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Publicly-Funded Skyscraper Fails to Put Safety First

Portland, Oregon's, Framework Project to Be Built "As Quickly as Possible"

Silver Spring, MD – On Tuesday, the city of Portland, Oregon, [announced](#) it would provide \$6 million in public funding to break ground on the United States' first high-rise structure built from wood in an effort to alleviate the city's affordable housing predicament. The Framework Project, a 60 unit apartment complex constructed with cross-laminated timber (CLT), a building material comprised of large panels of wood and glue-laminated beams, was given the grant through a city initiative "to quickly deliver affordable units during [Portland's] housing crisis," according to Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler.

"This proposed project has its priorities all wrong," said Kevin Lawlor, spokesperson for Build with Strength, a coalition of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association comprised of fire safety professionals, engineers, architects and industry experts committed to strengthening the nation's building codes and communities. "We should all agree that safety should come first, for the crews that will work on the project, for the first responders who will respond in an emergency, for the community and for the residents of the building. Building quickly should not take a backseat to building safely."

Traditionally speaking, buildings taller than 85 ft. in height fall under the International Building Code's designation of Type I or Type II construction, which are generally limited to non-combustible materials such as concrete and steel. However, the Framework Project, which would almost double that height limit, passed design review approvals from the City of Portland in July 2016, and the official building permit for Framework was approved by the State of Oregon and the City of Portland in June 2017.

Additionally, the decision to move forward with the Framework Project design was also in part made to help spur the demand for new timber and manufacturing jobs and investment in mass timber products.

"The welfare of the local timber industry should play no part in the rationale of what is otherwise strictly a construction decision," continued Lawlor. "The public should not be on the hook for investing in unsafe, untested and combustible construction products. Affordable housing doesn't have to mean unsafe housing – there should be no compromise on this."

“Putting the fact that lawmakers are picking winners and losers aside, the decision to use combustible building materials in a skyscraper as opposed to resilient products like concrete or steel needlessly exposes the community to danger.”

Jon Narva, Director of External Relations for the National Association of State Fire Marshals, recently said in a [video](#), “Within the United States, cross-laminated timber is really a new material, a new process. We still don’t know a lot about it, we’re trying to understand better how to protect the public with those buildings frankly coming into being. It’s certainly a fair statement to say we understand concrete and what it’s going to do under fire conditions better than we do cross-laminated timber.”

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