

Housing Stability Fund Proposal: SRO Elevator Replacement & Installation

Summary:

This project addresses the huge problem of lack of accessibility in Single Room Occupancy hotels in San Francisco, many of which are used for supportive housing for seniors and people with disabilities by the City and nonprofits. When elevators are present, they are generally decades old, malfunction regularly, and take weeks or months to repair, leaving residents stranded in the meantime. Many other SROs do not have elevators at all, especially in communities of color. This project will replace and install elevators in SROs across the city to improve housing opportunity and quality of life for very poor seniors and disabled people.

Goals:

- 1) Fund elevator replacement in 10 Single Room Occupancy hotels, throughout San Francisco, including Tenderloin and SOMA. Cost = \$700,000-\$1M each. Total \$7-10 million.
- 2) Fund new elevator installation in 5 Single Room Occupancy hotels, with a focus on Chinatown and the Mission. Cost = \$1M-\$1.5M each. Total \$5-7.5 million.
- 3) Improve long-term access in SROs so that senior and disabled residents can safely come and go.

Background of the Problem:

Senior and Disability Action (SDA) and the SRO Collaboratives conducted a survey in 2012 of seniors and people with disabilities living in SROs, and elevator breakdowns emerged as a major concern, with one-fifth of senior and disabled residents reporting that their buildings were not physically accessible to them. By 2014, the issue had gotten worse. A new survey showed that two-thirds of respondents said that their building's elevator was often out of service, and stories in the San Francisco Chronicle cited instances of residents trapped in their apartments with no way to get out except for negotiating multi-level staircases or calling the fire department. In response, the SF Board of Supervisors held a hearing to explore what to do about SRO elevators. Funding was set aside in 2014-15 for assessments of elevator repair needs.

The elevator assessments showed major problems in the city's SRO housing stock. Most SROs were built more than a century ago. Most elevators are so old that when a part breaks (as happens regularly), a replacement part has to be built from scratch and shipped from elsewhere in the country. The shortage of elevator repair companies adds to the wait, meaning that it is common for a simple repair to take a month or more. In the meantime, disabled tenants living on upper floors use the stairs if they can, at great risk of falling, or they rely on friends or the fire department to carry them downstairs to a doctor's appointment, or they do not leave their room for weeks at a time.

Many SROs have no elevator at all, especially in Chinatown and the Mission. But SRO rooms in these neighborhoods are often the only housing option for poor immigrants, especially those

who are older or disabled, so people are trapped or risk their health in going in and out. These buildings desperately need to have working elevators installed.

The SF Mayor's Office on Disability coordinated the SRO elevator assessments. Once they were conducted, advocates worked with supportive members of the Board of Supervisors, and \$500,000 was included in the add-back process for the 2016-17 city budget. An Elevator Repair Rebate Program was launched! The funding was continued each year and was used for elevator repairs. But during the pandemic, the City and County of San Francisco quietly cut the funding and effectively eliminated the program. The need is stronger than ever.

Quotes from SRO Residents:

"My neighbor was unable to leave for 4 days. I live on the 6th floor. I suffer from emphysema and it is very difficult for me to breathe after I climb the stairs. I had to have a breathing treatment once because of the elevator being out of use."

"I live in an SRO and have missed several doctor's appointments because the elevator was broken. Tenants were locked up for the whole weekend not long ago, not able to leave and no one to check on us."

How the proposal creates, supports, or expands the development of social housing:

SROs are one of the primary housing types used for permanent supportive housing in San Francisco. SRO hotels often cost less than apartment buildings for the City and County of San Francisco or non-profit community organizations to acquire or lease. At this time, about half of the city's SROs are under ownership or permanent management by the City or nonprofits. Supportive housing is primarily for seniors and people with disabilities (including mental health disabilities). Residents generally have income at less than 30% AMI, far less than the required 80% for social housing.

Elevators are essential to maintain SRO housing stock as a viable, safe housing option for low-income senior and disabled residents. Without consistently working elevators, people cannot safely buy groceries, go to medical appointments, see friends and family, or connect with community. As the City moves formerly homeless people out of Shelter in Place hotels, many are offered permanent supportive housing in SROs. For the thousands of people in this situation who cannot safely and regularly climb multiple flights of steep stairs, the absence of a consistently working elevator eliminates any hope of long-term accessible housing. An Elevator Replacement and Installation Project would dramatically increase accessible housing options and quality of life for thousands of seniors and people with disabilities in San Francisco.

How the proposed program advances racial, social, and geographic equity:

It is critical to preserve SRO hotels as one of the only housing options available to very low income and extremely low income seniors and people with disabilities. Improving housing quality for people at the lowest income levels is a social equity issue, and an issue of ending ageism and ableism in housing. In addition, due to long-term gentrification and displacement,

and lack of opportunities to hold jobs and buy homes, a disproportionate number of SRO residents are Black and Latinx. In Chinatown and Mission, where SROs are unlikely to have elevators at all, the vast majority of residents are Chinese and Latinx, respectively. Replacing existing elevators and installing new elevators as needed directly responds to racial disparities in housing in San Francisco.

Describe how the goals of the program or project can be accomplished or advanced and by what types of agencies or entities within Fiscal Year 2022-23.

Elevator replacement and installation is an ideal use of Housing Stability Funds because these are one-time capital expenses. The City and County already has the infrastructure needed for this program, through the information from the past SRO elevator assessments, and MOHCD's Elevator Repair Rebate Program. MOHCD could carry out this program and have 15 elevators replaced or installed in FY 2022-23.

Once the elevators are put in, they will be far less likely to have ongoing problems, and when they do, it will be easier and faster to procure parts and make repairs. But there is a complementary effort to revive the Elevator Repair Rebate Program and add ongoing city money, which will ensure that new elevators are well-maintained and can have a positive impact for many years to come.

Contact Information

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Organizations in Support of the Elevator Replacement and Installation Program

AIDS Legal Referral Panel
Community Living Campaign
Diversability
Independent Living Resource Center San Francisco
Openhouse
Self-Help for the Elderly
Senior and Disability Action