

Olympic Tower Skybridge

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Ben de Rubertis, Chair

Brianna Holan, Vice Chair

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Commissioners Present

Ben de Rubertis, Chair
Brianna Holan, Vice Chair
Rikerrious Geter
Laura Haddad
Mark Johnson

Commissioners Excused

Justin Clark
Rick Krochalis
Vinita Sidhu

Non Voting Commissioners Present

Amalia Leighton
Elaine Wine

Project Description

Transforming Age LLC is seeking approval to install a new skybridge across 8th Avenue, between Columbia and Cherry Streets, to connect an existing senior living facility with a proposed high-rise senior living facility. The existing facility provides independent living, assisted living, memory care, skilled nursing, physical therapy, and onsite staff to respond to calls from residents, while the proposed facility would provide independent living for seniors. Both facilities will provide shared amenities such as fitness programs, dining rooms, salons, and housekeeping services.

Meeting Summary

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) first review of the Olympic Skybridge project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the merit phase for the project. After the presentation and discussion, the SDC voted 0-5 to not approve the proposed skybridge.

Recusals and Disclosures

Vinita Sidhu recused herself as her employer, SiteWorkshop, is working on the project.

June 6, 2019

9:00 - 10:30 am

Type

Skybridge

Phase

Merit

Previous Reviews

None

Presenters

Paul Aigner
Transforming Age

Mark Brands
SiteWorkshop

Torsten Hirche
Transforming Age

Norie Sato
Artist

John Schupp
Ankrom Moisan Architects

Attendees

Kathy Bainbridge, Resident

Beverly Barnett, SDOT

Rick Baugh, Resident

Jim de Maine, MD, Resident

Lourdes de Maine, Resident

Kathy Dobbs, Resident

Donna Dunning, Resident

Lidia Filonowich, Resident

Amy Gray, SDOT

Holly Golden, HCMP

Elizabeth Hanson, Resident

Suzanne Hittman, Resident

Doug Holtom, FHIA

Joan Horner, Resident

Hu MacRae, Resident

Anne McCullough, FHIA

Ryan Miyahira
Ankrom Moisan Architects

Gordon Perkin, MD, Resident

Jim Sanders, Resident

Carole Shawksano, Resident

Ardis Shirk, Resident

Bob Terrell, Resident

Lynn Winter, Resident

Summary of Presentation

Paul Aigner and Torsten Hirche, of Transforming Age, Mark Brands, of SiteWorkshop, John Schupp, of Ankrom Moisan Architects, and Norie Sato, Artist, presented the merit phase for the Olympic Tower Skybridge. The project team provided a brief overview of the services provided through the Transforming Age organization. The organization has operated its current facility on the block bounded by Cherry St., Columbia St., 8th Ave and 9th Avenue in the First Hill Neighborhood since 2009. The proposed skybridge would connect the current facility with a proposed high rise development at the corner of 8th Ave and Columbia St. The project team's rationale for the skybridge is that it is necessary at this location to create a safe alternative for their residents to cross 8th Avenue in lieu of crossing at grade.

The project team then provided information for several at grade and below grade alternatives to the proposed skybridge. The team explained that the at grade alternative is not ideal. The team also showed in detail why the below grade alternatives were not feasible.

The team presented the design concept for the proposed skybridge. The proposal included an 11-foot wide enclosed pedestrian bridge that will span

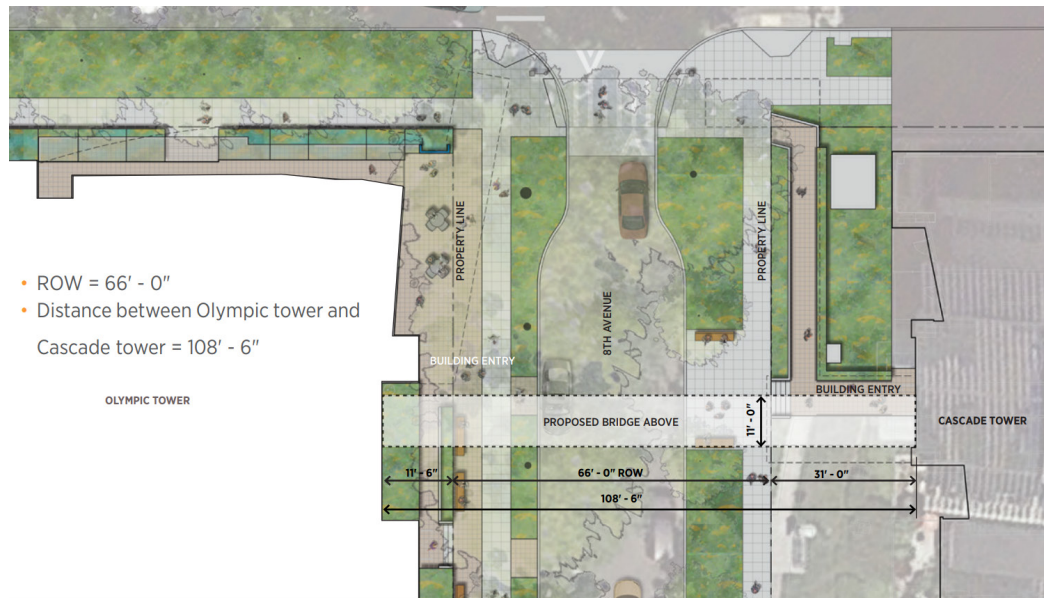


Figure 1: Proposed location of skybridge

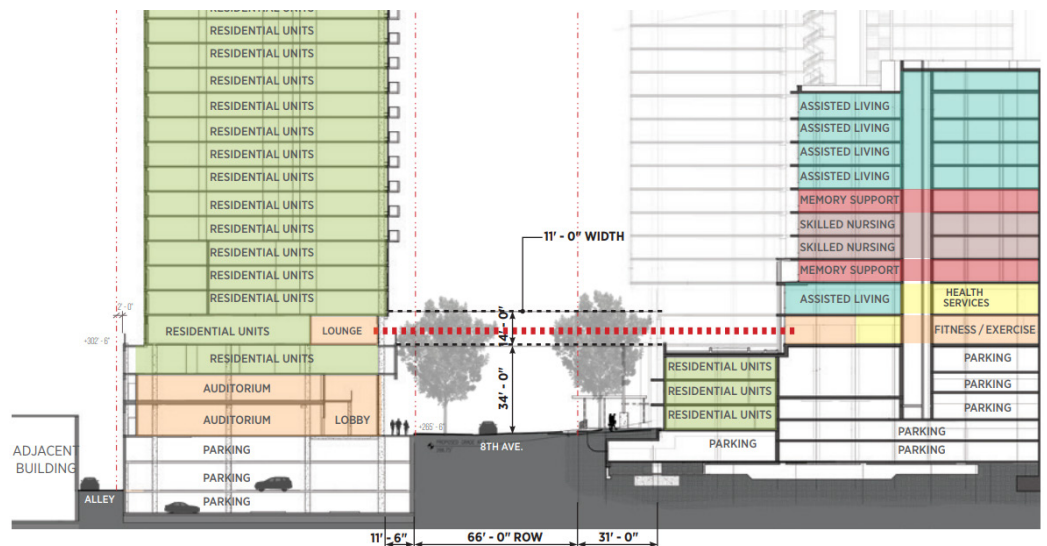


Figure 2: Cross section of proposed skybridge

roughly 109 feet across 8th Ave. The bottom of the proposed bridge would be 35-feet above 8th Avenue and will connect to residential amenities in both the existing and proposed senior living facilities. The proposed design is an abstract representation of a nurse log, a tree that has fallen and supports new growth, and will be constructed using a steel frame truss. The proposed design includes two alternatives for art. Both of which will be integrated within the underside of the skybridge to increase visibility from the street level. See figures 1-3 for more detail.

The project team then presented an overview of their proposed public benefit package. Benefits include raised intersection and curb bulbs at the intersection of Columbia St and 8th Ave as well as accessible landscape improvements along 8th Ave and Columbia St

Agency Comments

Beverly Barnett, SDOT, provides an overview of the skybridge review process. Ms. Barnett reviewed the City's policy as well as the permitting process for reviewing skybridges, which includes review and recommendations from the Seattle Department of Transportation's (SDOT) Skybridge Review Committee and the Seattle Design Commission. Ms. Barnett then stated that the Skybridge Review Committee did not recommend the approval of the proposed skybridge. Ms. Barnett then acknowledged the good job the project team has done in their presentation, but stated that there was not a compelling need for the skybridge. Ms. Barnett then mentioned that the project team has the capacity to design something for all residents and users at the street level.



Figure 3: Renderings of proposed skybridge design and art

Amy Gray, SDOT, provided a quick overview of what the Seattle Municipal Code requires the department to look at. Ms. Gray then focused on one criteria which addresses feasible alternatives to the skybridge proposal. Ms. Gray stated that if there are no feasible alternatives then the skybridge can proceed, but that SDOT believes there are feasible alternatives. Ms. Gray then reminded everyone that the department reviews feasible alternatives regardless of the design of the proposed skybridge.

Public Comments

Kathy Dobbs, Skyline Resident, spoke in favor of approving the proposed skybridge. Ms. Dobbs discussed issues related to mobility, safety and access as people get older. Ms. Dobbs then stated that seniors are more likely to get into an accident while crossing the street due to the increased time it takes to cross the street. Ms. Dobbs then addressed potential barriers to access due to increased traffic along 8th Ave as well as inclement

weather. Ms. Dobbs then stated potential Health risks related to increased isolation for seniors who are unable to cross the street safely.

Suzanne Hittman, Skyline Resident, spoke against the approval of the proposed skybridge. Ms. Hittman stated that the City and First Hill Neighborhood organizations had developed a public realm action plan designating 8th ave as a green street and that the proposed skybridge will violate the intention of the public realm action plan which calls for maintaining a clear line of vision from freeway Park to James St. Ms. Hittman then argued that while safety reasons had been stated, the proposed skybridge would provide a single use that is intended to keep residents and staff in its secure facility and from crossing the street. Ms. Hittman then stated that this project fails to address safety issues at the street level, which First Hill residents and employees will still have to continue to cross. Ms. Hittman closed by saying that is important for residents and visitors to continue to use sidewalks as a way to maintain a vitality within the neighborhood.

Jim de Maine, Skyline Resident, spoke in favor of approving the proposed skybridge. Mr. de Maine is a former medical professional and mentioned that some of the worst incidents included pedestrian fatalities due to vehicle accidents. Mr. de Maine then stated that issues related to access and mobility increase as people age, making it difficult for many seniors to cross the street during rush hour traffic or inclement weather. Mr. de Maine then stated that he is an advocate for onsite, long term care for people who have various disabilities, but that having to cross the street will be essentially impossible for them without the use of an assistant. Mr. de Maine then stated that the proposed skybridge would increase accessibility for people with various disabilities, allowing them to easily visit family and friends in the other facility. Mr. de Maine closed by mentioning the senior living facility includes a clinical liaison nurse to assist in case of a medical emergency and that without the skybridge, it would be more difficult for them to access the other facility to respond to any emergency.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- Availability of alternatives
- Visual impacts on the structure from the ROW
- Changes and effect on pedestrian patterns at the street level
- Materials
- Refinements to the concept

Availability of alternatives

While the SDC members did not have an opportunity to review the transportation report documenting unsafe conditions for pedestrians along 8th Avenue, they agreed that taking pedestrians off the street would not help the City in achieving its goals related to Vision Zero. Commissioners were not convinced by the project team's argument that 8th Ave was unsafe for pedestrians to cross. Commissioners then commented that with or without the skybridge, there would need to be safety improvements to 8th Ave for all pedestrians. The Commission then commended the project team for proposing traffic calming improvements at the 8th Ave and Columbia St intersection.

Visual impacts of the structure from the ROW

While the SDC appreciated the thoughtfulness and level of detail that went into the design of the skybridge, several commissioners thought the proposed skybridge might serve as a distraction along 8th Ave. Commissioners commented that 8th Ave is a greenway with a mature street tree canopy and worry that the skybridge would detract from that.

Changes and effect on pedestrian patterns at street level

While the SDC appreciated the level of detail provided regarding trips between the two facilities, they agreed the skybridge would have a negative impact on pedestrian patterns at the street level. While commissioners acknowledged that a skybridge would help facilitate movement and the trips between buildings were not really neighborhood activators, they also recognized that it would greatly reduce the visibility of a specific population group within the neighborhood. The Commission then recognized that the proposed skybridge, which will be privately used, would take away surrounding public resources, such as light, air, and views.

The Commission recognized how both the existing mature street tree canopy and proposed art could attract pedestrians to walk down 8th Ave, but acknowledged how the proposed art would exist solely because of the

skybridge, which might not be necessary for at grade pedestrian movement. Commissioners also commented that if the skybridge attracts more pedestrians to walk down 8th Ave, then traffic safety improvements would have to be improved to help mitigate increased pedestrian use.

Materials

The SDC appreciated the proposed design of the skybridge as well as the materials used. Specifically, commissioners appreciated the high level of transparency included in the design. Commissioners also commented that the art piece looks really promising. Commissioners then recommend the project team consider materials that would reduce the possibility of glare. The commission also recommended the project team think about long term maintenance with having a large percentage of transparent material at the tree canopy level.

Refinements to the concept

The SDC discussed the necessity of the skybridge as it relates to the programming in each facility. Commissioners concluded that it appeared the skybridge was necessary for the programming between the existing and proposed buildings, in part due to the design of the new structure. The commission indicated that due to skybridges being temporary structures, they cannot be fundamentally linked to the programming.

The SDC then discussed equity issues regarding the proposed skybridge. Commissioners noted that the City includes the aging, and if a skybridge is the only way for aging populations to occupy the City, then it is a loss to the City, but this is a larger policy consideration. Commissioners agreed that the solution to increasing safety and access is not to construct a skybridge. Several commissioners also worried about the precedent this skybridge would set for senior living facilities and other developments as they continue to grow and expand in the future.

Action

The Commission thanked the project team for their presentation on merit for the Olympic Skybridge project. Although the Commission appreciated the thoughtful design of the proposed skybridge and related street improvements, the SDC agreed that the applicant did not establish a compelling case for the necessity of the skybridge and that the skybridge would not address safety and access at the street level. The Commission was also concerned with the precedent this project would set for other senior living facilities as they expand. The SDC voted 0-5 vote not to approve the merit for the Olympic Skybridge project.