



Martin Hammer testifies at IRC Hearings in Albuquerque, May 4, 2019

Results From IRC COMMITTEE HEARINGS

A message from Martin Hammer, architect and lead author of proposed Appendix U

On Saturday May 4, CRI's proposed Appendix U – Cob Construction (Monolithic Adobe) was presented in testimony to the 11-member IRC Committee in Albuquerque, NM. Committee members had been given the two previous months to review the proposal along with 300 other IRC proposals. CRI's 5-member testimony team presented many compelling reasons in support of the Cob Appendix, including the well-developed, earthquake-safe (for high seismic regions) structural section, and cob's exceptional fire-resistance.

Anthony Dente, the lead engineer of the proposal worked with another engineer at the hearings to incorporate her suggested improvements, which garnered her valuable support in testimony. A compelling letter of support from elected officials and Chief Building Officials from wildfire-vulnerable and damaged communities was also read in testimony. Our team included a fire science engineer and University professor who conducted an equivalency analysis for the 1-hour fire rating for cob walls in the proposal, a very conservative rating based on historical testing and other evidence. However, the only opposition testimony to the proposal related to this subject of fire resistance, because the typically required ASTM test (a very costly test) had not been performed.

After testimony, the Committee in their comments praised the proposal and encouraged our team to continue the effort, but voted to disapprove the proposal. This was mostly or entirely because of the 1-hour fire rating without the ASTM test. It is ironic that one of cob's greatest strengths, its inherent fire resistance, was called into question and likely caused the proposal's disapproval.

Though the result is disappointing, CRI is not discouraged. On the contrary we are *encouraged*, and we hope you are too. Code proposals of this magnitude are rarely approved the first time, and most importantly we see a clear path to future approval. The ICC process allows a “Public Comment” to modify our proposal to address the Committee’s concerns. A second public hearing will occur in October in Las Vegas, at which voting ICC members (mostly building and fire officials) could approve the modified proposal. With sufficient fundraising in the next two months we will conduct the ASTM fire test, and put forth the fire rating it yields (likely 4-hours or more). If fundraising falls short we will remove the 1-hour rating from the proposal. Though limiting in some circumstances, it would still be a viable appendix for most projects.

Everyone at CRI continues to be excited by the prospect of an approved and readily available cob code. We are very proud of the Appendix proposal that so many devoted people contributed to and that was praised in Albuquerque. We are eager to take the next very achievable steps to make a cob code a reality, especially to give communities at risk of wildfires a sustainable, non-combustible building option. We invite you to join us. Please consider supporting the effort with a tax-deductible contribution for testing and other necessary expenses in this process. <https://www.crowdrise.com/o/en/campaign/cris-cob-code-effort>

Thank you! We look forward to the hearings in Las Vegas!

The Cob Code proposal can be seen at:
https://cobcode.s3.amazonaws.com/RB299-19_IRC_ProposedAppendixU_CobConstruction.pdf
