Inner City Association
Submission on the Council responses to earthquake prone buildings – update report
Strategy & Policy Committee 23 February 2012

1. Overall, the report is very informative and represents a lot of work. The recommendations to progress immediate actions and for priority activities in the Long Term Plan are pragmatic initiatives. Our members who are owners of buildings that fall under the definition of 'earthquake prone' want the Council to demonstrate leadership in this area, provide sound information, facilitate access to technical advice and information.

2. We have the following comments to make.

3. Funding Options (5.5.1) – we support any investigation into funding options, including the targeted rates that owners could access and encourage Council officers and Councillors to be creative in identifying and considering these and any other options.

   We encourage officers to be explicit in stating which category of building is being referred to when discussing funding options to avoid doubt. The wording of the three options could be read that not all multi-level apartments would be covered – as tax breaks are generally for commercial/public buildings, multi-level apartments may be heritage, but are not single/dwelling/single unit. This is an area of huge interest to our members and clarity is essential.

   The funding option for heritage buildings needs to include both listed and heritage areas.

4. Heritage (5.3.2) – our members are supportive of preserving the heritage of buildings and what it contributes to the character of the city, but not necessarily at the huge financial expense that will be incurred for owners and potentially Council or Government to bring these buildings up to potentially increased building standards.

   Some members put safety ahead of heritage. We support the initiative to look at the categorisation of the current heritage buildings and areas.

   A pragmatic approach to District Plan rules for the strengthening and refurbishment of heritage buildings/areas must be taken to avoid placing severe financial burden on owners for a public good. Owners bought heritage buildings knowing the preservation requirements but the environment has changed significantly – and so must the response.

5. Terminology – we have previously raised concerns about terminology used to refer to types of earthquake prone buildings. As an example, section 5.5.3 (para 2) talks about commercial buildings, para 3 talks about residential buildings, neither of which reflects multi-level residential apartments. The last bullet in 5.5.3 refers to 'promoting national funding options to incentivise residential upgrades – is this for single dwelling/single unit and/or multi-level apartments.

   Council officers may know which categories are being referred to, but owners do not. Reports must be explicit when referring to the categories of earthquake prone buildings to avoid confusion.

6. Need for certainty – the delay to the Commission of Inquiry's final report is extending the period of uncertainty about the implications for future building standards. Owners are concerned that after making a substantial upgrade to meet a new standard, they will face another one in another 10 years or so. New information will always become available on seismology, geology, engineering techniques, building technology and products, but does that mean all existing buildings should again be strengthened to be like a new building? Owners cannot afford to fund continuing strengthening requirements – and Council needs to consider this in its discussions with government agencies.

7. Quantifying the number of residences affected – it is good to see progress on quantifying the number of buildings with residential use affected by the Earthquake Prone Building Policy, we need to go further and identify the number of residences. In a space of 100 metres directly outside the Council Chambers are 51 residences. It is only by getting to this detail can Council begin to assess the financial impact of the Policy on residential use. (Spoken to at meeting)