City & County of San Francisco

The City Lacks Authority to Address Long-Standing Elevator Deficiencies in Single Room Occupancy Buildings but Can Do More to Help Mitigate the Problem

Citywide Performance Audit



Why It Matters

Although the City can inspect and issue violation notices for broken or unsafe elevators in single room occupancy buildings (SROs), state law limits the City's enforcement authority. The City should develop a city law to address prolonged SRO elevator outages, improve long-term planning for SRO elevator maintenance and renewal, centralize information and resources for SRO operators and residents, and maintain accurate, complete data on SROs and elevators to support data-driven decision-making.



Prepared by

OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER
CITY SERVICES AUDITOR

November 13, 2026

About the Controller's Office

The Controller is the chief financial officer and auditor of the City and County of San Francisco (City). We produce regular reports on the City's financial condition, economic condition, and the performance of city government. We strive to be a model for good government and to make the City a better place to live and work.

About the Audits Division

The City Services Auditor (CSA) was created in the Controller's Office through an amendment to the San Francisco Charter that voters approved in 2003. Within CSA, the Audits Division ensures the City's financial integrity and promotes efficient, effective, and accountable government by:

- Conducting performance audits of city departments, contractors, and functions to assess efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and business processes.
- Investigating reports received through its whistleblower hotline of fraud, waste, and abuse of city resources.
- Providing actionable recommendations to city leaders to promote and enhance accountability and improve the overall performance and efficiency of city government.

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AUDIT AUTHORITY

This audit was conducted under the authority of the San Francisco Charter, Section 3.105 and Appendix F, which requires that CSA conduct periodic, comprehensive financial and performance audits of city departments, services, and activities.

STATEMENT OF AUDITING STANDARDS

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for the findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. The Audits Division is independent per GAGAS requirements for internal auditors.

OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER
CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

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November 13, 2026

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Dear City Officials:

The Office of the Controller, City Services Auditor (CSA), Audits Division, presents the report on its audit of elevators in San Francisco's Single Room Occupancy buildings (SROs), which was requested by the Office on Disability and Accessibility. The audit had as its objectives to identify the entities responsible for overseeing elevator access and usability in SROs funded by the City and County of San Francisco (City) and to assess how effectively they fulfill those responsibilities, with particular attention to the impacts of limited access or usability on seniors and people with disabilities.

The audit found that the long-standing problems of frequent and prolonged elevator outages in SROs and the inadequate accessibility of some SRO elevators to seniors and people with disabilities are largely due to:

- City's limited authority to enforce elevator inspections in these buildings under state law.
- Inconsistent maintenance and delayed repairs of the elevators, with high costs and difficulty sourcing parts being the main challenges.
- Fragmentation of complaint collection and tracking of chronic elevator problems.
- Poor and decentralized data, which limits data-driven strategic decision-making.
- Elevators that, even when fully operational, lack basic accessibility features needed for safe use by seniors and people with disabilities.

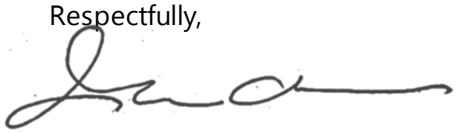
The report includes four recommendations for the responsible departments:

- Work with the Board of Supervisors to develop and propose a city law or amend existing law to address prolonged SRO elevator outages.
- Collaboratively develop and implement a framework for preparing multiyear strategic plans for SRO elevator maintenance and renewal.
- Centralize resources for SRO operators on available elevator maintenance and repair assistance and for SRO residents on their rights, recourse options, and reporting pathways.
- Ensure the City maintains accurate and complete data on SROs and their elevators.

The departments' responses are attached as appendices. CSA will work with the departments to follow up every six months on the status of the open recommendations made in this report.

CSA appreciates the assistance and cooperation of all staff involved in this audit. For questions about the report, please contact me at mark.p.delarosa@sfgov.org or (628) 652-9924.

Respectfully,



Mark de la Rosa
Director of Audits

cc: Board of Supervisors
Budget Analyst
Citizens Audit Review Board
City Attorney
Civil Grand Jury
Mayor
Public Library

Executive Summary

The Office of the Controller's City Services Auditor (CSA) audited the usability of elevators in Single Room Occupancy buildings (SROs) in San Francisco, focusing on city-funded SROs where city departments have oversight or management responsibilities, such as funding. The audit also examined the impact that limited elevator access and functionality have on seniors and people with disabilities.

Why It Matters

SRO elevator issues have been a challenge for the City and County of San Francisco (City) for decades. When elevators are inoperable, seniors and people with disabilities are trapped in their homes or cut off from essential care, turning a maintenance issue into a serious health and safety concern.

WHAT WE FOUND

The audit found that elevators in San Francisco SROs are:

Not Consistently Maintained or Repaired in a Timely Manner

Inconsistent maintenance and delayed repairs of SRO elevators prevent usability and increase safety risks for tenants.



Not Properly Tracked or Monitored

Poor citywide data makes it difficult to make data-driven decisions for prioritizing funding for elevator modernization efforts and repairs.



Lacking Basic Accessibility and Usability Features

Even when operational, many SRO elevators present accessibility challenges, creating safety and usability risks for seniors and people with disabilities.



WHAT WE RECOMMEND

The report makes four recommendations for departments to address these findings. A key recommendation is that the Office on Disability and Accessibility work with the Board of Supervisors to develop and propose local legislation to address prolonged elevator outages in SROs and establish enforcement mechanisms for chronic or repeat failures.

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Finding 3 – Even when working correctly, SRO elevators can be difficult or dangerous for seniors and people with disabilities to use. Of the 20 elevators we checked, 19 lacked at least one of the 14 features needed to make them more accessible to vulnerable residents, and one was inoperable 28

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Glossary

311	San Francisco 311
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
Cal/OSHA	California Occupational Safety and Health Agency
City	City and County of San Francisco
CSA	City Services Auditor, Audits Division
DBI	Department of Building Inspection
HSH	Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing
MOHCD	Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development
NOV	Notice of Violation
ODA	Office on Disability and Accessibility
Planning	Planning Department
SRO	Single Room Occupancy (building)

Introduction

BACKGROUND

This audit was requested due to ongoing concerns

The Office on Disability and Accessibility (ODA),[1] a division of the City and County of San Francisco (City) Human Services Agency's Department of Disability and Aging Services, requested this audit in response to concerns regarding the lack of accessible Single Room Occupancy buildings (SROs) and the lack of a citywide elevator database.

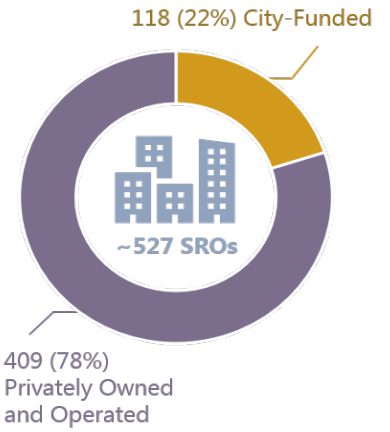
There are over 500 SROs in San Francisco, but most are not funded by the City

The term *SRO* is commonly used to describe a housing type which consists of an individual room, with residents sharing bathrooms or kitchens with others in the building.[2] For the purposes of this report, an SRO is a building that contains at least one SRO room (or unit).

As shown in Exhibit 1, 527[3] SROs exist in San Francisco, 409 (78%) of which are privately owned and operated. Only the remaining 118 (22%) are city-funded.[4]

As shown in Exhibit 2, SROs funded by the City are concentrated in the Tenderloin, South of Market, and Nob Hill areas.

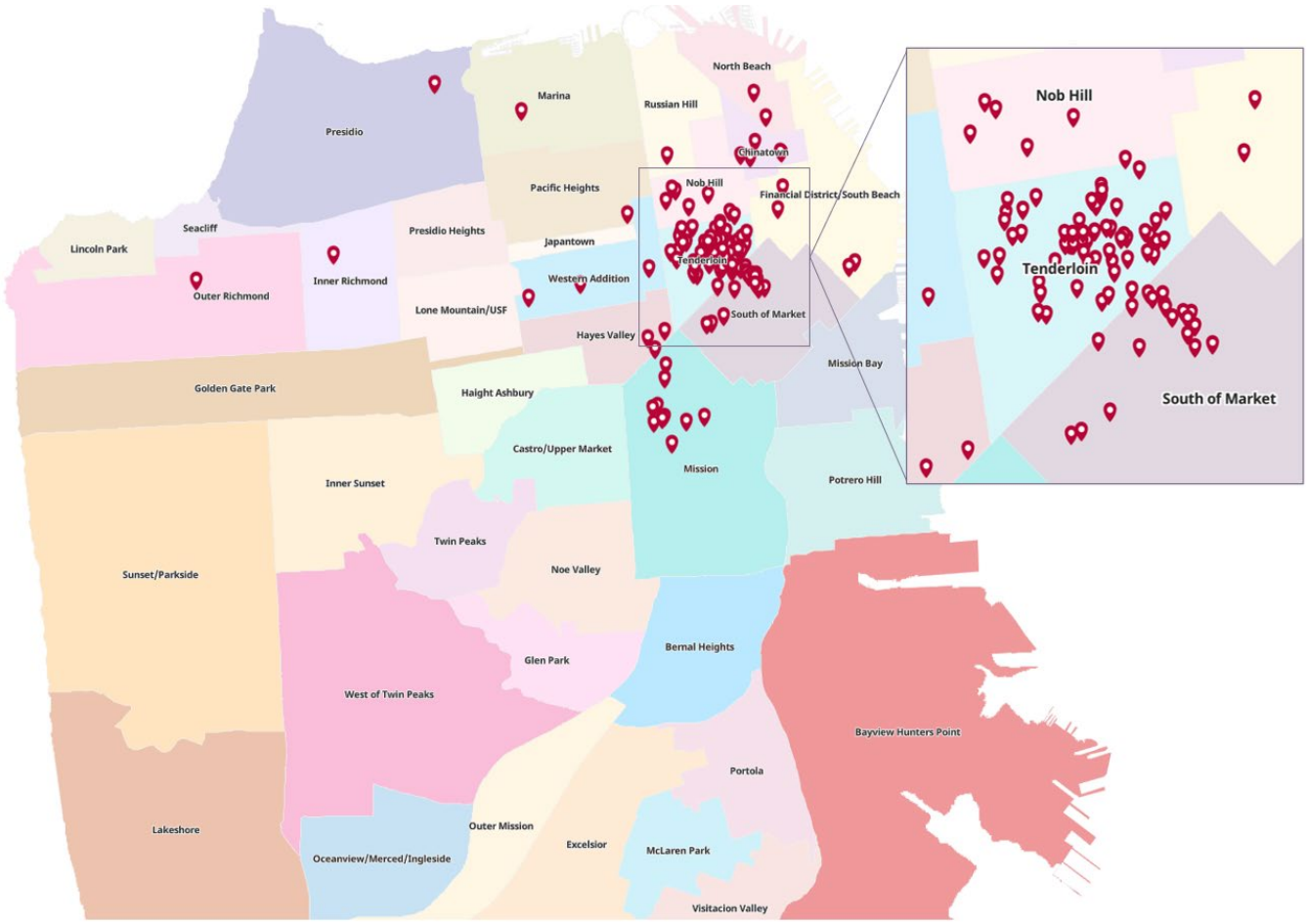
Exhibit 1: 118 of 527 San Francisco SROs are city-funded



Source: SRO data provided by departments

[1] Before April 1, 2025, ODA was known as the Mayor's Office on Disability.
[2] The San Francisco Planning Code, Section 890.88(c), defines an SRO as a dwelling unit or group housing room consisting of no more than one occupied room with a maximum gross floor area of 350 square feet and meeting the San Francisco Housing Code's minimum floor area standards.
[3] We identified 527 SROs in San Francisco as of March 2024 based on our analysis of departments' data. However, we cannot confirm this figure because additional data sources may exist and different sources may interpret the definition of an SRO differently.
[4] City-funded SROs are SROs that receive funding from city departments.

Exhibit 2: 69% of SROs funded by the City are in the Tenderloin, South of Market, or Nob Hill Areas

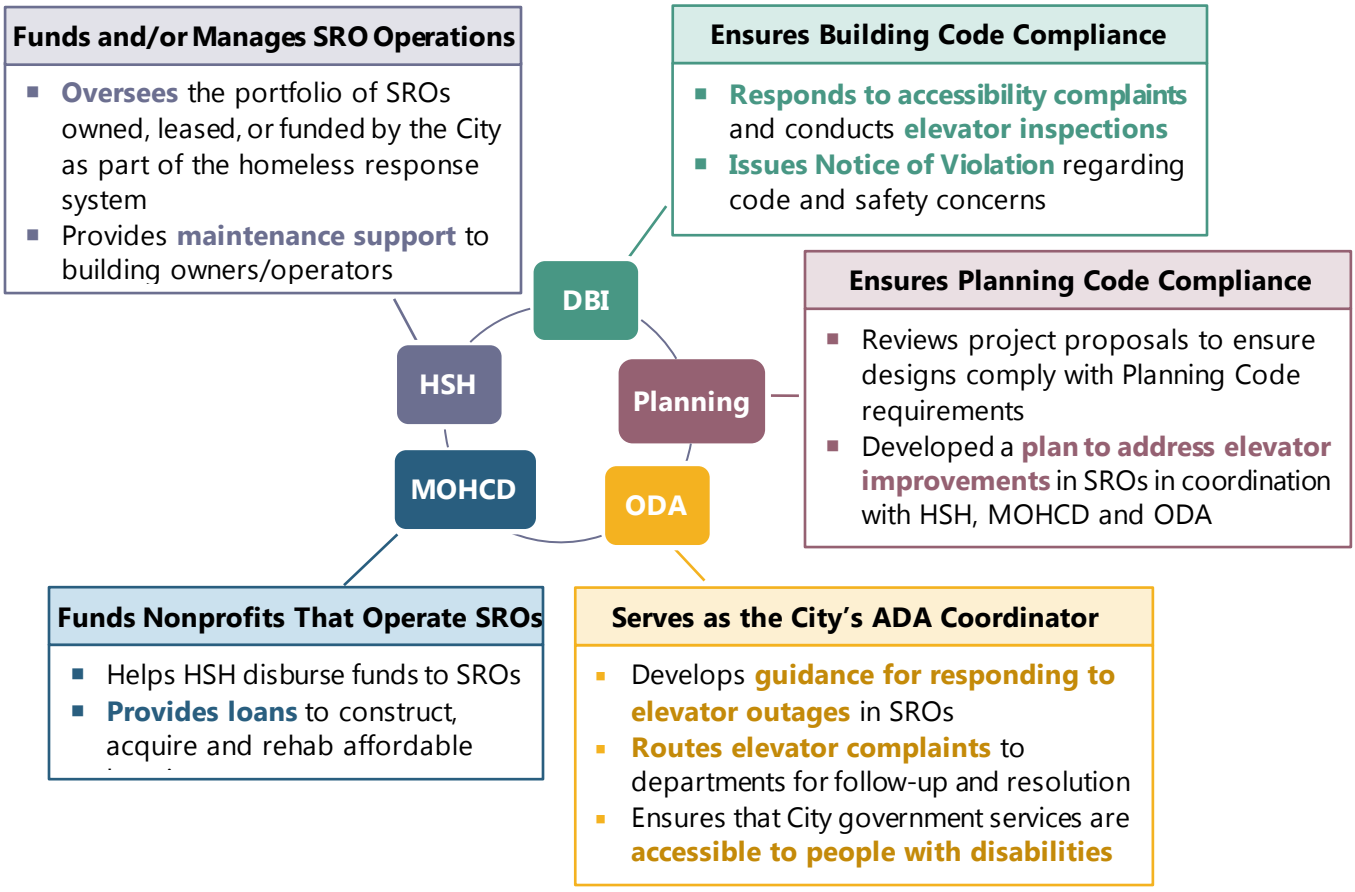


Source: Data from multiple departments (CSA-generated graphic); a consolidated list of SROs is available upon request

Five departments have different responsibilities related to SROs

The Department of Building Inspection (DBI), Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH), Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD), Office on Disability and Accessibility (ODA), and Planning Department (Planning) have responsibilities related to the regulation, funding, and support of SROs and their residents. Each department serves a distinct role. Exhibit 3 shows the roles and responsibilities of each of the five departments.

Exhibit 3: Roles and responsibilities of the five city departments related to SROs



Source: Indicated departments (CSA-generated graphic)

The findings and recommendations in this report are directed at city departments. However, the City's authority to enforce elevator safety is highly constrained by state law. Meaningful, long-term improvements to elevator reliability will require legislative action and coordination beyond existing departmental responsibilities.

SRO elevator challenges have persisted for many years

Several city reports highlight longstanding challenges for SROs in San Francisco, including elevators that are outdated, out of service for extended periods, or in some cases, absent altogether. Of the 118 city-funded SROs, 90 (76%) have elevators. Of the 409 privately owned and operated SROs, 135 (33%) have elevators. Exhibit 4 summarizes key findings and recommendations of three reports from the last decade related to SRO elevator maintenance and usability in San Francisco.

Exhibit 4: Key findings of city reports on SRO elevator access, maintenance, or safety

Report	Issues
Aging and Disability Affordable Housing Needs Assessment Report[a] *(2022 - Human Services Agency)*	▪ **Elevator outages disproportionately impact** seniors and individuals with disabilities from accessing basic needs. For example, residents are stranded without food, medication, and other essential items and services. ▪ **Many elevators are outdated, costly to maintain, and difficult to repair.** Individual repairs can cost up to $1 million, and older buildings often require hard-to-find parts that prolong repair times. Labor shortages further increase delays. ▪ **Elevator issues affect SRO residents citywide.** Affordable housing residents report chronically broken elevators and long wait times to get modifications. Also, many SRO sites have stairs but no elevator, making them inaccessible to people with mobility difficulties.
Single Room Occupancy Hotels in San Francisco - A Health Impact Assessment[b] *(2017 - Department of Public Health)*	▪ **Most SROs were built after 1906 with an average built year of 1914**, making them among the older structures in San Francisco's housing stock. Building age contributes to the high cost of elevator repairs/replacement resulting in inconsistent operation. ▪ **Many SRO residents are older adults or individuals with disabilities**, making reliable elevator access essential. ▪ **Unreliable elevators make even the most basic functions a struggle for some residents**. Inoperative elevators in SROs create significant barriers for tenants, especially seniors and people with mobility challenges. ▪ **Code enforcement is fragmented** among departments, making system-wide issues, including elevator oversight, difficult to track.
Assessment of the Needs of San Francisco Seniors and Adults with Disabilities[b] *(2016 - Department of Aging and Adult Services)*	▪ **Older housing stock is broadly inaccessible** for people using wheelchairs or those who cannot climb stairs. ▪ **Many SRO hotels lack working elevators**, which directly limits the ability of people with mobility impairments to live in or navigate these buildings.

Notes:
[a] Scope was city-funded SROs.
[b] Scope was both privately owned and operated SROs and city-funded SROs.

Source: Human Services Agency, *Aging & Disability Affordable Housing Needs Assessment*, 2022; Department of Public Health, Single Room Occupancy Hotels in San Francisco - A Health Impact Assessment, 2017; Department of Aging and Adult Services, *Assessment of the Needs of San Francisco Seniors and Adults with Disabilities*, 2016

The City Continues to Make Efforts to Address SRO Elevator Issues

The 2025 *Aging and Disability Affordable Housing Implementation Plan* outlines core strategies to address underlying conditions that affect elevator reliability in city-funded SROs. The plan emphasizes the need for capital investment to address aging and deteriorated building systems. According to the plan, to meet this objective, the City needs to:

- Continue to subsidize costly permanent Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) modifications of 100% affordable housing sites, such as those related to elevators, doorways, ramps, and bringing accessible units up to code.
- Increase funding for capital improvements of permanent supportive housing, especially across older housing stock, to make it safer, healthier, and more accessible for older adults and adults with disabilities.
- Advocate for a permanent line item in the General Fund Capital Plan for elevator repairs, upgrades, and replacements at permanent supportive housing sites, especially in city-funded SROs.
- Explore legislation that creates a funding source or incentives for property owners to increase accessible features in city-funded affordable housing sites.

The plan further highlights widespread infrastructure deficiencies in the city-funded SRO portfolio, the need for improved coordination among responsible departments and to build commitment toward implementing priority actions related to the needs of seniors and adults with disabilities. Operational challenges the City must address include:

- Improving data collection on adults with disabilities being served by the City's affordable housing system and facilitate data sharing among City agencies to improve accountability, and transparency to the community.
- The City lacks centralized, accessible physical and digital entry points for housing-related information, counseling, and support for older adults and people with disabilities.
- City agencies have not developed comprehensive communication access plans to identify and address accessibility gaps throughout housing service processes.

- Improving the lack of cultural competency in service provision, inconsistent fulfillment of reasonable accommodation requests, and insufficient accessible communication channels for adults with disabilities across city-funded housing programs.

In 2022 the Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution to allocate $10 million to improve elevator usability in SROs. In 2024 funding was approved for 14 SROs in HSH's portfolio. In 2025, an additional 13 SROs were selected by HSH to receive funding through the Elevator Modernization Program.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the audit was to identify the entities that oversee elevator access and usability in SROs funded by the City and to assess how well they do so. The audit also considered the impact of any lack of access or lack of usability on seniors and people with disabilities.

Specifically, the audit:

1. Identified the relevant stakeholders and oversight agencies and assessed their effectiveness in fulfilling their roles in managing the operation, inspection, maintenance, and funding of elevators in SRO facilities.

2. Determined whether elevators in SRO facilities comply with relevant laws, policies, and regulations.

SCOPE

The audit focused on the SROs currently funded by the City where city departments have oversight and/or management responsibilities. However, the impact of SRO elevator issues on San Francisco residents, especially seniors and people with disabilities, discussed in this report are applicable to all SROs in San Francisco, regardless of funding source.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the audit objective, CSA assessed elevators in privately owned and operated SROs and city-funded SROs. However, analyses involving responsibilities that apply only to city departments, such as funding, were limited to city-funded SROs. Specifically, CSA:

Analyzed Violations and Complaints

- Reviewed DBI's Notice of Violation (NOV) data for all SRO elevators to assess the type, frequency, and time between issuance and closure.
- Analyzed SRO elevator-related complaint data from DBI and San Francisco 311 (311) to evaluate trends, recurring issues, and resident-reported impacts.

Conducted Site Visits

- Selected a purposeful sample of 18 SROs (20 elevators total, 13 of which are city-funded and seven are privately owned and operated) with the most elevator-related NOVs.
- Developed a standardized accessibility and usability checklist based on applicable building codes and ADA requirements, in consultation with the City's access compliance officer.
- Conducted site visits to observe and document elevator usability features and interview building managers, maintenance staff, and a resident regarding elevator conditions, maintenance practices, and lived experience.

Reviewed and Compared Data Sources

- Identified the population of SROs by requesting and consolidating data from multiple city departments into a single portfolio.
- Obtained the California Occupational Safety and Health Agency's (Cal/OSHA) elevator database to identify elevators located in SROs and determine permit status.
- Reviewed Office of the Assessor-Recorder property records to determine SRO age and confirm building location.

Surveyed SRO Owners and Operators

- Sent a survey to 145 SRO owners and operators.[5] Received 27 (19%) responses, which provided information on maintenance practices, repair timelines, costs, and operational challenges.

Conducted Background Research and Interviews

- Reviewed prior studies, laws, regulations, departmental records, and funding materials related to SRO elevator maintenance and modernization, including HSH's methodology for selecting properties for the Elevator Modernization Program.

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[5] Based on a review of department data, we identified 527 SROs in San Francisco, 225 (43%) of which have an elevator. We then obtained contact information for 145 (64%) owners and/or operators of these 225 buildings through DBI's list, supplemented by onling searches to locate contact information of buildings run by nonprofits.

- Interviewed city department employees, staff of SRO advocacy groups, SRO resident representatives, SRO property managers, SRO property owners, a senior executive of an elevator repair company regarding work performed on elevators at SROs as well as cost of repair/modernization, and a senior executive of a nonprofit SRO operator regarding average costs for elevator maintenance, and modernization as well as any funding constraints, operational challenges, and impacts on residents related to elevator maintenance, safety, and usability.

Results

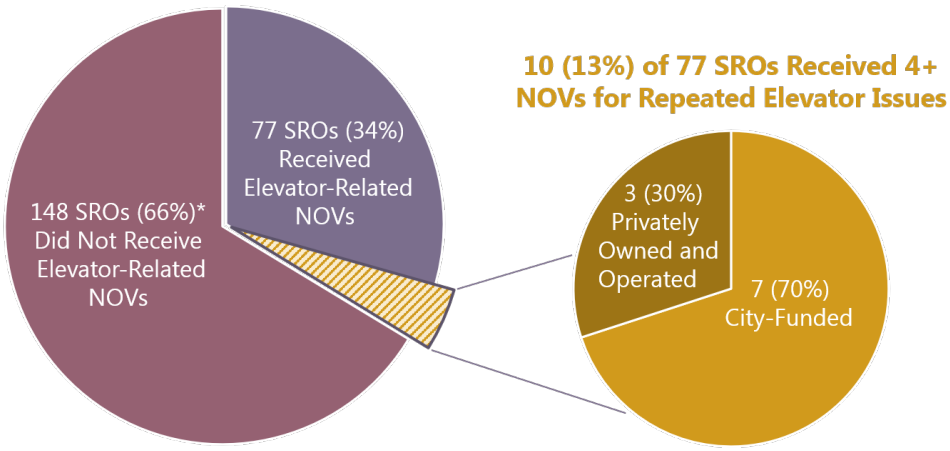
Finding 1 – Many SRO elevators are old and inconsistently maintained, limiting usability and increasing safety risks for tenants. Although state law limits the City's enforcement role, recent repairs began under the City's $10 million Elevator Modernization Program, but these are only for SROs that are city-funded.

> *"I'm making decisions based on the fact that I can't trust the elevator. I'm afraid if I go down it, either I'll get stuck in it, or I'll get stuck on the ground floor."*
>
> Source: The San Francisco Standard (2022)

Elevator outages are not a minor inconvenience; they cut off a critical lifeline for many residents to access their basic needs. Unreliable and nonfunctioning elevators routinely leave some SRO residents without access to food, medication, and other essential items and services. SROs often have steep and/or narrow stairways and other accessibility challenges that make vertical mobility more difficult even for those who do not need mobility devices, such as wheelchairs or walkers. When elevators break, these conditions create serious physical barriers that disproportionately impact seniors or adults with mobility impairments.

DBI's NOV data shows that elevator-related *outages in San Francisco SROs are common and prolonged,* with several buildings receiving repeated violations for the same or similar issues. As shown in exhibit 5, from January 2018 through April 2024, 77 (34%) of the 225 SROs with elevators in San Francisco received at least one elevator-related NOV. Of these 77 SROs, 10 (13%) received four or more NOVs for repeated elevator issues in this six-and-a-half-year period. Seven (70%) of the 10 SROs are city-funded and three (30%) are privately owned and operated.

Exhibit 5: One-Third of SROs in San Francisco received elevator-related Notices of Violation



Source: CSA analysis based on DBI data, January 2018–April 2024

These systemic challenges are further reflected in 311 data where SRO residents routinely describe elevator breakdowns, long repair delays, and a lack of clear communication about when elevators will return to service.

Fragmented complaint collection and tracking of chronic elevator problems.

Based on 311 data, the City received over 600 elevator-related complaints from January 2018 through December 2023, 271 of which were related to SROs. This corresponds to an annual average of 45 elevator-related complaints at SROs. The details in these complaints point to serious, recurring problems with SRO elevator reliability and resident safety, which are summarized in Exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6: Elevator-related complaints at SROs received by 311 include safety, accessibility, and regulatory compliance issues

Nature of Complaint	Examples
Frequent, Prolonged and Recurring Outages 	• Elevators are out of service for weeks or months, sometimes nearly a year or more. • Multiple complaints at same address over time.
Disproportionate Resident Impact 	• Repeated mentions of elevator outages affecting wheelchair users, seniors, and residents with mobility impairments. • Many residents state they cannot leave their units, so miss medical appointments, cannot get food, do their laundry, or obtain medication because the elevator is down.
Serious Life-Safety Risks 	• Reports of residents trapped for long periods, sometimes requiring assistance by the San Francisco Fire Department to escape. • An instance of paramedics forced to carry someone down multiple flights of stairs. • Repeated mentions of unsafe elevator conditions including, gates remaining open while car moves, grinding or banging noises when in operation, doors not closing, and uncontrolled movement.
Inadequate Maintenance and Repairs 	• Elevators being "fixed" only to fail again within days or "quick fixes" instead of long-term repairs. • Reports of unsafe repairs performed by unqualified people.
Poor Management Response 	• Building management aware of elevator issues but "doing nothing," to address. • Many residents state management is either unresponsive or gives vague answers ("it'll be fixed when it's fixed").

Nature of Complaint	Examples
	• When notices are posted, no updates or timeline for repair are provided to residents.
Accessibility and Rights Concerns	• Residents repeatedly mention ADA issues and basic access to and from their homes being compromised.
Weak Regulatory Compliance	• Multiple complaints flag expired elevator permits, some having expired years ago.

Source: 311 complaints, January 2018–December 2023

Based on the volume of complaints recorded, many SRO residents choose to submit elevators complaints through 311. However, some may report issues to building managers or owners, directly to DBI, or through a nonprofit liaison. This means that complaints related to specific elevators or buildings are captured in various ways, preventing a complete understanding of a building's complaint history over time. Also, if the elevator complaints received by 311 and routed to DBI become NOVs, these NOVs are entered into DBI's system with unique identifiers that do not tie to the original 311 complaint. Thus, we had to manually reconcile 311 complaint data with DBI's NOV data and inspection records to have a complete understanding of which SROs had the most persistent elevator issues.

DBI is responsible for enforcing Building Code and Housing Code standards but does not have complete oversight of elevators.

DBI works with building owners regarding corrective actions required by any NOV in its jurisdiction. This includes following up every 30 days to check on progress toward correction as well as providing a final inspection to verify the issue has been resolved.

When DBI receives an elevator-related complaint, it sends an inspector to evaluate the elevator. The inspector may issue an NOV if they identify a city Building Code or Housing Code violation. According to DBI, if an NOV is issued, the case moves through the enforcement process. This includes issuing abatement orders, recording liens against property, and making referrals to the City Attorney's Office after three liens or orders of abatement are made against a property.

Exhibit 7: DBI referral process to Cal/OSHA for elevator-related complaints



Source: DBI (CSA-generated graphic)

However, SRO elevator complaints maybe referred to the State following DBI's inspection because they were not in DBI's enforcement jurisdiction. This is often where DBI's involvement ends, thus leaving significant gaps in ongoing monitoring, follow-up, and overall oversight of elevator usability. Exhibit 7 summarizes DBI's referral process for elevator-related complaints.

Under the California Code of Regulations, the California Occupational Safety and Health Agency (Cal/OSHA), which is part of the state Department of Industrial Relations, has authority over elevator permitting routine inspections, and enforcement of Elevator Safety Orders. When an elevator issue involves state-regulated safety systems, it falls outside DBI's authority and must be referred to Cal/OSHA for oversight and enforcement, as summarized in Exhibit 8.

Exhibit 8: Examples of State Regulated Elevator Safety Orders Outside of DBI's Authority

Area of Regulation	Examples of Requirements
§3001. Permit to Operate	Permit to Operate Required. **No elevator shall be operated without a valid, current permit** issued by the Division. **The permit,** or a copy thereof, to operate a passenger elevator **shall be posted conspicuously and securely in the elevator car**.
§3034. Car Enclosures and Car Doors and Gates	**Cars shall be provided with electric lights** or lights. Not less than two lamps shall be provided. All hoistway doors shall be closed and locked and the **car doors for each compartment closed before the car can be operated**.
§3041. Emergency and Signal Devices	Passenger **elevators shall be provided with an emergency alarm system**, operable from within the car, which will provide effective means for summoning assistance at all hours in case of emergency. **A sign**, having lettering not less than 3/16 inch, **shall be provided in passenger elevators adjacent to the car emergency alarm** giving instructions as to the use of the device for summoning assistance.
§3042. Hoisting Ropes and Their Connections	When wear, corrosion, broken wires, or other factors indicate that **ropes or cables** have their breaking strength materially reduced **below the manufacturer's rating**, they **shall be renewed.** **Only wire ropes having the commercial classification** "Elevator Wire Rope," or wire rope constructed specifically for elevator use, **shall be used for the suspension of elevator cars** and for the suspension of counterweights, including replacement of ropes on existing elevators.

Source: California Code of Regulations, Title 8; Elevator Safety Orders, California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Occupational Safety and Health

The state's years long backlog leaves elevator safety gaps unaddressed for extended periods.

DBI does not follow up with Cal/OSHA after making a referral because the complaint is considered closed in its internal system, even when the underlying elevator issue remains unresolved. Cal/OSHA, however, has a serious backlog in elevator inspections. As of December 2023, over 7,900 elevators in San Francisco had an expired permit and 217 of them are in SROs. We confirmed this during our onsite visits, where many of the 20 elevators we visited had expired permits, some five years out of date.

According to Cal/OSHA, it was working through the backlog of inspections. Although the number of expired permits in San Francisco

went down to around 7,700 by June 2024, the number of expired permits in SROs increased to 219. This reflects the significant gaps in oversight due to the lack of monitoring or follow-up on cases referred to CAL/OSHA, and highlights the broader challenges faced by the City in ensuring ongoing SRO elevator safety and usability.

Other California cities have legislation and statutes in place for elevator oversight.

Due to a special provision in state law, the City of Los Angeles is the only local government in California with independent authority to conduct elevator permitting, inspections, and enforcement. Through its Department of Building and Safety, Los Angeles inspects all elevators annually for compliance with applicable codes. This includes new installations, modernization and repair of existing devices, as well as responding to customer complaints.

In July 2024 the City of Oakland unanimously adopted an Elevator Maintenance Ordinance to address gaps affecting tenants with mobility disabilities when residential elevators become inoperable. The ordinance requires building operators to conduct regular maintenance, provide advance notice of planned outages, and expedite repairs. When outages exceed 24 hours, landlords must offer temporary alternative housing or reimburse tenants who secure their own accommodations, subject to a daily cap. The ordinance also establishes enforcement mechanisms, including injunctive relief and statutory damages, to ensure compliance. Oakland officials cited repeated elevator failures, prolonged outages, and the disproportionate harm to disabled and elderly residents as justification for local legislative action beyond existing state elevator safety regulations.

Like Oakland, the City of Berkeley has legislation addressing the role of building operators to ensure that elevators remain usable and accessible at all times. Like Oakland's law, Berkeley's focuses on tenant protections and habitability, requiring landlords to take prompt corrective action and to provide alternative accommodations for tenants whose disabilities prevent them from using stairs. The Oakland and Berkeley ordinances demonstrate how local governments can complement state elevator safety oversight by mitigating the accessibility, health, and housing stability impacts of extended elevator outages.

San Francisco lacks comparable authority under state law and must rely on Cal/OSHA for routine inspections and enforcement, restricting the City's ability to directly address chronic elevator outages and

Positive Progress

Advocacy efforts, led by groups like Senior Disability Action, helped secure $10 million in city funding for elevator maintenance in city-funded SROs through the Elevator Modernization Program.

expired permits. Actions taken by other jurisdictions illustrate both legislative and structural approaches that could strengthen San Francisco's response to prolonged elevator outages and improve housing accessibility and safety for residents with disabilities.

Repairing old elevators takes longer and costs more.

Nearly all (94%) of the SROs in San Francisco were built before 1930[6] and many have elevators that are decades old, difficult to service, and increasingly expensive to maintain. More than a quarter (28%) of elevators in SROs were installed before the 1990 enactment of the ADA, and according to a private SRO owner, some are so antiquated that repair companies may hesitate or decline to work on them. An elevator company representative shared that this is due to obsolete operating systems and the difficulty of sourcing replacement parts. When these elevators break down, repairs are frequently delayed, not only because parts are scarce but also because repairs are costly and substantial repairs can trigger mandatory modernization requirements under state code[7]. These factors may significantly extend outage durations and increase repair costs, leaving residents without a reliable means of mobility.

Repairing and modernizing elevators in San Francisco SROs is complex and costly. A building manager we contacted provided a repair invoice, work order, and modernization bid that highlight the significant financial burden of maintaining aging elevator systems. For example, a work order to remove and replace elevator doors, repair door edges, and replace worn components for one elevator totals $39,247.

Modernizing an elevator costs even more: one proposal shared with us shows a full elevator modernization for $262,400. This proposal is consistent with industry estimates, which typically place full modernization costs between $100,000 and $300,000 per elevator. Industry data further suggests that that full modernization investments are typically recovered over roughly four to seven years through a combination of lower annual maintenance, fewer emergency repairs, and reduced energy consumption. Despite this, the six-figures cost to modernize one elevator may be more than many SRO owners can manage on their own.

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[6] Of the records of 527 SRO buildings in the Assessor-Recorder's property data, 493 include the year built and, thus, are included in this calcuation.

[7] California Code of Regulations, Title 8, requires alterations made to conveyances to comply with ASME A17.1 – 2004, Section 8.7, which is the American Society of Mechanical Engineers' "Safety Code for Elevators and Escalators."

Survey responses from 27 SRO operators similarly indicate that elevator outages are widespread, persistent, and challenging to address. Of the 27 respondents, 11 (41%) reported that their elevators needed maintenance or repair at least 10 times during 2023.

Also, 23 respondents (85%) stated that a major roadblock to consistent elevator maintenance and timely repair is the lack of available funding to address these issues and the difficulty in obtaining the parts needed. One private SRO owner detailed their struggle to get the money needed to make elevator repairs, which included having to sell a personal property to fund elevator repairs in a building in their portfolio. For publicly-funded SROs, some city grant agreements include an allowance for elevator maintenance as required but they do not include elevator repairs.

Cost is the primary cause stated for delayed elevator repairs, modernization or replacement.

Funding elevator repairs is challenging for both private and city-funded SROs. Some building operators stated that they often lack the financial capacity to address major elevator issues. During a site visit inteview, a private building owner shared that even routine maintenance is cost prohibitive due to the technical expertise needed to service older elevators. Thus, in some instances, owners or property managers have resorted to makeshift, unsafe fixes, such as reportedly using zip ties[8] to keep elevators operable, placing residents at further risk.

City-funded SROs face similar financial constraints however, they have more access to city funding that is specifically for elevators repairs in the City's public housing portfolio. For example, in 2016, an elevator replacement in a City-funded SRO was estimated at over $2.8 million, with $1.2 million loaned by a nonprofit organization and the remaining approximately 58% loaned by MOHCD.

In fiscal year 2022-23 the City's budget included funding to financially support elevator upgrades through the Elevator Modernization Program. Launched in 2024 by HSH, the goal of the program is to provide funding for necessary major repairs, modernization, and alteration of antiquated elevators in SROs. Funding was provided for elevator repairs in the City's SRO portfolio.[9] This program is currently

[8] The San Francisco Standard, 2023.

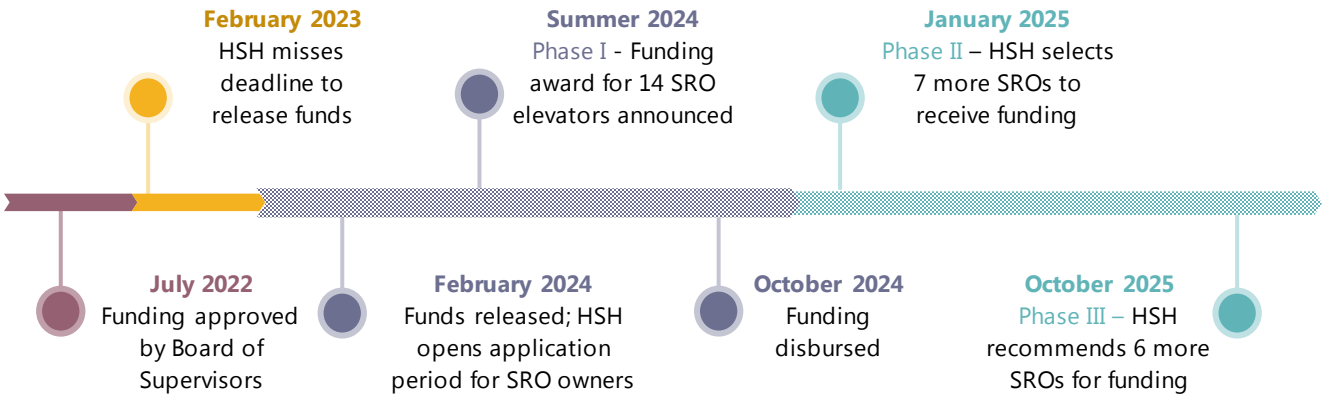
[9] Funding in Phase I of the Elevator Modernization Program was limited to privately owned SROs in the Permanent Supportive Housing system.

only available for Permanent Supportive Housing SROs that have a minimum of five years remaining on their lease with HSH. Specifically, the program prioritzed SROs that met the following criteria:

- Have the longest remaining lease term with HSH
- Owner is in good standing with the mortgage lienholder
- Building is in good physical condition and well maintained
- Owner agrees to match the City's contribution
- Elevator repair or modernization will improve residents' health, safety, and accessibility

As of early March 2026, HSH has selected 27 of 52 (52%) SROs from its portfolio to receive funding for elevator improvement and/or modernization, with approximately $9.2 million in funding disbursed. Exhibit 9 summarizes the key events of the Elevator Modernization Program.

Exhibit 9: Elevator Modernization Program timeline



Source: HSH (CSA-generated graphic)

According to HSH, the complexity in developing the notice of funding availability stemmed from competing priorities with limited staffing, and it needed to coordinate with the City Attorney's Office, MOHCD, and other city partners before it could disburse the funds.

Finding 2 – The City lacks complete and accurate data on the City's SRO portfolio and the elevators in those buildings.

The City's decentralized oversight makes SRO data fragmented and unreliable, limiting data-driven, strategic decision-making. Five departments have responsibilities related to the regulation, funding, and support of SROs and their residents. With each department serving a distinct role, SRO data is collected and maintained independently and according to each department's operational needs. This decentralization causes the City to lack a single, accurate, and complete list of SROs and the elevators in them.

A complete and accurate list of SROs, including their key characteristics, including elevator-related information, would be the starting point needed to understand the scope of the SRO population citywide. Without such an inventory, it could be difficult for policymakers and staff to make well-informed, data-driven decisions about oversight, how to allocate limited funding, or which strategies are most effective in addressing persistent elevator usability and accessibility challenges that have been consistently, if sometimes haphazardly, brought to light through complaints, media attention, and advocacy efforts.

Each of the five departments involved separately maintains SRO data related to its specialized role, using various systems and in formats that are not readily compatible. Departments also use different definitions of what constitutes an SRO or an SRO unit,[10] which further complicates reconciling the datasets.

Because each department uses different data sources and classification criteria, the resulting datasets vary significantly in both size and accuracy. Due to these discrepancies, no department maintains a complete or reliable inventory of SROs, limiting the City's ability to coordinate oversight, or assess elevator-related risks across the SRO housing stock.

Exhibit 10 illustrates these differences by summarizing the data each department maintains and the data limitation it applies.

[10] The San Francisco Planning Code defines an SRO as a dwelling unit or group housing room consisting of no more than one occupied room with a maximum gross floor area of 350 square feet.

Exhibit 10: Departmental SRO data types and variances hamper coordination and prioritization

Department	SRO Data Retained	# SROs Tracked	⚠ Data Limitation(s)
DBI	Maintains a list of residential hotels (SROs) based on required annual filings* that shows the number of occupied and vacant units	499	**Most inclusive list** but: ▪ missing those that are not required to file annually ▪ missing some SROs that are in HSH/MOHCD's portfolio ▪ include buildings that may only contain one or a few SRO units.
HSH	Maintains a list of SROs in its portfolio	69	**Limited data** (only contains SROs that HSH funds)
MOHCD	Maintains a list of SROs in its portfolio	69	**Limited data** (only contains SROs that MOHCD provides funding or loans to)
ODA	Retains a list of SROs with elevators that it used to send surveys to in 2014	184	**Extensive but incomplete and dated data**
Planning	Compiled a list gathered from various sources, including HSH, MOHCD, and ODA	85	**Incomplete data due to** relying on information from other departments
Total Unduplicated Addresses		**527**	

* San Francisco Administrative Code, Chapter 41, *The Residential Hotel Unit Conversion and Demolition Ordinance*, requires owners of residential hotels (commonly known as SROs) to report unit usage data to DBI annually.

Source: Indicated departments

Variations in definitions and data indicate that each department operates with a different understanding of the City's SRO landscape.

Without a consistent definition of an SRO or standardized data on SROs' characteristics, the City is at a disadvantage in trying to coordinate and prioritize its efforts to ameliorate the problems with SRO elevators. As Exhibit 10 shows, city departments have widely varying counts of how many SROs exist in San Francisco, the most basic piece of information needed to begin considering how to tackle the problems with SRO elevators. Exhibit 11 highlights these variations at the SRO level.

Exhibit 11: Although some SROs are in all departments' datasets, many are not

The SROs listed here are examples of buildings that did not appear in all datasets we reviewed.

SRO Address	Departmental Data Containing Address				
	DBI	ODA	HSH	MOHCD	Planning
235 Eddy St.	X				
433 Ellis St.	X		X		
480 Ellis St.	X	X	X	X	X
240 Hyde St.		X		X	
450 Jones St.	X	X			
520 Jones St.		X	X		
2176 Mission St.	X		X		X
505 O'Farrell St.	X	X	X		
770 O'Farrell St.	X		X		X
37 Woodward St.	X	X		X	X
Total Present in Database	**8 of 10**	**6 of 10**	**6 of 10**	**3 of 10**	**4 of 10**

Source: SRO address lists of indicated departments

To develop a consolidated list of SROs and the number of SRO elevators, we reconciled the SRO data maintained by the five departments. To approximate the complete population of SROs in the City, we cross-referenced SRO addresses against publicly available information, including online property searches and Assessor-Recorder records. Through this process we learned that:

- 527 SROs, including privately owned and operated SROs and city-funded SROs, exist in San Francisco.
- These SROs have 309 elevators.
- Of the 527 SROs, 225 (43%) have at least one elevator.

Despite these reconciliation efforts, the consolidated list may still be incomplete due to the underlying data issues identified across departments. Our list may omit certain SROs that were not captured in any departmental dataset and, due to our use of DBI data, likely include buildings that would typically be classified as businesses (mixed-use hotels).

Informed decision-making requires reliable data.

The City lacks the basic information needed to make sound, data-driven decisions about how to prioritize elevator usability for SRO residents. Key information, such as the number of elevators and maintenance or repair needs, is lacking or not consistently tracked. Having relevant and reliable data that is collected through consistent and well-designed practices helps ensure the information is appropriate, accurate, complete, and timely, supporting effective

decision-making. Maintaining comprehensive and accurate SRO data depends on coordinated data collection and shared definitions across the departments involved in SRO operations.

A consolidated list of SROs in San Francisco, including the neighborhood, whether the building has an elevator, and the building year built, is available upon request.

Finding 3 – Even when working correctly, SRO elevators can be difficult or dangerous for seniors and people with disabilities to use. Of the 20 elevators we checked, 19 lacked at least one of the 14 features needed to make them more accessible to vulnerable residents, and one was inoperable.

In our assessment, nearly all of the SRO elevators we visited lacked basic accessibility and usability features reflected in current standards, particularly those that may benefit seniors and people with disabilities greatly. Specifically, during site visits at 18 SROs with a total of 20 elevators,[11] 19 elevators lacked at least one of the 14 features we assessed and one elevator was inoperable. In addition to these 18 SROs, we were unable to visit one other SRO because its elevator had been out of service for an extended period. Because many of these elevators predate current standards, they may not be required to comply with every current code requirement.

The extent of these limitations demonstrates that city priorities to improve accessibility in SROs should begin by ensuring that elevators meet baseline usability conditions. Without reliable, accessible elevators, many residents remain physically isolated in their buildings and unable to safely and independently move to and from their units.

To evaluate baseline usability of the elevators, we consulted with the ODA's access compliance officer in developing a checklist of 14 usability features based on accessibility standards and guidelines in the California Building Code and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).[12] The California Building Code and ADA set standards and guidelines for elevator accessibility, requiring, for example, that elevator doors must be easy to open and that the elevator car be large enough to fit a wheelchair.

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[11] The 18 SROs we visited have a total of 20 elevators, of which 13 are in city-funded SROs and 7 are in privately owned and operated SROs.

[12] To create the checklist, we selected 14 elevator usability features as stated in the California Building Code and Americans with Disabilities Act standards and guidelines. We also consulted ODA's access compliance officer. Our checklist was not intended to be used to determine whether an elevator complies with law or regulations, but rather was intended to enable us to assess how accessible an elevator is for seniors and people with disabilities.

Using the checklist as a benchmark, we identified features that were not present in a sample of 20 elevators, 13 of which were in city-funded SROs and seven in privately owned and operated SROs. The checklist was not used to evaluate compliance with current regulations. Instead, it was used to identify missing features that may affect accessibility. City-funded SROs had a higher percentage of elevators lacking automatic doors, door widths of at least 3 feet, cars depths of at least 4.5 feet, and floor areas of at least 18 square feet. In contrast, privately owned and operated SROs had a higher percentage of elevators lacking audible and visual signals and support rail.

Exhibit 12 shows the usability features we looked for, how many elevators lacked each, and examples of how the absence of each feature can adversely affect residents, and Exhibit 13 shows photographs we took during site visits that illustrate common deficiencies we observed.

Exhibit 12: Of the 20 elevators we checked, 19 lacked at least one of the 14 features needed to make them more accessible to vulnerable residents

The percentages below are of the 20 elevators (13 of which are city-funded and seven of which are privately owned and operated) we were able to assess.

Usability Feature	Potential Impacts When Feature Is Not Present	Total # of Elevators Without Feature	City-Funded	Privately Owned & Operated
		Out of 20	Out of 13	Out of 7
1. Automatic (not manual) doors	▪ Can be hard to use for people with limited strength, coordination issues, or using mobility devices like canes, walkers, or wheelchairs; increased fall risk as person must use both hands and shift balance	8 (40%)	6 (46%)	2 (29%)
2. Horizontal sliding doors	▪ Hinged doors (see Exhibit 13) may increase risk of injury as they swing into users' path	4 (20%)	3 (23%)	1 (14%)
3. Door at least 3 feet wide	▪ Wheelchairs and walkers may not fit through narrow doors, preventing access	16 (80%)	11 (85%)	5 (71%)
4. Car at least 4.5 feet deep	▪ Insufficient space to turn or maneuver, especially for power wheelchairs, may hinder exiting ▪ May prevent larger mobility devices or multiple users from entering	7 (35%)	6 (46%)	1 (14%)
5. Clear floor area of at least 18 square feet*	▪ May restrict movement, making it hard to reposition or exit	15 (75%)	10 (77%)	5 (71%)

Usability Feature	Potential Impacts When Feature Is Not Present	Total # of Elevators Without Feature	City-Funded	Privately Owned & Operated
		Out of 20	Out of 13	Out of 7
6. Gap between elevator car and floor outside elevator does not exceed 1-¼ inches	▪ Gap is a tripping hazard, creating fall risk ▪ Wheelchair wheels, canes, and walkers can get stuck in gap, preventing safe entry or exit and potentially blocking pathways in an emergency	2 (10%)	1 (8%)	1 (14%)
7. Emergency button in car	▪ No way to call for help if trapped or in distress	1 (5%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
8. Emergency button at least 35 inches above floor	▪ Hard to reach for users with limited mobility or in wheelchairs ▪ Can delay or prevent emergency response, increasing danger	7 (35%)	4 (31%)	3 (43%)
9. Floor buttons no higher than 54 inches for side access and 48 inches for front access	▪ Buttons inaccessible to seated users or those with limited reach	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
10. Tactile markings on buttons and controls	▪ Blind or low-vision users unable to effectively and safely use elevator	4 (20%)	1 (8%)	3 (43%)
11. Entrances have audible signals	▪ Blind or low-vision users may not know elevator has arrived ▪ Users could walk into an empty elevator shaft	8 (40%)	4 (31%)	4 (57%)
12. Entrances have visible signals	▪ Deaf or hearing-impaired users may not know elevator has arrived	8 (40%)	5 (38%)	3 (43%)
13. Entrances have floor designations	▪ Increased difficulty for users with visual or cognitive impairments to determine their location in the building	5 (25%)	3 (23%)	2 (29%)
14. Support rail on at least one wall of car	▪ Lack of stability for users can increase fall risk	13 (65%)	8 (62%)	5 (71%)

* California Building Code and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards differ for clear floor area requirements. We used California Building Code requirements in our checklist.

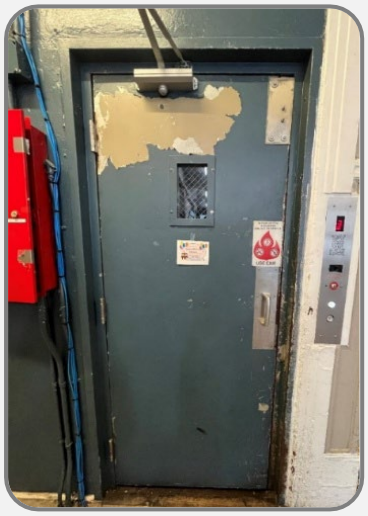
Source: CSA site visits to 20 SRO elevators in 2024. Usability features from California Building Code, Chapter 11B, sections 407.2.2.1-407.4.10 and American with Disabilities Act, Chapter 4, sections 407.1-409

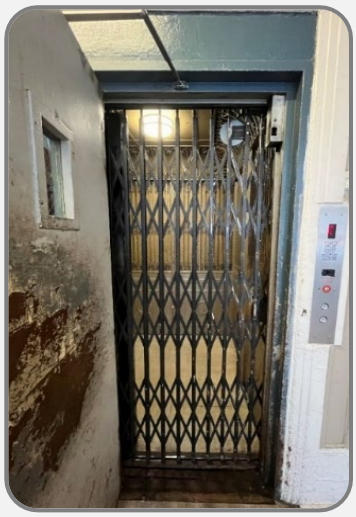
Exhibit 13: SRO elevators we checked lacked features found in current accessibility standards

Example #1: Manual Doors:

Why It Matters

Elevators that require pulling open a heavy, fire-rated door and closing a metal gate may be difficult for people with lower strength or who need their hands to use mobility devices such as a cane, walker, or wheelchair.





Photos taken at 445 O'Farrell St. (city-funded)

Example #2: Doors Less Than 36 Inches Wide:

Why It Matters

Doors that are too narrow restrict or prevent access for those who use mobility devices, especially power wheelchairs.



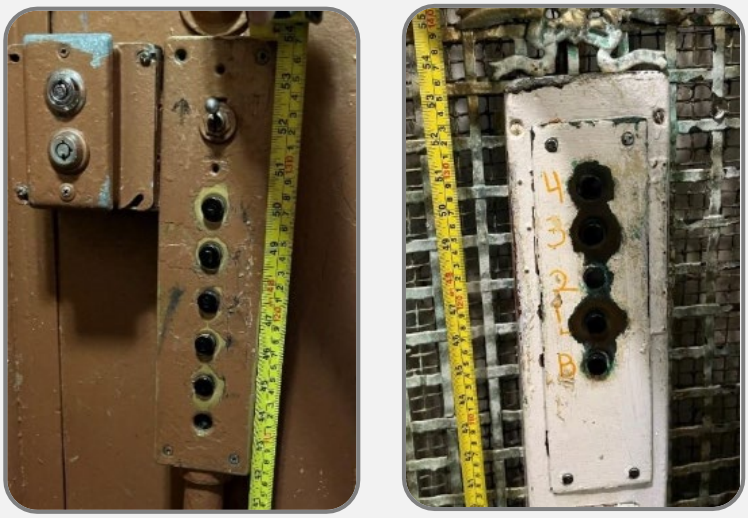


Photos taken at 450 Jones St. (left, privately owned and operated) and 516 O'Farrell St. (right, city-funded)

Exhibit 13: SRO elevators we checked lacked features found in current accessibility standards *(continued)*

Example #3: Buttons Lacking Tactile Markings

Why It Matters Elevator buttons without tactile markings prevent people, especially blind or low-vision users, from reliably identifying floors or controls.



Photos taken at 528 Valencia St. (left, city-funded) and 1010 Post St. (right, privately owned and operated)

Example #4: Cars Lacking Support Rails

Why It Matters Lack of support rail increases fall hazard during elevator operation for users who rely on handrails to maintain balance.



Photos taken at 505 O'Farrell St. (left, city-funded) and 106 6th St. (right, city-funded)

Source: CSA site visits (2025)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Office on Disability and Accessibility should work with the Board of Supervisors to develop and propose a city law or amendment to existing law to address prolonged elevator outages in single room occupancy buildings. Consider legislation that mirrors that in the cities of Berkeley and Oakland and establishes enforcement mechanisms for chronic or repeat failures.

2. Led by the Office of Disability and Accessibility, the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, Department of Building Inspection, Mayor's Office of Housing Community Development, and Planning Department, should collaborate with the Board of Supervisors to develop and implement a framework for preparing multiyear strategic plans for routine elevator maintenance and renewals for single room occupancy buildings in the City's portfolio.

3. The Department of Building Inspection, Office on Disability and Accessibility, and Planning Department should develop and maintain a centralized, publicly accessible resource, such as a master list of elevator companies with expertise to work on old elevators that outlines available elevator maintenance and repair assistance for building owners and property managers, and elevator outage guidance in different languages that clearly explains the rights, recourse options, and reporting pathways available to residents affected by elevator outages.

4. The Department of Building Inspection should proactively work with other city departments to ensure its system of record continues to be an accurate and complete citywide dataset of all single room occupancy buildings and elevators in San Francisco.

Appendix – Departments' Responses

Office on Disability and Accessibility

SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
Department of Disability and Aging Services

P.O. Box 7988
San Francisco, CA
94120-7988
www.SFHSA.org

August 26th, 2026

Mark de la Rosa
Director of Audits
City Hall, Room 476
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Director de la Rosa,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft audit report, *The City Lacks Authority to Address Long-Standing Elevator Deficiencies in Single Room Occupancy Buildings but Can Do More to Help Mitigate the Problem*. We appreciate the Controller's Office and the City Services Auditor Division for their thorough and thoughtful analysis of the systemic issues affecting elevator reliability, safety, and accessibility in San Francisco's Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings.

The Office on Disability and Accessibility (ODA) concurs with the report's findings that persistent elevator outages severely impact residents with disabilities and older adults, often resulting in dangerous loss of mobility, isolation, and barriers to basic needs. We also agree that the City's limited enforcement authority under state law, fragmented data systems, and aging infrastructure significantly constrain our ability to ensure safe and accessible vertical transportation in SROs.

ODA has reviewed the draft report in detail and has not identified any errors or omissions. We concur with all recommendations addressed to our department and are committed to working with the Board of Supervisors and partner departments—including DBI, HSH, MOHCD, and the Planning Department—to advance the actions outlined in the audit. Our completed Recommendation and Response Form is attached, as requested.

In brief, ODA agrees to:

- Collaborate on city legislation establishing enforceable standards for elevator uptime, communications, and tenant protections.
- Participate in the development of a multiyear strategy for elevator maintenance and modernization within City-funded SROs.
- Co-create a centralized, publicly accessible elevator resource hub with multilingual tenant guidance and contractor information.

Daniel Lurie
Mayor

Kelly Dearman
Executive Director, DAS

Page 1 of 2

SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
Department of Disability and Aging Services

P.O. Box 7988
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- Support cross-department efforts to standardize and improve the accuracy of the City's SRO and elevator datasets.

We appreciate the attention and care the audit team has given to this critical accessibility issue. Reliable elevator access is not simply a convenience—it's a foundational component of safety, independence, and dignity for San Franciscans with disabilities and older adults.

Thank you for your partnership and ongoing commitment to improving accessibility across our City. Please contact me if additional information or clarification is needed.

Sincerely,

Eli Gelardin

Eli Gelardin
Director
Office on Disability and Accessibility
City and County of San Francisco

Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development

Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development
City and County of San Francisco

Daniel Lurie
Mayor

Daniel Adams
Director

September 4, 2026

Mark de la Rosa
Director of Audits
City Hall, Room 476
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

RE: Department Response to Audit: The City Lacks Authority to Address Long-Standing Elevator Deficiencies in Single Room Occupancy Buildings but Can Do More to Help Mitigate the Problem

Dear Mr. de la Rosa,

The Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD) appreciates the opportunity to provide a formal response to the recommendation given to our department in the Controller's draft audit report. The report accurately details the complexities of the SRO landscape and the City's ability to monitor and enforce elevator conditions.

First, I am pleased to provide an update on the progress already under way regarding Finding #2: the City does not have complete and accurate data of the City's SRO portfolio and the elevators within those buildings. For the past two years, the Partnership for the Bay's Future (PBF) has funded a Fellow to undertake an in-depth analysis of SRO housing stock. One outcome of this work is a comprehensive data set of SRO buildings. Although the PBF Fellowship concludes at the end of 2026, MOHCD and the Planning Department are working together to institutionalize a complete and accurate dataset of the City's SRO portfolio and the elevators within those buildings. This work will be funded through a HUD grant and staffed in part through a FUSE Fellowship embedded in the Planning Department.

Second, the report's recommendation #2 is that MOHCD, in partnership with other agencies, collaborate with the Board of Supervisors to develop and implement a framework for preparing multiyear strategic plans for routine elevator maintenance and renewals for single-room occupancy buildings within the City's portfolio. MOHCD holds information on the 70 SRO buildings that receive funding from our department, which include approximately 21% of all SRO units. MOHCD can contribute our experience and expertise to a collaborative effort to develop a framework for a multiyear strategic plan, but given our engagement with only a limited number of SRO buildings, the department is not appropriately positioned to lead such planning work. On the implementation

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side, MOHCD is a financial lender and as such very has limited ability to enforce regulations for routine elevator maintenance.

Thank you again for the hard work on the audit and for providing MOHCD an opportunity to respond. We look forward to continuing to work together to protect and improve San Francisco's housing.

Sincerely,

Daniel Adams
Director

Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESSNESS AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Mike Levine, Executive Director

Daniel Lurie, Mayor

September 3, 2026

Mark de la Rosa
Director of Audits
Office of the Controller, City Services Auditor Division
City and County of San Francisco

Re: Response to Audit Recommendation – *The City Lacks Authority to Address Long-Standing Elevator Deficiencies in Single Room Occupancy Buildings but Can Do More to Help Mitigate the Problem*

Dear Director de la Rosa,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the audit report titled *The City Lacks Authority to Address Long Standing Elevator Deficiencies in Single Room Occupancy Buildings but Can Do More to Help Mitigate the Problem*. The Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) appreciates the Controller's analysis and is committed to improving the safety, accessibility, and reliability of elevators within the City's Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings that serve as a critical component of the homeless response system.

This letter provides HSH's response to Recommendation 2:

Recommendation 2:
Collaborate with the Board of Supervisors to develop and implement a framework for preparing multiyear strategic plans for routine elevator maintenance and renewals for single-room occupancy buildings within the City's portfolio.

HSH Response:
HSH concurs with this recommendation. Ensuring safe, functional, and reliable elevators is essential for the health and well-being of residents in Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) buildings, particularly those with mobility or accessibility needs. We agree that a multiyear planning framework—developed in coordination with the Board of Supervisors and City partners—will strengthen the City's ability to proactively address

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elevator maintenance and modernization needs across the PSH SRO portfolio under HSH's jurisdiction.

Recent HSH Investments in Elevator Modernization

To support PSH residents and reduce the significant impacts of elevator outages, HSH has made substantial investments in elevator improvements across the portfolio in recent years. Between February 2024 and April 2026, HSH disbursed more than $9.2 million for critical elevator repairs and modernization projects across 27 SROs—representing 52% of the 52 SROs with passenger elevators in the HSH-funded portfolio. These investments have directly addressed longstanding deficiencies, reduced health and safety risks, and improved accessibility for residents with disabilities or mobility challenges.

Future Strategic Planning Efforts

As part of implementing this recommendation, HSH will collaborate with key City partners—including the Department of Building Inspection (DBI), the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD), the Planning Department, and the Office of Disability and Accessibility (ODA)—to develop a coordinated, multiyear planning framework. A critical component of this effort will be identifying and securing funding and an appropriate funding model to support long-term implementation.

HSH remains committed to improving elevator reliability, supporting residents' safety and access needs, and strengthening interdepartmental collaboration to develop an effective long-term strategy.

Please let us know if you need additional information or further clarification. We appreciate the Controller's continued partnership and look forward to collaborating on the implementation of this recommendation.

Sincerely,

Mike Levine
Executive Director

cc:
Marion Sanders, Chief Deputy Director, HSH
Salvador Menjivar, Director of Housing, HSH

Department of Building Inspection and Planning Department

San Francisco Planning

DBI DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING INSPECTION

September 11, 2026

Mark de la Rosa
Director of Audits
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlet Place, Room 476
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Citywide Performance Audit: *The City Lacks Authority to Address Long-Standing Elevator Deficiencies in Single Room Occupancy Buildings but Can Do More to Help Mitigate the Problem*

Dear Mr. de la Rosa:

Thank you for your team's work on an audit of elevator maintenance in the City's Single Room Occupancy buildings. Single Room Occupancy buildings provide critical affordable housing opportunities for a range of tenants, including elderly and disabled residents, who rely on elevators for safety and mobility. There are many complex issues related to elevator maintenance in these buildings, and the Department of Building Inspection's (DBI) Housing Inspection Services team works diligently to enforce the City's housing codes related to elevator maintenance within the limitations of its authority.

DBI and the Planning Department (Planning) are in the process of merging our two departments and are working to integrate our teams for a more holistic approach to community planning and development and building maintenance. As we build and expand cross-functional teams, we see areas for collaboration to address the recommendations outlined in this audit, both as one combined agency and in partnership with other City agencies.

First, we want to clarify the Housing Inspection team's role in enforcing elevator maintenance. Under San Francisco Housing Code Sections 713 and 808, DBI issues Notices of Violation (NOVs) for inoperability of elevators and actively monitors and follows up on all NOVs it issues. The department has a range of enforcement options that are progressively punitive if a building owner is not making a good faith effort to address the problem. However, as you noted in the audit, some of the elevator maintenance challenges are due to the age of the elevators, scarcity of necessary parts and other issues that can make compliance difficult for even the most diligent building owners.

Regarding recommendation #1, DBI and Planning legislative staff are interested in working with partner agencies and the Board of Supervisors on potential legislation to assist tenants in buildings that experience chronic or repeat elevator failures. Our staff have extensive experience with elevator maintenance issues and will be an invaluable resource to the Board when drafting potential legislative changes.

For recommendation #2, DBI and Planning agree to partner and serve as subject matter experts to the Board of Supervisors and the lead departments as they develop and implement a framework and strategic plan for ensuring timely and comprehensive elevator maintenance in City-owned buildings.

Regarding recommendation #3, DBI and Planning agree to create and maintain a centralized, publicly accessible resource of elevator contractors for building owners. We agree to provide a link on our website to the California State Contractor's Board, which provides information on contractors licensed in the State of California for specific types of work, as well as additional resources and information for both tenants and building owners.

For recommendation #4, Planning and the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development are working together on a project to create a system for developing a complete and accurate dataset of the City's SRO buildings, including an inventory of elevators in the buildings. This project also aims to create systems and procedures for ongoing updates, monitoring, and analysis of SRO conditions. This work is part of a larger HUD-funded project that will include financial analysis of typical capital upgrades needed to improve habitability conditions in SRO buildings, which will result in a policy framework and legislative recommendations.

Thank you again for your attention to this critical issue, and we look forward to working with your office and other partners to address the issues outlined in this audit.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dennis Phillips
Director, Planning Department

David Kane
Interim Director, Department of Building Inspection

Recommendations and Responses

For each recommendation, the responsible agency should indicate in the column labeled Agency Response whether it concurs, does not concur, or partially concurs and provide a brief explanation. If it concurs with the recommendation, it should indicate the expected implementation date and implementation plan. If the responsible agency does not concur or partially concurs, it should provide an explanation and an alternate plan of action to address the identified issue.

Recommendation	Responsible Agency	Agency Response	CSA Use Only Status Determination*
1. Work with the Board of Supervisors to develop and propose a city law or amendment to existing law to address prolonged elevator outages in single room occupancy buildings. Consider legislation that mirrors that in the cities of Berkeley and Oakland and establishes enforcement mechanisms for chronic or repeat failures.	Office on Disability and Accessibility	☒ Concur ☐ Do Not Concur ☐ Partially Concur The Office of Disability and Accessibility concurs with this recommendation. The expected implementation timeline for the ordinance would depend on the Board of Supervisors' stewardship and legislative process.	☒ Open ☐ Closed ☐ Contested
2. Led by ODA, collaborate with the Board of Supervisors to develop and implement a framework for preparing multiyear strategic plans for routine elevator maintenance and renewals for single room occupancy buildings in the City's portfolio.	Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing	☒ Concur ☐ Do Not Concur ☐ Partially Concur HSH concurs with this recommendation. Ensuring safe, functional, and reliable elevators is essential for the health and well being of residents in Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) buildings, particularly those with mobility or accessibility needs. We agree that a multiyear planning framework—developed in coordination with the Board of Supervisors and City partners—will strengthen the City's ability to proactively address elevator maintenance and modernization needs across the PSH SRO portfolio under HSH's jurisdiction.	☒ Open ☐ Closed ☐ Contested

* Status Determination based on audit team's review of the agency's response and proposed corrective action.

Recommendation	Responsible Agency	Agency Response	CSA Use Only Status Determination*
		As part of implementing this recommendation, HSH will collaborate with key City partners—including the Department of Building Inspection (DBI), the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD), the Planning Department, and the Office of Disability and Accessibility (ODA)—to develop a coordinated, multiyear planning framework. A critical component of this effort will be identifying and securing funding and an appropriate funding model to support long term implementation.	
	Department of Building Inspection and Planning Department	☒ Concur ☐ Do Not Concur ☐ Partially Concur DBI and Planning are committed to serving as subject matter experts to the Board of Supervisors and lead departments in developing a multiyear strategic framework for SRO elevator maintenance and renewal. Note: ADA-compliant shaft upgrades may require removing SRO units, conflicting with Chapter 41's unit-preservation requirements. DBI recommends that the framework include a waiver or variance process to reconcile the two.	☒ Open ☐ Closed ☐ Contested
	Mayor's Office of Housing Community Development	☒ Concur ☐ Do Not Concur ☐ Partially Concur MOHCD holds information on the 70 SRO buildings (with about 21% of all SRO units) that receive funding from our department. MOHCD can contribute our experience and expertise to ODA's strategic planning process. MOHCD is a financial lender and as such has very limited ability to implement regulations for routine elevator maintenance.	☒ Open ☐ Closed ☐ Contested

* Status Determination based on audit team's review of the agency's response and proposed corrective action.

Recommendation	Responsible Agency	Agency Response	CSA Use Only Status Determination*
	Office of Disability and Accessibility	☒ Concur ☐ Do Not Concur ☐ Partially Concur Coinciding with new citywide legislation (recommendation #1), ODA will collaborate with the Board of Supervisors, Planning/DBI, HSH and MOHCD to develop an Elevator Maintenance Implementation Plan. We recommend the following role delineation: • Lead agency for development of the plan: ODA • Operational responsibility for elevator maintenance and compliance: Planning/DBI, HSH, and MOHCD Fulfilling these recommendations would require ODA's ADA Grievance and Housing Initiative Coordinator position filled (currently vacant and not yet approved).	☒ Open ☐ Closed ☐ Contested
3. Develop and maintain a centralized, publicly accessible resource, such as a master list of elevator companies with expertise to work on old elevators that outlines available elevator maintenance and repair assistance for building owners and property managers, and elevator outage guidance in different languages that clearly explains the rights, recourse options, and reporting pathways available to residents affected by elevator outages.	Department of Building Inspection and Planning Department	☒ Concur ☐ Do Not Concur ☐ Partially Concur DBI and Planning intend to create and maintain a centralized, publicly accessible resource for building owners, linking to the California State Contractor's Board for licensed elevator contractors, along with multilingual guidance on residents' rights, recourse options, and reporting pathways.	☒ Open ☐ Closed ☐ Contested
	Office of Disability and Accessibility	☒ Concur ☐ Do Not Concur ☐ Partially Concur The Office of Disability and Accessibility concurs with this recommendation. While we strongly support the effort, developing maintenance and renewal schedules falls outside our core expertise, which is focused on ensuring programmatic and architectural accessibility to City programs, services, and facilities.	☒ Open ☐ Closed ☐ Contested

* Status Determination based on audit team's review of the agency's response and proposed corrective action.

Recommendation	Responsible Agency	Agency Response	CSA Use Only Status Determination*
		We are happy to play a role as accessibility subject matter expert on this recommendation.	
4. Proactively work with other city departments to ensure its system of record continues to be an accurate and complete citywide dataset of all single room occupancy buildings and elevators in San Francisco.	Department of Building Inspection	☒ Concur ☐ Do Not Concur ☐ Partially Concur DBI's existing SRO list, based on required Chapter 41 filings, is likely the most complete dataset currently available, but excludes non-filing SROs, some HSH/MOHCD portfolio buildings, and may include mixed-use or single-unit properties. Dual tourist/resident designations further complicate tracking. A mandate for expanded coverage would require legislation. Planning and MOHCD are developing a citywide SRO and elevator dataset under a HUD-funded initiative, which will also inform capital-upgrade financial analysis and policy recommendations. DBI intends to align its records with this effort.	☒ Open ☐ Closed ☐ Contested

* Status Determination based on audit team's review of the agency's response and proposed corrective action.