

May 13, 2024

MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation Committee
From: Lish Whitson, Analyst
Subject: CBs 120768 & 120769: UW 12th Avenue Skybridge Permit Renewals

On May 21, 2024, the Transportation Committee will consider Council Bills (CB) [120768](#) and [120769](#), which would renew and amend approval for the University of Washington's (UW) skybridges over 12th Avenue NE, south of NE 45th Street and the alley between 11th and 12th Avenues NE on the same block, in Council District 4. The skybridges connect the University of Washington Tower, an office building on the east side of 12th Avenue NE, to parking garages located on the west side of 12th. Both bills would provide for a fifteen-year term after adoption.

This memorandum describes the skybridges and the changes requested. Attachment 1 describes the relevant City regulations that guide the Council's consideration of skybridge permit renewals.

University of Washington Tower Skybridges

A permit for a pedestrian and vehicular skybridge across the alley between two parking garages located on the block south of NE 45th Street between 11th and 12th Avenues NE was first granted by the City Council in 1968 under [Ordinance 96899](#). The following year, the City Council granted a permit for a pedestrian skybridge across 12th Avenue NE under [Ordinance 97577](#) to connect the parking garages to the office tower on the east side of 12th Avenue. Permission to maintain the skybridges has continued since that original approval. Most recent approvals were granted under Ordinances [119161](#) in 1998 and [119532](#) in 1999.

In 2006, the UW acquired the University of Washington Tower and the parking garages, along with the skybridges that connect them. In 2010, Ordinances [123234](#) and [123242](#) recognized the transfer of ownership of the bridges to the UW and updated the permit terms. Approval of the alley skybridge permit was scheduled to expire in 2018 and approval of the skybridge over 12th Avenue was scheduled to expire in 2019. The UW has complied with all of the requirements of these ordinances.

The UW's Board of Regents has requested that the skybridge permits be renewed for one additional fifteen-year term, after which the UW would need to repermit the skybridges. CBs 120768 and 120769 would implement that request. The bills comply with the terms and conditions required under the Seattle Municipal Code and the Seattle Department of Transportation recommends approval.

Attachments:

1. Skybridge Permit Renewals and Repermitting

cc: Ben Noble, Director
Aly Pennucci, Deputy Director

Attachment 1

Skybridge Permit Renewals and Repermitting

Property owners who seek to build a new pedestrian bridge that would encroach over and above a public place¹ must seek skybridge permit approval from the City Council under Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) [Chapter 15.64](#).

The current practice of the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) is to recommend 15-year permits that can be renewed for an additional 15-years for a total term of approval of 30 years. After that 30-year period, the skybridge's owner will need a new permit from the Council to continue operating the skybridge. The code provides for two different times when the Council may be called on to review an existing term permit: at the expiration of a term or during the renewal of a term permit if amendments are proposed.

Renewals

The code allows for renewals of a skybridge permit only if permitted in the original ordinance. [SMC 15.64.083](#) provides authority to the Director of the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to recommend amendments at term renewal. Amendments may only be made if consistent with the following terms and conditions listed in [SMC 15.64.090](#) and are made via ordinance:

- the term of years that permission is granted and renewal periods, if any;
- provision for regular inspection of and procedures for closure or removal of the skybridge;
- requirements for performance bonds, public liability insurance, indemnification, conformance with other laws, and annual fees;
- prohibition against assignment without City consent;
- a requirement for execution and recording of a covenant ensuring that obligations and conditions imposed on the permittee run with the land, where applicable;
- public benefit mitigation elements; and
- timely acceptance of permission.

¹ A "public place" is defined as: "public right-of-way and the space above or beneath its surface, whether or not opened or improved, including streets, avenues, ways, boulevards, drives, places, alleys, sidewalks, planting strips, squares, triangles, and plazas that are not privately owned." ([SMC 16.02.046](#))

Repermitting

If, at the end of a permit's term, the skybridge owner determines that they want to continue to operate the skybridge, they must request a new permit. SDOT will review the proposal, including any public benefits to be provided to offset impacts to the public realm. [SMC 15.64.087](#) provides the following requirements for Council consideration of the renewal of a skybridge permit:

Upon completion of final review of an application to continue to maintain and operate an existing skybridge upon expiration of the term of the permission (including any authorized renewals), the Director of Transportation shall transmit a final recommendation to the City Council for its decision to grant or deny the application for a term permit to continue to maintain and operate an existing skybridge. The Council shall include in its consideration those elements set out in [Section 15.64.086.C](#). The City Council shall not approve an application to continue to maintain and operate an existing skybridge upon term expiration unless it finds that continued maintenance and operation of the skybridge is in the public interest and no reasonable alternative to the skybridge exists.

Section 15.64.086.C indicates that the Council should consider these elements in its review of whether to repermit a skybridge:

1. Adequacy of horizontal and vertical clearance;
2. Any known conflicts with existing or proposed utilities, street lighting, traffic control devices, or other upcoming transportation projects;
3. View blockage;
4. Interruption or interference with existing streetscape or other street amenities;
5. Impacts due to reduction of natural light;
6. Reduction of and effect on pedestrian activity at street level;
7. Number of pedestrians that currently use the skybridge;
8. Effect on commerce and enjoyment of neighboring land uses;
9. Availability of reasonable alternatives;
10. Changed conditions in the vicinity since original installation;
11. Effect on traffic and pedestrian safety;
12. Accessibility for the elderly and handicapped; and
13. The public benefit mitigation elements, or changes to the existing public benefit mitigation elements, provided by the proposal.

As with permit renewals, new permits for an existing skybridge must be consistent with the terms and conditions described in SMC 15.64.090, listed above.