

Street Vacations & Term Permits

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Presentation Outline

- Introductions
- What is right-of-way (ROW)?
- ROW Enhancements
- Street Vacation Policies
 - Public Trust Analysis
 - Public Benefits
- Street Vacation Examples
- Significant Structure Term Permits
- Skybridge Term Permit
- Term Permit Process

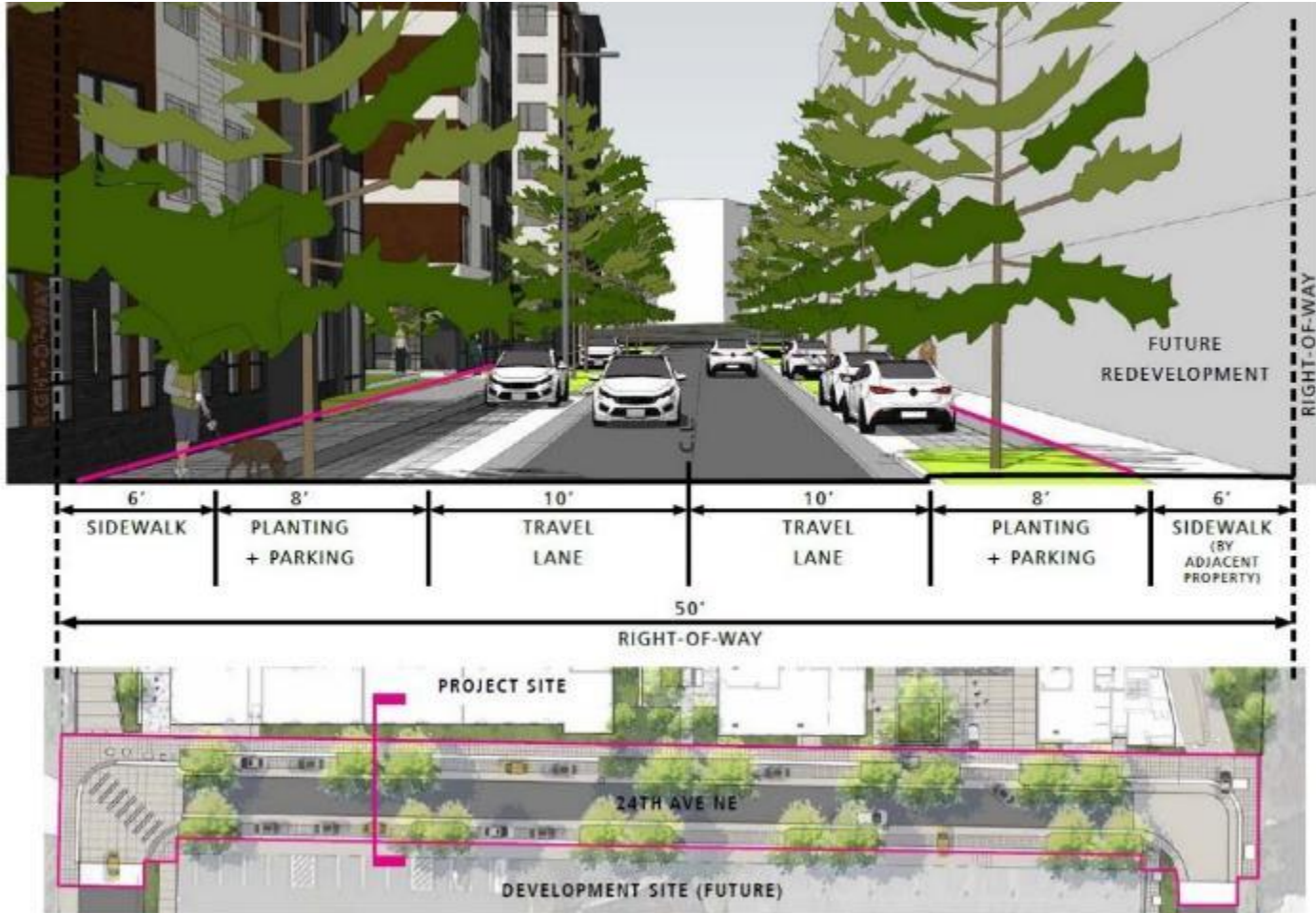


How Street Vacations Change Seattle



Last Updated January 2026

What is Right-of-Way?



Trailside - 24th Ave NE improvements

- Property dedicated or acquired for public transportation and utility use, including streets and alleys
- Held in public trust - City acts as trustee
- Generally created by plat or dedication
- No rights to vacate or use for private purposes
- Vacated property may only be acquired by abutting property owners
- Vacation must be in public interest (e.g. public trust, public benefits)

ROW Enhancements

Sources:

- Streets Illustrated Manual
- Street Vacation Policies
- Street Concept Plans
- Design Principles
- Community Goals
- Transportation Levy
- Pedestrian and Bike Master Plan



Elements beyond code, such as:

- Widened sidewalks
- Special pavement treatments
- Additional landscaping
- Seasonal and understory plantings
- Art
- Artist fabricated street furniture
- Murals
- Wayfinding
- Community history or cultural references
- Other elements that enhance the pedestrian realm

City Council Street Vacation Policies



Adopted policies per Resolution 31809 (2018), and criteria per RCW 35.79, and SMC 15.62



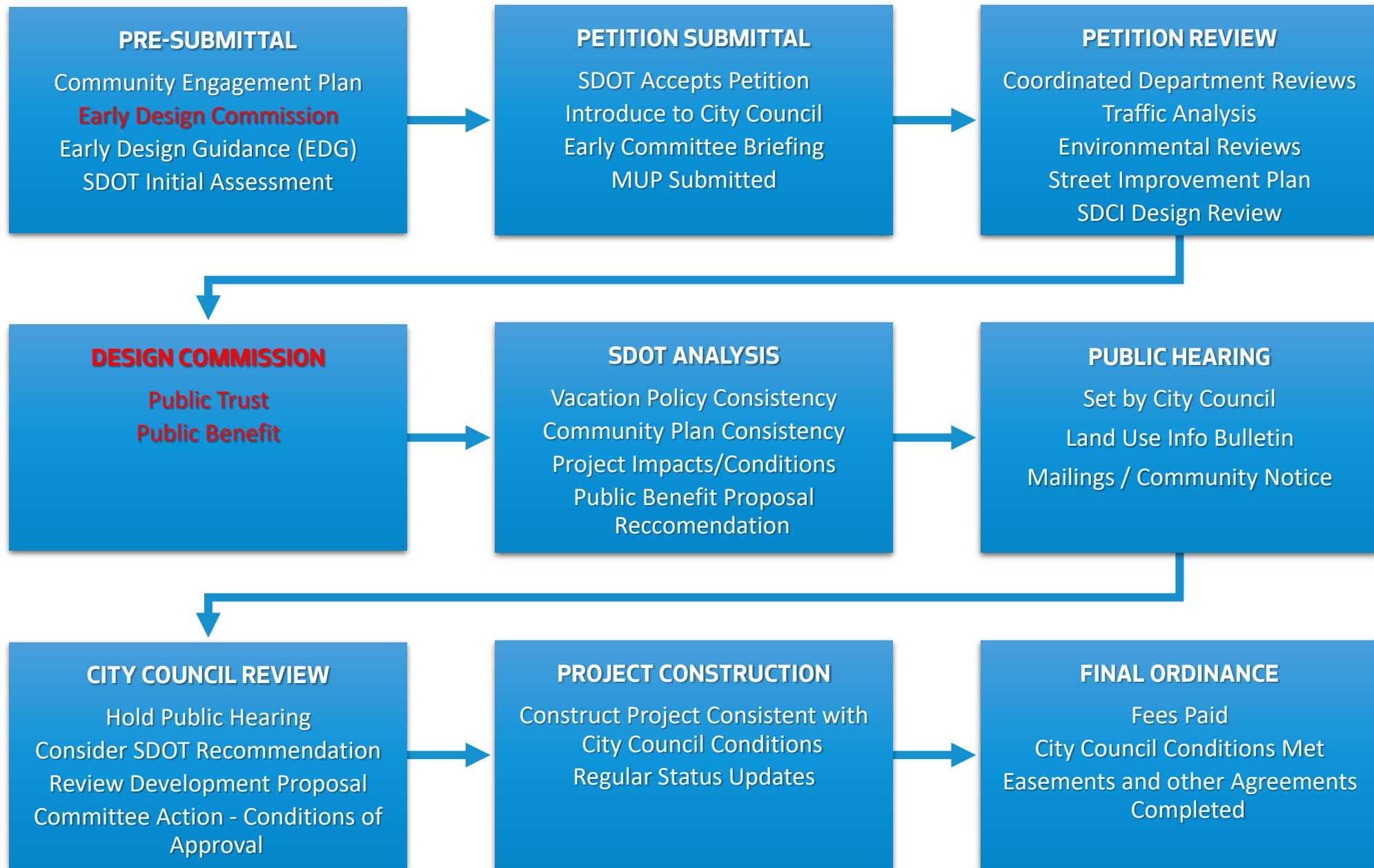
Policies establish the principles of the review process and information required



Policies define "public benefit analysis" and "public trust"



Legislative function under State law, SDOT administers the process at request of City Council



Step 1: Vacation Public Trust Analysis

Based on role of streets and alleys:

- Circulation
- Access
- Utilities
- Open Space
- Light and Air
- Views
- Free Speech
- Public Assembly
- Land Use and Urban Form



Step 2: Vacation Public Benefits

Overview

- Long-term benefit to the public
- Proportional to the benefit gained due to the vacation
- Beyond mitigating the impacts of development or code requirements
- Consider race and social equity (such as off-site public improvements)
- Include ideas from community

Categories

- Physical - streetscape enhancements, art, wayfinding, plazas, bike and ped enhancements, etc.
- Community programming
- Real property
- On-site or off-site
- Payment of funds in certain circumstances (in addition to other fees)

Significant Structure Term Permits

Significant structures: objects that have a long duration in ROW; impede City or public use of the public space or are necessary for functions of the adjacent property.

- Tunnels, pipelines, private utilities, plazas, and others.

City Council approves by ordinance for a fixed time, or Term. Recommendation to Council following review by SDOT and Seattle Design Commission (SDC).

Public benefit mitigation may be required for at grade structures.



King County Alki Transformer

Term Permit Process

- ❑ **Step 1:** Resolution – early conceptual approval for new projects and occurs after SDC review (if applicable). Identifies conditions to be met prior to final approval.
- ❑ **Step 2:** Ordinance – occurs at 100% design, after conditions have been met, and is the final approval.
 - **New structures** – set duration, terms and conditions.
 - **Term permit expiration** – at end of term, continued use requires a new application.

City Council reviews and may approve, deny or modify legislation.



Fremont Solar Collector

Skybridge Term Permits

Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) defines the three types of skybridges:

- **Public use:** open to everyone and no access barriers
 - **Semi-public use:** open to everyone, but access may be limited or through a private structure
 - **Private use:** access is restricted for private users only
- The City discourages strictly private skybridges but has allowed skybridges for public or semi-public uses.
 - SDOT leads interdepartmental review through Skybridge Review Committee (SRC).
 - SDC reviews and makes recommendation to SDOT Director.
 - Public benefit mitigation required.



UW Skybridge

Skybridge Review

SDOT and the SRC review for code compliance, technical feasibility, and policy objectives.

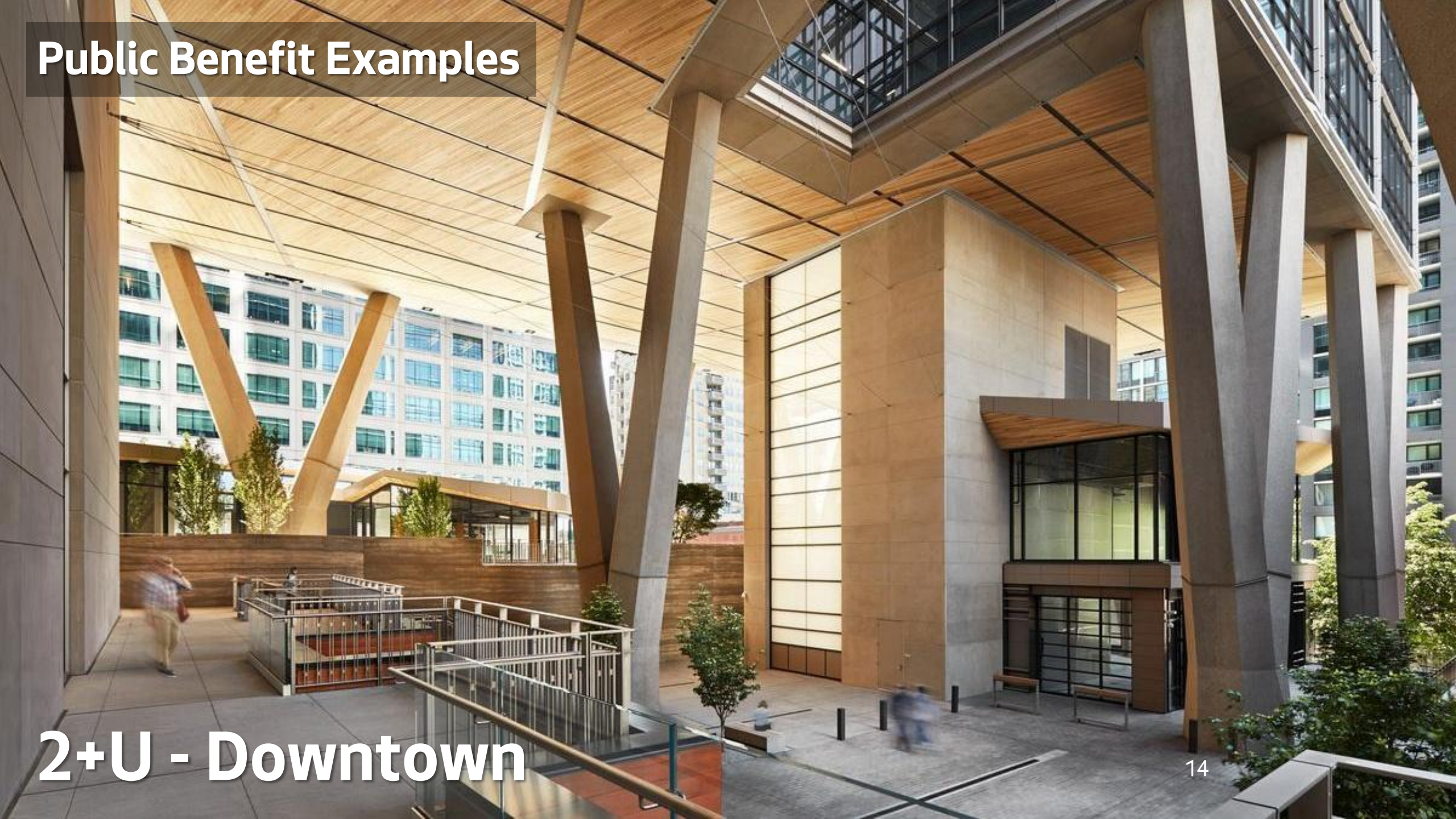
- Consider compelling need that cannot be accommodated on private property.
- Share recommendation to SDC.

SDC reviews urban design implications, impact on surrounding streets, and merits of public benefit proposal.



Pike Place Market Skybridge

Public Benefit Examples



2+U - Downtown

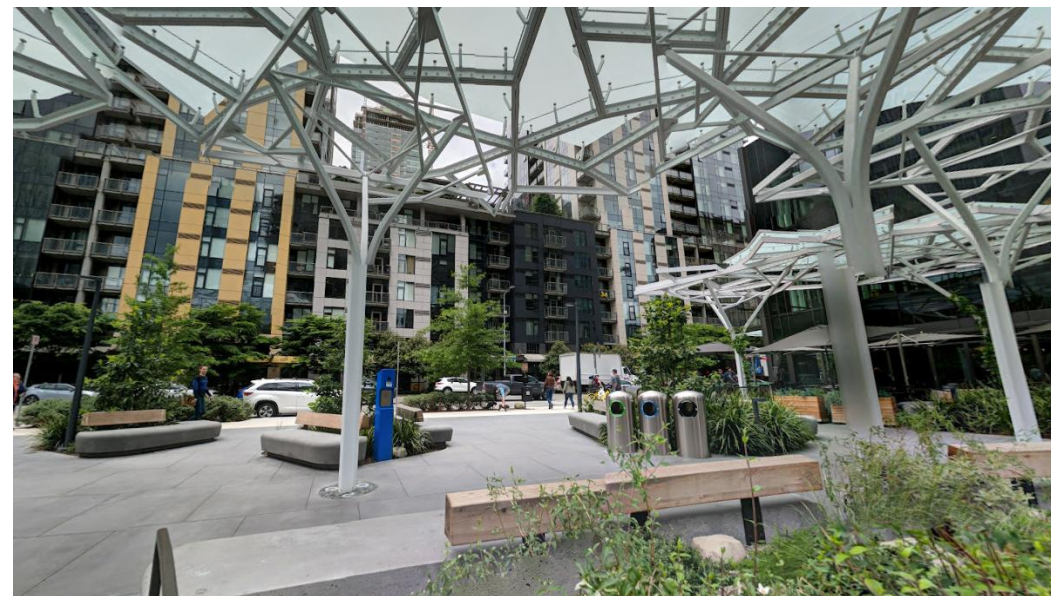
SCL Broad Street Substation





Lennar Ovation Alley Vacation

Amazon Spheres - Denny Triangle Alley



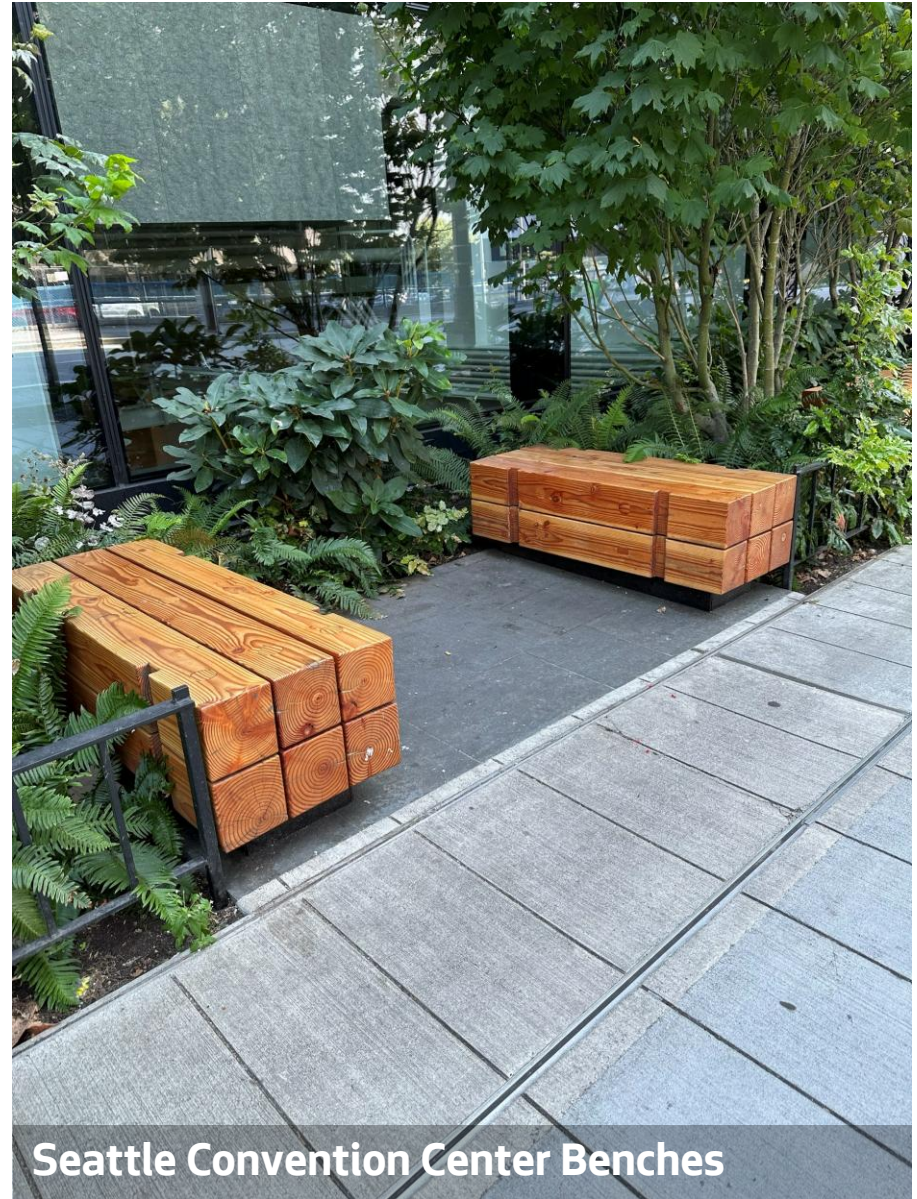
Seattle Convention Center



Shared Elements



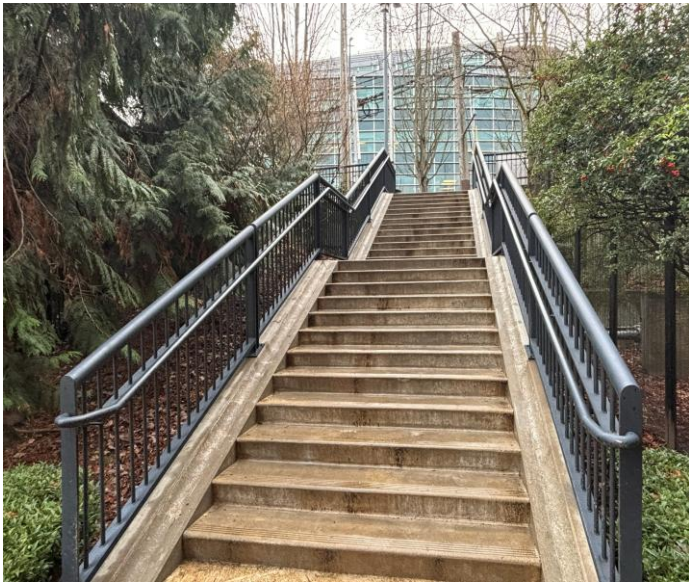
Fred Hutch Skybridge Benches



Seattle Convention Center Benches

UW Skybridge Network - Burke Gilman Trail Upgrades





Fred Hutch Skybridge

Westin Hotel - Giant Sequoia Tree





Questions?

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