



Soft Story Seismic Retrofit Program

SCREENING FORM INSTRUCTIONS

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These Instructions provide directions, explanation, and definitions to accompany the **Soft Story Retrofit Program Screening Form**.

ABOUT THE SCREENING FORM

Albany Municipal Code (AMC) Section 12-15 was created by ordinance on July 17, 2023 and became effective on October 15, 2023. The purpose of Section 12-15 is to require seismic retrofit of certain earthquake-vulnerable residential buildings.

The first step in the process is Screening. The primary purpose of Screening is to determine whether each building is subject to the ordinance or exempt, and to set the deadlines by assigning each building to a “compliance tier” (see AMC Section 12-15.3.b). In addition, the Screening phase will introduce owners to the program and will confirm information the Building Department is using to plan the program’s later phases. Overall, Screening is meant to make the later phases of the program easier for all participants.

The Screening Form, along with these Instructions, is intended to implement the Screening process. Both documents are authorized by AMC Sections 12-15.2.g, 12-15.2.h, and 12-15.3.a.1. In most cases, completion of the screening form will require the evaluation of a licensed design professional such as qualified architect, civil engineer, or structural engineer.

The Building Department has sent notice letters with the Screening Form and Instructions to the owners of all the buildings it expects might be subject to the program. However, AMC Section 12-15.2.d makes clear that buildings are subject to Section 12-15 based on the attributes of the building, whether or not the owner receives notice from the City.

More information about the Soft Story Seismic Retrofit Program (or “Wood-Frame Target Story Retrofit Program”) is available at albanyca.org/softstory. There you will find:

- Answers to frequently-asked questions about the retrofit program and what owners need to do
- Electronic versions of the Screening Form and these Instructions
- Details on the ordinance and wood-frame target story buildings

If you have any questions about the program, the screening form, or your building, please reach out to the program staff at softstory@albanyca.org.

SUBMITTAL DEADLINE AND PROCEDURE

As shown at the top of Screening Form page 1, completed forms may be submitted in any of four ways: email, regular mail, in-person delivery or via the online form. Either the owner, the owner’s agent, or the owner’s design professional may submit the completed form.

The Screening Form must be submitted by October 15th, 2024. However, once an initial Form is submitted on time, if new information becomes available, a revised or replacement Form may be submitted at any time with no penalty.

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The Building Official is authorized to interpret the Screening requirements and administer the process (AMC Section 12-15.2.h). If an initial form is not submitted by October 15, 2024, the Department may assume the building is a *subject building* assigned to Tier 1 and may track and enforce compliance accordingly.

The Building Official is also authorized to grant an exemption or a six-month extension based on information provided by the owner. In accordance with AMC Section 12-15.1.e, to be granted an exemption or extension, the owner must demonstrate significant financial hardship (which would be unusual just for Screening), a reduction in tenant displacement, or other extreme conditions beyond the owner's control.

In accordance with AMC Table 12-15.3.c, and based on the Effective Date of October 15, 2023, the overall program deadlines are as shown in the following table. Each building subject to the program is assigned to a Compliance Tier based on Section 2, Questions 5 and 6 of the screening form.

**Wood-Frame Target Story Seismic Retrofit Program Deadlines
based on AMC Section 12-15 Effective Date of October 15, 2023**

Compliance Tier	Description	Screening	Retrofit Permit	Construction and Affidavits
Tier 1	5+ units, no unit in target story	Oct 15, 2024	Oct 15, 2025	Oct 15, 2026
Tier 2	3-4 units, no unit in target story	Oct 15, 2024	Oct 15, 2026	Oct 15, 2027
Tier 3	5+ units, unit in target story	Oct 15, 2024	Oct 15, 2027	Oct 15, 2028
Tier 4	3-4 units, unit in target story	Oct 15, 2024	Oct 15, 2028	Oct 15, 2029

DEFINITIONS

The following terms are used in the Screening Form. Most of the definitions are provided in AMC Section 12-15.1. In accordance with AMC Section 12-15.2.h, the Building Official is authorized to interpret these and other definitions as needed to administer Section 12-15.

Building Official. The designated staff person authorized and responsible for implementing the California Building Code. This is currently Community Development Director Jeff Bond.

Design professional. This term is not defined in AMC Section 12-15, but it is used in the Screening Form to mean a qualified architect, civil engineer, or structural engineer. All California-licensed design professionals are required by law to practice only within the limits of their experience and training.

Dwelling unit. A single unit providing complete, independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation; or any individual residential unit in a building with R-1 or R-2 occupancy, including short-term rental units; or any guestroom, with or without a kitchen, in either a tourist or residential hotel or motel. Any unit occupied as a dwelling unit, whether approved or not approved for such use, shall be counted as a dwelling unit.

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Owner. The owner of record as shown on the last equalized assessment roll of the county. For purposes of providing notice to an owner of any action or proceeding under this section, the term *owner* includes the actual owner of record, or part owner, or such owner's agent, employee or other legal representative.

Subject building. This term is defined indirectly in AMC Section 12-15, and it is the basis for the questions in Screening Form Section 2.

- AMC Section 12-15.2.c effectively defines this term as a building satisfying three conditions:
 - “constructed or permitted for construction before January 1, 1981 or designed based on an adopted version of the 1976 or earlier edition of the Uniform Building Code.”
 - “contain[s] three or more *dwelling units*”
 - “[has] a *wood-frame target story*.”

Target story. Either (1) a basement story or underfloor area that extends above grade at any point or (2) any story above grade, where the wall configuration of such basement, underfloor area, or story is substantially more vulnerable to earthquake damage than the wall configuration of the story above; except that a story is not a *target story* if it is the topmost story or if the difference in vulnerability is primarily due to the story above being a penthouse or an attic with a pitched roof.

- Building owners will not be able to determine whether their building fits this definition. Rather it is meant to rely on the judgement of a licensed design professional, and subject to the approval of the building official.

Wood-frame target story (WFTS). A *target story* in which a significant portion of lateral or torsional story strength or story stiffness is provided by wood-frame walls.

Examples D.1 and D.2 show simple cases to illustrate the concept of a *wood-frame target story*.

Example D.1: No *target story*

- Wall configuration is essentially identical in both stories, and there is no crawl space or underfloor area.



Example D.2: *Wood-frame target story*

- Wall configuration in first story is obviously different from that of the upper story. Most of the front wall is missing, creating a vulnerability.



SECTION 1 – BUILDING INFORMATION

Address. List the street address of the building. If the building has multiple addresses, list the range that applies (e.g. 111-117 Main St.).

Building identifier. This item is used to distinguish the different buildings at the address. If the address has only one building, leave this item blank. If it has more than one building:

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- You may ignore any building or structure that does not contain any *dwelling units*, such as a standalone garage, a carport, a storage or utility shed, or a common area clubhouse or pool house.
- You may choose any building identifiers you like. If you already use building identifiers like A, B, C, etc., those are acceptable. If not, you may make up any identifiers that make sense to you.
- Submit a separate screening form for each building at the address.

SECTION 2 – “SUBJECT BUILDING” CHECK

Section 2 determines whether the building identified in Section 1 is a subject building in accordance with AMC Section 12-15.2.c.

Supplemental information. In accordance with AMC Sections 12-15.2.g and h, the Building Official is authorized to require submittal of supplemental information to confirm or support the responses to the questions in Section 2. Questions 1 through 3 address the three-part definition of a subject building, given in AMC Section 12-15.2.c and excerpted above under Definitions.

1. Was the building originally constructed, permitted, or designed before January 1, 1981?

- As stated in AMC Section 12-15.2.c, a building constructed after January 1, 1981 is still a subject building if it was permitted before that date or if it was designed with the building code in effect before that date. Therefore, answer “Yes” if the building was permitted for construction before January 1, 1981 or designed under an adopted version of the 1976 or earlier edition of the Uniform Building Code.

2. Does the building contain three or more *dwelling units*?

- See the notes in the Definitions section under *dwelling unit*.
- The size of each unit (number of bedrooms, square footage, etc.) is immaterial. Only the count of units matters.
- For buildings with congregate living (such as care facilities or group homes), the count of *dwelling units* should be taken as the number of full-time residents the facility can legally house.

If the answer to Question 1 or 2 is “No,” the building will be exempt from retrofit. You may skip to Section 4 and submit the form without hiring a design professional.

3. Does the building have one or more *wood-frame target stories*?

- See the notes in the Definitions section under *target story* and *wood-frame target story*.
- If you answer “no” to Question 3, you may skip to Section 3.
- **Design professional required for exemption.** In general, identification of a *target story* or a *wood-frame target story* requires the technical judgement of a licensed design professional, except in the two alternative screening scenarios below:
 1. **Owner opts IN to program.** If the owner knows that the building DOES have a wood-frame target story, the owner may answer “Yes” without hiring a design professional. If you complete the Screening without a design professional, the building will be deemed a subject building and will proceed to the retrofit design phase, for which a design professional will always be required. If the design professional later determines that the building should be exempt, a revised Screening Form may then be submitted to

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claim the exemption, even after the formal end of the Screening phase in October 2024.

- Even if a design professional is not strictly required, hiring one to complete the Screening Form can offer other advantages to the owner of a subject building. Hiring a design professional for Screening can provide an opportunity to discuss the requirements of the Program with a knowledgeable professional for relatively low cost and with no commitment. If the design professional is also interested in providing services for the design phase of the program, the Screening process can also provide an opportunity to meet and discuss the project at the site, again for relatively low cost and commitment.
 - A design professional will be required if the owner believes the building belongs in Compliance Tiers 3 or 4 (which have later deadlines). See Questions 6 below for details.
2. **Optional Screening by the Building Department.** If the building has a *target story* but also has full-height concrete or masonry walls throughout that story (either clay bricks concrete walls, or concrete masonry units), it might be exempt from retrofit. Normally this determination requires the input of a design professional hired at the owner's expense. To spare the owner this cost, the Department is offering to complete the Screening for buildings that appear to be exempt due to the presence of concrete or masonry walls, with no fee. This option will require the building owner to send photos of the walls to staff and participate in a site visit by staff. To learn more about this process and whether your building is eligible, visit albanyca.org/softstory under the "alternative screening options" tab.

4. Has the building already undergone a seismic retrofit?

- Answer yes to this question if there has been prior retrofit work to the building intentionally designed to address the collapse risk posed by a *wood-frame target story*.
- The building official will require supplemental information after submission of the screening form and assess previously retrofitted buildings on an individual basis to determine whether the retrofit was sufficient to exempt the building from the program.
- Even if the prior retrofit was permitted and approved, the Building Department cannot make this assessment based on those records alone because until now, all retrofits have been voluntary and were therefore not reviewed for compliance with any particular standard or criteria.
- A nominal or partial retrofit (such as the installation of a steel frame or wood shearwall on just one line) will generally not be adequate for approval.
- In general, the more recent the retrofit, the clearer the documentation of design criteria similar to those of the current program, and the clearer the documentation of construction quality, the more likely it is that the Building Official will approve the exemption based on prior retrofit.

Questions 5 and 6 address the Compliance Tier descriptions in AMC Section 12-15.3.b. The two questions together have four possible outcomes, each of which results in assignment to a specific Compliance Tier (see page 1 for the list of tiers). Compliance Tier 1 may be considered a default assignment.

Question 5. Does the building have 5 or more dwelling units.

- See the notes in the Definitions section under *dwelling unit*.

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Question 6. Does the building's *wood-frame target story* contain one or more legally permitted *dwelling units* or other spaces with business (B), mercantile (M) or assembly (A) occupancy?

- In general, the intent of AMC Section 12-15 is to allow more compliance time for buildings with occupied *wood-frame target stories*, which often require more coordination with tenants. Hence, buildings with occupied units in the critical story are assigned to Tier 3 or Tier 4, which have later deadlines.
- **Design professional required for assignment to Tier 3 or 4.** A “Yes” answer to Question 6 requires the judgment of a design professional because it relies on identification of specific *wood-frame target stories*, and because it relies on an understanding of building code occupancy groups.
- Lobbies, storage areas, laundry rooms, fitness rooms, equipment rooms, and other (non-Assembly) common areas that are not part of actual *dwelling units* do not count as occupied spaces for purposes of Question 6.

SECTION 3 – DESIGN PROFESSIONAL STATEMENT

If a design professional is not needed to complete Section 2 Questions 3 or 6, leave this Section blank. Otherwise, the design professional must sign and seal (stamp) the form before it is submitted.

SECTION 4 – OWNER / AGENT STATEMENT

Owner / Agent contact information. Enter contact information for either the owner or a designated agent.

- Identifying an agent is optional.
- If information is provided for both the owner and a designated agent, the Building Department will use the agent's information for correspondence regarding the program.

Whether or not a design professional is needed, the owner or agent must sign the completed form before it is submitted.