

## **Navigating Berkeley's Transfer Tax Program**

Below is an explanation of how the current Berkeley Seismic Retrofit Transfer Tax Rebate Program works, and how we can help you navigate through this program.

1) To qualify for the rebate program, you must use either Standard Plan A or a design developed by an engineer. You must procure a building permit and have all work completed within one year of date of purchase. If for some reason you cannot do the work within this time period, you can apply for an extension. This requires that you already have the permit and show good cause why you were not able to do the work within the one year. Good cause can be something like an illness or the inability for your contractor to do the work in the prescribed time period. To qualify for Standard Plan A, homes cannot be built on hills that slope more than one foot down in three feet horizontal, or have clay or concrete roof tiles with mortared edges. Single story houses must be less than 2,000 square feet and two story houses less than 3,000 square feet. Standard Plan A can also be used on duplexes.

2) To get the permit, an application and set of plans must be submitted to the Building Department. The plan must either follow Standard Plan A's guidelines, or a design developed by a civil or structural engineer. Most houses with cripple walls cannot use Standard Plan A, so an engineer will usually be required. In addition, Standard Plan A retrofits are often more expensive and less effective than properly engineered retrofits. Standard Plan A retrofits often are not approved upon the first submission and the plan checker will notify you of required changes. This starts the process all over again since a revised plan needs to be submitted. If approved, Standard Plan A applications can usually be picked up in 3 days, but sometimes they can take 3 weeks. Engineered plans generally take 3 weeks for the city to review, and are usually approved without any changes being required.

The way we would navigate this program with you is as follows:

We will develop an itemized proposal and determine whether or not an engineer will be required. If you agree with the terms of our proposal, we will submit plans to the Building Department, file the permit application, and pay the permit fee. Any agreed upon engineering fees will be due once the permit is issued. We can usually provide engineered plans for basic houses that do not comply with Standard Plan A for around \$1,000. More complex homes, or steep hillside homes, may be considerably more expensive and must be evaluated on a case by case basis.

3) 4) If you decide to use an engineer, look for a structural engineer with extensive experience in wood frame design and construction. Structural engineers have S.E. at the end of their names and have more advanced training than civil engineers. Any civil or structural engineer is allowed by state law to design your wood frame retrofit, even if they have designed only skyscrapers and have little knowledge or experience in wood frame retrofit work. This is similar to how a dermatologist can legally do your brain surgery. Therefore, you need to check the engineer's qualifications very carefully.

The engineer we use and trust is Thor Matteson, S.E., a nationally recognized structural engineer who specializes in making homes earthquake resistant. He is a consultant to the City of Oakland as they try to improve their program. He wrote Wood-Framed Shear Wall Construction --an Illustrated Guide, published by the International Code Council. You can see his book and contact him through his website at [www.shearwalls.com](http://www.shearwalls.com) In addition, he has been a builder for most of his life and therefore understands the practicality of retrofit work. If you want to understand the design principles behind all retrofit work, we suggest you read his book.

4) The rebate is equal to one half of one percent of the purchase price of your home. Once the Building Department does their final inspection, you must submit to the Berkeley Building Department the following downloadable form. The easiest way to do that is to give the filled out form to the building inspector when he comes for his last inspection. He will give this to the Finance Department. Have him sign a second copy for your records. They have been known to lose these forms. You should receive your check from the City in 3 to 6 weeks.

The form can be downloaded off the PDF Download Forum at [www.bayarearetrofit.com](http://www.bayarearetrofit.com) The form is also on Berkeley's web site.

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