



6.4 The Current LFRS Design Practice

This section provides a brief overview of the current design practices for analyzing the LFRS of light-frame buildings. It highlights the advantages and disadvantages of the various approaches but, in the absence of a coherent body of evidence, makes no attempt to identify which approach, if any, may be considered superior. Where experience from whole-building tests and actual building performance in real events permits, the discussion provides a critique of current design practices that, for lack of better methods, relies somewhat on an intuitive sense for the difference between the structure as it is analyzed and the structure as it may actually perform. The intent is not to downplay the importance of engineering analysis; rather, the designer should understand the implications of the current analytic methods and their inherent assumptions and then put them into practice in a suitable manner.

6.4.1 Lateral Force Distribution Methods

The design of the LFRS of light-frame buildings generally follows one of three methods described below. Each differs in its approach to distributing whole-building lateral forces through the horizontal diaphragms to the shear walls. Each varies in the level of calculation, precision, and dependence on designer judgment. While different solutions can be obtained for the same design by using the different methods, one approach is not necessarily preferred to another. All may be used for the distribution of seismic and wind loads to the shear walls in a building. However, some of the most recent building codes may place limitations or preferences on certain methods.

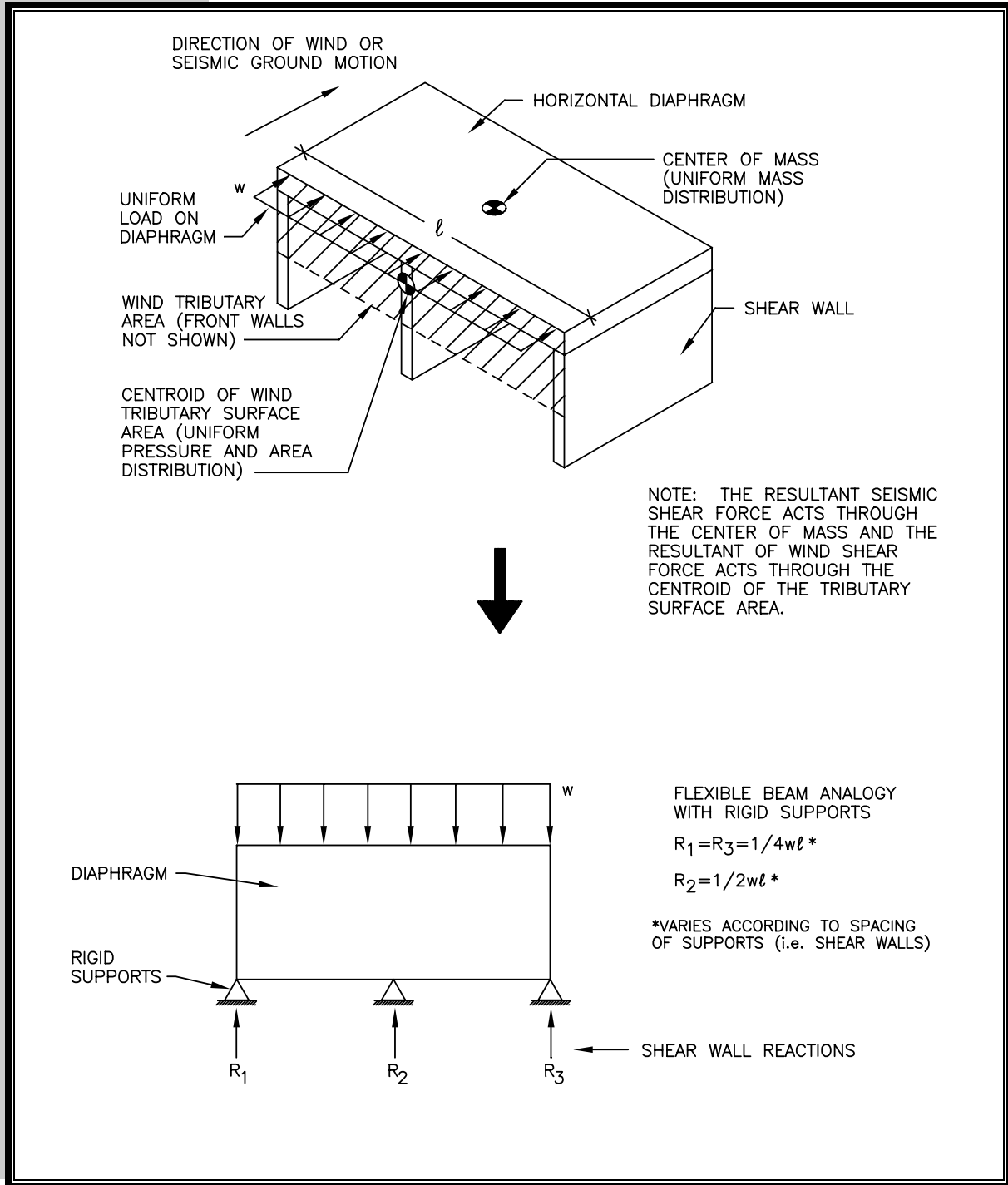
Tributary Area Approach (Flexible Diaphragm)

The *tributary area approach* is perhaps the most popular method used to distribute lateral building loads. Tributary areas based on building geometry are assigned to various components of the LFRS to determine the wind or seismic loads on building components (i.e., shear walls and diaphragms). The method assumes that a diaphragm is relatively flexible in comparison to the shear walls (i.e., a “flexible diaphragm”) such that it distributes forces according to tributary areas rather than according to the stiffness of the supporting shear walls. This hypothetical condition is analogous to conventional beam theory, which assumes rigid supports as illustrated in Figure 6.4 for a continuous horizontal diaphragm (i.e., floor) with three supports (i.e., shear walls).



FIGURE 6.4

Lateral Force Distribution by a "Flexible" Diaphragm (tributary area approach)



In seismic design, tributary areas are associated with uniform area weights (i.e., dead loads) assigned to the building systems (i.e., roof, walls, and floors) that generate the inertial seismic load when the building is subject to lateral ground motion (refer to Chapter 3 on earthquake loads). In wind design, the tributary areas are associated with the lateral component of the wind load acting on the exterior surfaces of the building (refer to Chapter 3 on wind loads).