

SDOT Director's Rule Briefing

Skybridge Term Permits

Presentation overview

- Background
- Draft Director's Rule
- Process
- Current skybridge examples

Background

Skybridges are permitted by the City Council by ordinance

- SMC 15.64 – Policy of the City to limit the proliferation and adverse effects of skybridges
- Three types of skybridges:
 - Public use: open to everyone and no access barriers; 10% degree of alienation applied to the annual fee
 - Semi-public use: open to everyone, but access may be through private structure; 75% degree of alienation applied to the annual fee
 - Private use: access is restricted for private users only; 200% degree of alienation applied to the annual fee
- The City is more favorable to skybridges for public or semi-public uses (e.g. university campuses and hospitals) and less favorable to strictly private uses (e.g. connecting residential buildings, garages, etc.)
- If a skybridge permit is approved, the owner is required to provide public benefit and address any impacts

Draft Director's Rule objectives

- Clarify roles of the Skybridge Review Committee and the Seattle Design Commission
- Provides applicant clear information on the process and criteria the City uses to evaluate skybridge applications
- Changes the term of the skybridge permit from three 10-year terms to an initial term of 15 years, with one additional term of 15 years
- Timing – get input from Seattle Design Commission, other SDOT departments, Skybridge Review Committee, SDCI, OPCD, and other stakeholders

Process

Skybridge Review Committee (SRC) reviews applications against criteria in SMC 15.64 and makes a recommendation to the SDOT Director

- Skybridges must meet a compelling need that cannot be addressed without the structure
- The SRC evaluates the public benefit mitigation proposal
- Skybridge must address clearance and other impacts

Seattle Design Commission (SDC) reviews applications, including a public benefit mitigation proposal, and makes a recommendation to the SDOT Director

- For new skybridges:
 - How the urban design implications of a new skybridge on the public realm have been adequately addressed?
 - Does the proposed public benefit mitigation package provide appropriate mitigation to enhance the public realm due to the urban design implications of the skybridge.
- For existing skybridges:
 - Has the existing skybridge contributed to adverse impacts on the public realm at or near its location since its approval?
 - Has the proposed public benefit package adequately addressed those impacts, including its relationship to previously provided public benefits features?

SDOT Director makes recommendation to City Council based on the SRC and SDC recommendations

City Council reviews and decides whether to grant a skybridge permit

Skybridge Review Committee - reviews new and existing applications

The SRC is comprised of staff from SDOT, SDCI, OPCD, and the SDC

The SRC makes a recommendation to the SDOT Director to approve or deny the application

It is the SRC's role to:

- Balance the criteria in SMC 15.64 with the public interest
- Confirm that the skybridge will be consistent with the goals and policies for the proposed location
- Provide potentially affected agencies and utilities the opportunity to review and comment on the application
- Determine if the skybridge is technically feasible

After its review, the SRC refers the application to the SDC

Seattle Design Commission Review - new skybridges

The SDC review of the urban design implications of a new skybridge will include an assessment of:

- Availability of reasonable alternatives to the skybridge
- Visual impacts of the skybridge from locations within the right-of-way, including any view corridors
- The extent to which the skybridge reduces light and air on the public realm
- Changes and effect on pedestrian patterns both at the street level and within any buildings connected as a result of the skybridge
- Implications on existing and proposed landscape
- Use of materials in context with surrounding development
- Context of the surrounding built environment
- Public benefit package

Seattle Design Commission Review - new skybridges

Evaluate the proposed public benefit mitigation package and assess whether the proposed public benefit package sufficiently addresses the implications of the skybridge on the public realm through:

- Correcting deficiencies in the adjacent public realm
- Providing new investments that serve to enhance the public realm
- Using investments to create new public spaces or places
- Includes equitable outcomes that serve the broadest possible communities

Seattle Design Commission Review - new skybridges

The following are examples of public realm enhancements that are typically found in a successful public benefit mitigation package:

- Widened sidewalks that exceed code requirements
- Tree plantings that are designed to address deficits in the number, species, or frequency of nearby street tree plantings
- Tree planting used to create or reinforce a public place
- Installation of Green Stormwater Infrastructure designed to provide demonstrated improvements to water quality
- Installation of street furniture designed to serve nearby populations
- Installation of new lighting to enhance the pedestrian environment
- Public art integrated into a skybridge or into the nearby public realm
- Updates to the public realm designed to address deficiencies in access for all ages and abilities
- Creation of new public spaces, either within the public realm or on private property, that are designed to attract people through programming, physical amenities, or other similar enhancements
- Publicly accessible and programmable interior spaces that address community-based needs expressed in community engagement or existing neighborhood plans

Seattle Design Commission Review - existing skybridges

The SDC evaluation will assess whether the existing skybridge has contributed to adverse impacts on the public realm evaluating by evaluating:

- Visual impacts of the structure due to change in the quality of materials, or their maintenance and upkeep
- Changes in the urban context resulting in changes to pedestrian movement or volumes at or near the skybridge
- Impacts on the extent and health of landscape at or near the skybridge
- How current standards for accessibility, life safety and structural integrity affect the use of the skybridge
- Use of materials in context with surrounding development
- Modifications to the skybridge since its installation that create additional visual impacts
- Public benefit package

SDOT Recommendation to City Council

SDOT reviews the application, information that addresses SMC criteria, supporting materials from City staff, other City plans and goals, and the recommendations from the SRC and the SDC

SDOT Director prepares a recommendation, including conditions and public benefit obligations, and legislation for the City Council

If the City Council approves the skybridge application, SDOT administers the permit

Current skybridges

- University of Washington – U District
 - 4 fully accessible bridges for the public
 - 1 semi-public bridge connecting UW campus and UW Medical Center
 - UW made improvements to the Burke Gilman Trail adjacent to the Campus as the public benefit



Current skybridges

- SMRC Marketside – Post Alley
- Working with the owner to renew a skybridge permit
- 1 fully private pedestrian skybridge for residents at Marketside Flats
- Public benefit includes:
 - Street improvements at Western Ave and Union St
 - Paving, landscaping, bench/traffic barrier, 4 ADA ramps, 2 marked pedestrian crossings
 - Signs indicating route for public access elevators
 - Upgrading “Post Alley” sign
 - Historic marker on Marketside Flats



Current skybridge under review

- Westin Hotel – Downtown
 - Originally built in the 1980s
 - Permit expired in 2010
 - Westin initially wanted to remove skybridge
 - New hotel owners decided to renew the permit
 - Semi-public access connecting the Westin to a parking garage
 - Working with the Westin on proposed public benefit



Questions?

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