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Subject: Skybridge Permits		Code and Section Reference: SMC Chapter 15.64					
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		<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Approved</td> <td>Date</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(signature on file) Grace Crunican, SDOT Director</td> <td>12/21/06</td> </tr> </table>		Approved	Date	(signature on file) Grace Crunican, SDOT Director	12/21/06
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Index: Street and Sidewalk Use, Skybridges		<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Approved</td> <td>Date</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(signature on file) Diane Sugimura, DPD Director</td> <td>12/21/06</td> </tr> </table>		Approved	Date	(signature on file) Diane Sugimura, DPD Director	12/21/06
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Background

Seattle's street rights-of-way are an important and complex public resource. The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) is authorized to manage Seattle's transportation system and strives to operate and maintain this system to support public health and safety for the traveling public of all ages and abilities. SDOT is also responsible for overseeing permit processes for public rights-of-way, including the skybridge permit application process. Seattle Municipal Code chapter 15.64 establishes the procedures to apply for a skybridge permit within the City of Seattle. According to SMC 15.64.010, skybridge applications "shall be reviewed with regard to how well they serve the public interest and their relationship to the cityscape."

Rule

The Seattle Municipal Code defines the policy intent, procedures and criteria by which SDOT reviews skybridge applications. The purpose of this Rule is to interpret the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 15.64 policies on skybridges. Consistent with direction in the Comprehensive Plan, the City of Seattle encourages at-grade crossings and discourages above-grade pedestrian connections of streets, alleys and public spaces in order to enliven the street-level pedestrian environment. SDOT is responsible for the skybridge review and permitting process. In addition to approving the construction documents for skybridges, DPD is responsible for leading related policy review functions, including the Major Institution Master Plan process, support for the Seattle Design Commission, and oversight of the Seattle Design Review Boards.

This rule also identifies how the public interest regarding skybridges shall be met through the discretionary review process for skybridge proposals and renewals, as well as defining the skybridge permit review process.

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1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) Joint Director's Rule is to:

- Interpret the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 15.64 policies on skybridges;
- Clarify the City's strong intention to limit the proliferation of skybridges, with few exceptions;
- Encourage at-grade crossings of streets, alleys and public spaces in order to enliven the street-level pedestrian environment and discourage above-grade pedestrian connections;
- Clearly define how the public interest regarding skybridges shall be met through the discretionary review process for skybridge proposals and renewals;
- Clearly articulate the skybridge permit review process; and,
- Further define the factors identified in SMC 15.64 that the City of Seattle examines when skybridge proposals or renewals are considered by the city.

1.2 Background

1.2a Definition

The term "skybridge" is generally used to refer to an above-grade connection linking structures across a public right-of-way, usually an alley or a street. A skybridge may be an open or

enclosed structure that accommodates pedestrian traffic only, and is not usually used for other purposes. Skybridges are typically proposed to link shared or dependent functions across a street or alley.

1.2b Skybridge Permits

Skybridges are regarded as temporary structures and are usually granted with a 10-year term permit that is renewable up to 30 years. The City reserves the right to require removal of a skybridge at any time, at no expense to the City. There is no right to acquire or use public right-of-way. A skybridge permit provides for the use of the right-of-way under the terms and conditions of the permit or until the permit expires or is revoked. The skybridge permit review process is administered by [SDOT's Street Use Division](#).

1.2c Existing Policies

SMC 15.64 establishes the procedures and criteria for applying for, permitting, building, operating, and maintaining a skybridge within the City of Seattle. According to SMC 15.64 it is the City's existing policy to "limit the proliferation and adverse effects of skybridges," and that skybridge applications "shall be reviewed with regard to how well they serve the public interest and their relationship to the cityscape."

The Municipal Code identifies a number of conditions to be taken into consideration in reviewing a skybridge application, but does not dictate how the evaluation of these conditions is to be used to approve or deny a request. This discretionary review process allows for substantial flexibility in considering skybridge requests and despite strong policy direction to the contrary, has historically resulted in the denial of few permits.

Prior to adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 1994, the Downtown Land Use and Transportation Plan (LUTP), 1985, was the definitive policy document guiding development in the downtown area. The LUTP included policies that strongly discouraged skybridges, primarily on the grounds that they reduce pedestrian activity in the public street level environment and obstruct views.

The Neighborhood Plan Element of the City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan includes policy guidance that supports pedestrian travel and an active pedestrian environment at street level. The Comprehensive Plan and Transportation Strategic Plan policies pertaining to the discretionary review process for skybridges and below-grade crossings can be found in [Attachment A: Citywide Policy Direction related to Skybridges and Below Grade Crossings](#).

1.2d Potential Streetscape Impacts

Skybridges typically have the following impacts on the streetscape:

- **Remove pedestrian activity from the street by providing grade separated access.** This is of particular concern in urban centers and urban villages where pedestrian activity contributes to the vitality of the streetscape.
- **Impact viability of street-level retail.** By diverting pedestrian activity away from the street, skybridges can have an impact on ground floor retail viability. This is especially true if a skybridge links "second floor" retail uses across a street, effectively creating a second-story circulation network.
- **Create a private or semi-public crossing option.** Skybridges create a private or semi-public crossing of a public space that can result in social inequity if pushed to the extreme. This is a reality in certain US cities where skybridges are a common way to connect private

retail spaces across streets, leaving the street space below to those who are economically or socially disadvantaged.

- **View blockage.** This is of particular concern regarding protected views that are regulated by the State Environmental Protection Act and the Land Use Code.
- **Shade and shadow.** Skybridges cast shade and shadow on the streetscape below. Dark, shadowy spaces below a skybridge can be perceived as a security risk to pedestrians at street level.
- **Urban Design.** Skybridges alter the physical environment. They introduce a significant visual element to the streetscape that is challenging to mitigate.

2.1 The City of Seattle's Role in the Skybridge Proposal and Renewal Process

It is SDOT's role, with participation from DPD, to:

- Balance the criteria in the SMC with the expression of public interest;
- Confirm that the skybridge will be consistent with the goals and policies for the location where it is being proposed;
- Provide potentially affected agencies and utilities the opportunity to review and comment on skybridge proposals;
- Determine if proposed skybridges are technically feasible;
- Advise the Executive and Legislative branches of City government on the appropriateness of a skybridge proposal;
- Review and approve Major Institution Master Plan (MIMPs); and
- Administer the term permit issuance and renewal process for approved skybridge proposals and renewals.

2.2 Skybridge Permit Checklist

SDOT has developed a [Skybridge Permit Checklist Client Assistance Memo](#) (SDOT CAM 2207) to be used by the Applicant before submitting a skybridge application. The checklist includes the items that comprise a complete petition submittal as well as information on the review and approval process. The checklist will also be used by the City's Skybridge Review Committee to review applications and determine if they are complete and if they meet the intent of SMC 15.64.

3.1 Skybridge Petition Criteria

The Seattle Municipal Code provides a [list of criteria](#) that will be considered in the review of a skybridge petition. Material addressing each of the criteria must be provided at the time of the petition. In addition, the City must determine whether the proposal meets the intent of the SMC; serves the public interest; and fits within a broader urban design context. The criteria are:

1. **Horizontal and vertical clearance:** Provide information about the street classification; the height of the proposed skybridge above grade; and the width of the proposed skybridge.
2. **Structural adequacy:** Submit structural calculations for SDOT's review.
3. **Potential conflict with existing or proposed utilities, street lighting or traffic control devices:** Provide information detailing any impacts to utilities, street lighting, or traffic control devices.

4. **View blockage:** Demonstrate that there will be no adverse effect upon a view within any view corridor identified in [SMC 23.49.024, View Corridor Requirements](#) or 25.05.675P, Public View Protection. Provide information as to impacts to public views; identify whether this is a protected view corridor or provides views of public amenities or landmarks. Address how view impacts are addressed by the design and how view impacts may be mitigated.
5. **Interruption or interference with existing streetscape:** Provide information about the pedestrian environment of the proposal. Describe proposed pedestrian enhancements and how the project will provide for an active street environment. Explore all opportunities to incorporate public art and lighting at street level.
6. **Reduction of natural light:** Address potential shadow impacts from the skybridge and provide information about lighting of the skybridge and under the skybridge. Provide information about pedestrian lighting around the proposal. Use transparent or translucent materials.
7. **Reduction of pedestrian activity at street level:** Provide information about any loss of pedestrian activity at the street. Consistent with a number of goals in the Comprehensive Plan, the City values pedestrian activity at street level. The City will review all skybridge proposals to determine whether a skybridge is clearly necessary to link critical and essential functions of the building, or if it is proposed merely for convenience. To inform this review, provide information about the proposed street environment and how it will be enlivened, including proposed retail, building entries, open space, plazas, art, lighting, landscaping enhancements and other elements to attract pedestrians.
8. **The number of pedestrians projected to use the skybridge:** Provide the number of pedestrians anticipated to use the skybridge on a daily basis, identify pedestrian use associated with the project, general public use, and "pass through" users. Indicate whether the location of the skybridge will increase access by pedestrians to rapid transit stations or other major public transportation facilities.
9. **Effect on commerce and enjoyment of neighboring land use:** Provide information about the context for the proposed skybridge. Provide a nine-block urban design analysis that identifies zoning, street classification, major view points, public amenities such as parks, and retail, restaurant or other uses that draw pedestrians. Provide analysis as to how the proposed skybridge impacts or could enhance the adjacent community. Identify if the skybridge provides a connection identified in an adopted neighborhood plan.
10. **Availability of reasonable alternatives:** Demonstrate how the skybridge is integral to the project, and how without the skybridge, the principal uses to be served would be unable to operate. Provide information about the range of alternatives considered. This should include an at-grade crossing. Indicate if the proposed site is a location where at-grade crossings are otherwise prohibited or discouraged—such as across freeways or rail yards. In addition address whether functional or work groups might be organized so that uses could be located together without the need for a skybridge connection.
11. **Effect on traffic and pedestrian safety:** Demonstrate that the skybridge will not result in substantial, negative impacts on the current or potential use of the street or alley, including use by pedestrians. Provide information about traffic and safety impacts from the proposal.
12. **Accessibility for elderly and handicapped:** Provide information about accessibility and use of the proposed skybridge, including ADA compliance. Identify if the skybridge will enhance pedestrian circulation, increase public safety, or enable compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in areas where pedestrian travel on the street is either severely hampered or unsafe due to:

- Major topographic barriers, railroad rights-of-way, or other substantial obstructions to pedestrian circulation; or,
- Adverse street conditions characterized by a high volume and speed of traffic, limited number of controlled intersections, designation as a Major Truck Street, or substantial vehicular/pedestrian conflicts along the sidewalk or alley (e.g., multiple curb cuts for parking, loading or service access, or when principal parking access is from the alley).

In addition, provide information as to how the proposal is in the public interest as required by SMC 15.64.065. Additional maps or documentation may be requested by SDOT to respond to questions or concerns identified during the review of the proposed skybridge.

4.1 Permit Renewals

When a skybridge permit is granted, the permit will specify the terms, conditions, and fees associated with the permit. In general, skybridge permits are granted for a ten-year term, which can be renewed twice for a total of 30 years. If an applicant seeks to renew a permit after the initial ten-year term;

- SDOT will review whether the right-of-way is needed for any street or utility purpose;
- SDOT will review the fees and assess the adequacy of insurance provisions, bonds or maintenance agreements; and,
- SDOT will review whether the skybridge is still in use, is well maintained and whether the applicant has met any other conditions of the permit such as providing and maintaining streetscape enhancements.

The granting of a new skybridge permit beyond the period and terms established in the initial permit (generally a total of 30 years) is not assured. In the event that an applicant seeks a renewal after the initial term and two renewals have expired, SDOT will convene the Skybridge Review Committee. The Review Committee will determine what level of review is required and what information is necessary for the review. The review may include review by the Design Commission, utilities, structural review, or review for consistency with current City plans, zoning, or code requirements. The information requested may include a justification for the renewal, whether there are changed conditions in the area, current business needs for the skybridge, assessment of whether there have been impacts over time on the pedestrian environment and streetscape. Following this determination, the permit review process will then proceed in the same manner as the review of a new permit.

Attachment A: Citywide Policies Related to Skybridges

City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan, Neighborhood Plan Element (2004)

Urban Form Goal: DT-G4: Use regulations in the Land Use Code and other measures to encourage public and private development that contributes positively to the downtown physical environment by:

1. Enhancing the relationship of downtown to its spectacular setting of water, hills and mountains;
2. Preserving important public views;
3. Ensuring light and air at street level and in public parks;
4. Establishing a high quality pedestrian oriented street environment;
5. Reinforcing the vitality and special character of downtown's many parts;
6. Creating new downtown parks and open spaces at strategic locations;
7. Preserving downtown's important historic buildings to provide a tangible link to the past;
8. Adequately mitigating impacts of more intensive redevelopment on the quality of the physical environment.

Public Safety Goal: DT-G12 Promote public safety by encouraging conditions that contribute to a safe and friendly urban environment including:

- Maintaining streets and open spaces as active, well designed public places;
- Supporting twenty-four hour activity in a manner that minimizes conflicts among different uses; accommodating a mix of people from all income, age, and social groups; and,
- Providing for needed human services within the limits of a neighborhood's capacity to support them.

DT-UDP6: Employ development standards that guide the form and arrangement of large buildings to reduce shadow and wind impacts at the street level, promote a human scale, and maintain a strong physical relationship with the pedestrian environment. In areas where consistency of building form is important to maintaining an identifiable character and function, regulate building bulk to integrate new and existing development. Limit the bulk of tall buildings in residential areas to provide for light, air and views at street level and reduce the perceived scale of the buildings. Vary development standards to reduce impacts of large-scale buildings by district consistent with the desired scale and development pattern in the area.

DT-UDP8 Designate as view corridors street segments providing street level views of important natural features, which may include views to Elliott Bay, West Seattle, Mount Rainier and the Olympic Mountains. Protect view corridors through regulations controlling actions within the public right-of-way, as well as through reasonable development standards for abutting property, consistent with Policy UD 9: View Corridor Setbacks. Consider impacts on designated view corridors in the evaluations of street vacations and encroachments.

DT-UDP8 Designate as view corridors street segments providing street level views of important natural features, which may include views to Elliott Bay, West Seattle, Mount Rainier and the Olympic Mountains. Protect view corridors through regulations controlling actions within the public right-of-way, as well as through reasonable development standards for abutting property,

consistent with Policy UD 9: View Corridor Setbacks. Consider impacts on designated view corridors in the evaluations of street vacations and encroachments.

DT-UDP10 As appropriate for each land use district and type of street environment desired, maintain a strong relationship between buildings and the sidewalk environment through specific street level development standards. The standards are intended to:

1. make streets enjoyable and pleasant places to be;
2. provide visual interest for pedestrians;
3. provide a comfortable sense of enclosure along the street;
4. integrate individual buildings within the streetscape;
5. bring the activity occurring within buildings into direct contact with the street environment;
6. provide strong edges to clearly define public open spaces; and
7. ensure adequate conditions to support higher density development occurring on abutting properties.

DT-UDP11 Regulate uses at street level in certain areas in order to generate pedestrian interest and activity in conformance with policies for the pedestrian environment. Promote street level uses to reinforce existing retail concentrations, enhance main pedestrian links between areas, and generate new pedestrian activity where appropriate to meet area objectives without diluting existing concentrations of retail activity. Promote active and accessible uses at the street level of new development where it is important to maintain the continuity of retail activity. Consider measures to promote street level space of adequate size and sufficient flexibility to accommodate a variety of retail and service activities. Encourage incorporation, as appropriate, of street level uses as part of open space public amenity features provided for a floor area bonus to promote activity and increase public use of these spaces. To encourage active and accessible street level uses throughout downtown, consider appropriate exemptions of these uses from floor area limits.

DT-UDP13 Further promote the urban design and development objectives of these policies through the City's design review process to ensure that downtown development is orderly, predictable, and aesthetically pleasing.

Transportation Strategic Plan Policy Direction on Alleys

S7. Encourage the Retention of Alleys for Service and Access to Property.

Improved alleys are an important part of Seattle's street network. The primary purpose of alleys is to provide for access to adjacent properties, utilities, and service functions. Wherever possible, it is important that service and utility functions be located in alleys to protect the character of the adjacent streets that serve a broader purpose, such as access to property by pedestrians, bicyclists, transit patrons as well as for street trees and landscaping and other amenities. In neighborhood business districts, SDOT may allow adjacent property owners to provide pedestrian-oriented design features in the alley. SDOT makes these decisions on a case by case basis and requires that the alley's primary purpose is met, public safety issues are addressed, and the property owner agrees to maintain the improvements. SDOT will continue to work with City Council, the Seattle Design Commission, property owners and community groups to retain alleys for their primary purpose through project review for alley vacations and improvements.