 22-24, 2008.

Methodology and Response Rates

The survey was sent out to city managers and county administrators of all 109 ABAG jurisdictions on July 3, 2008. The original deadline of July 22, 2008 was extended to August 29, 2008 to increase the response rate. In the interim, a preliminary staff report, list of respondents (by county), and Power Point slides were presented to ABAG's Regional Planning Committee on August 6, 2008 based on the 54 responses received by that date.

The survey closed on August 29, 2008 with 85 jurisdictions responding out of a total of 109. The response rate at 78% was excellent. Of the 85 respondents, 2 submitted answers for less than half of the survey questions. In addition, a small number of respondents skipped questions. Staff had mixed success with follow-up calls, which accounts for the varying response rates for individual questions.

Key Findings

1. **Reasons for Delays in Recovery Planning**-Most jurisdictions (84%) cited mitigation efforts as the prime reason for not doing more to prepare for long-term recovery efforts. Lack of funds (72%), time (46%) and staff* (41%) were cited as the next most common obstacles.
2. **Financial Recovery**-The vast majority of jurisdictions (92%) have designated a department to oversee the FEMA reimbursement claims process and half (50%) of the Bay Area's local governments have adopted a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan as part of their General Plan. Areas for improvement include: adoption of repair and reconstruction ordinances, documenting of pre-existing conditions, and establishment of a fund for emergency repairs. Only 18%, 37%, and 57% of jurisdictions, respectively, have these measures in place.
3. **Emergency Purchases**-More than half (53%) of local governments' codes or regulations allow the city manager or county administrator to make emergency purchases over \$100,000, which is a minimal amount. Of the 37 comments received, 54% stated there was **no limit** specified in the Municipal Code or other governing document; this is the most flexible and appropriate approach.
4. **Resumption of Government Operations**-Many jurisdictions have made considerable progress ensuring that government operations and services can resume. They still have not fully completed preparations for their resumption, however. For example, 39% currently do not have back-up procedures or plans for making payments if normal finance operations are interrupted. Of this number, 25% plan to do so by December 2009, leaving only 14% with no plans to do so. A total of 54% currently do not have a list of alternate locations for offices and community centers, though 26% plan to by December 2009 (leaving only 28% with no plans to make a list.) In addition, 25% currently do not have back-ups of key records that can be accessed from alternate work sites, though 15% plan to by December 2009 (leaving only 10% with no back-up plans.)
5. **Promoting Mitigation: Residential Buildings**-More extensive retrofitting of residential buildings is needed to preserve our housing stocks, particularly of older single-family homes with "cripple walls" and multifamily housing with "soft stories." Cripple walls are the weak outside wall of the crawl space below the floor one walks on and the perimeter foundation. Soft story buildings (typically built prior to 1980) have an open first floor to allow for parking or retail. Only 16% of jurisdictions currently provide incentives for strengthening cripple walls of single-family residences. A clear majority (84%) of jurisdictions currently has no incentives for seismic retrofitting of single-family residences with cripple walls. Of this number, 8% plan to provide incentives by December 2009, leaving 76% with no plans to provide incentives.

Over one-third of jurisdictions (33%) indicated they do not have multifamily housing with soft stories. Thus, the following percentages only apply to those local governments with soft story multifamily buildings. Of the remaining jurisdictions with soft story buildings, only 10% of jurisdictions have mandated strengthening rules or provide incentives, while 21% plan to do so by December 2009. The majority of jurisdictions (69%) do not mandate strengthening or provide incentives.

6. **Promoting Mitigation: Commercial Buildings**-Relative to mitigation programs for residential buildings, more local governments have actively promoted mitigation of unreinforced masonry buildings in their commercial areas by requiring that these buildings be retrofitted or vacated (44%.) However, 17% of cities and counties cited they currently have no plans to require mitigation of these commercial buildings. *Local governments can facilitate retrofitting by providing incentives. This mitigation measure will drastically reduce property damage after a major earthquake and, more importantly, preserve the historic character and mix of small businesses in older downtowns during recovery. Currently, only a small number of the Bay Area's 109 jurisdictions offer such incentives.*
7. **Expedited Processes**-Building departments need to prepare for the high volume of work they will be required to do after a disaster. Having expedited processes for reviewing plans, granting permits and scheduling inspections for both residential and commercial properties will help ease the recovery effort. While 48% of jurisdictions have expedited processes in place, 24% plan to do so by 2009 and 30% currently have no plans to establish them.
8. **Assisting in Business Recovery**-More planning departments need to be aware of the implications for small business recovery after a major earthquake. It is recommended that they identify key businesses and districts most in need of immediate resumption and include specific area plans in the General Plan. More than half (61%) of jurisdictions currently have no plans to establish specific area plans and only 33% of jurisdictions have identified key businesses and districts.

Next Steps

As part of ABAG's Disaster Recovery Initiative, four issue papers addressing financing disaster recovery, housing recovery, recovery of business and the economy, and recovery of government facilities and services have been presented at earlier RPC meetings. These issue papers and other related resources are available online at <http://quake.abag.ca.gov/recovery/>. Forthcoming issue papers will address recovery issues related to infrastructure, schools, health facilities and land-use. This project is funded by ABAG and the City of Oakland.

A summary report of the survey's findings will be available at the ABAG General Assembly and a full report will be available online at <http://quake.abag.ca.gov/recovery/>

Based on the survey's results, ABAG will create a template of best practices as part of the larger toolkit that provides technical assistance to local governments for recovery planning.

* Note: Lack of staff was not included in the original list of obstacle options. It was cited in 41% of the responses for "J-Other."