

March 10, 2025

MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation Committee
From: Lish Whitson, Analyst
Subject: Resolution 32166: Skyline Skybridge

On March 18, the Transportation Committee will receive a briefing on Resolution 32166, which would grant conditional approval of a new skybridge across 8th Avenue between Columbia and Cherry streets on First Hill (Council District 7).

Skybridges that are placed above the public right-of-way requires a Skybridge Term Permit under Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) [Chapter 15.64](#). Skybridges are held to a higher level of review than other types of significant structure term permits. SMC 16.64.010 states:

It is the intent of the City Council to limit the proliferation and adverse effects of skybridges. Council will consider requests for new skybridges, and the repermitting of existing skybridges upon expiration of the term of the permission, with regard to how well they serve the public interest and their relationship to the cityscape. The provisions of [Chapter 15.64](#) shall be liberally construed in carrying out the intent of the Council.

For more information about the skybridge approval process, please see Attachment 1.

Resolution 32166 contains standard conditions, including requirements that the skybridge owner file covenants and attain public liability insurance, receive all necessary permits, pay all necessary City fees, and agree to remove the skybridge at the City's discretion.

This memorandum describes the proposed skybridge, the City's review of the skybridge and recommendations, and identifies next steps.

Skyline Skybridge

The Skyline retirement community consists of two towers located on either side of 8th Avenue on First Hill, together containing 457 units for independent living, assisted living, memory support, rehabilitative care, and skilled nursing. The Cascade Tower is located at 725 9th Avenue, between 8th and 9th avenues, and the Olympic Tower is located at 715 8th Avenue on the west side of 8th. In this area, 8th Avenue is a non-arterial street.

The Cascade Tower includes facilities to provide medical services for residents of both towers. The Olympic Tower includes amenities such as a restaurant and fitness center available to residents of both towers. The proposed skybridge would connect the towers, increasing opportunities for the seniors who live at Skyline to move between Skyline's facilities without needing to go outdoors. The proposed skybridge would connect the fourth floors of the towers.

Public benefits proposed to accompany the installation of the tower include:

1. Open space improvements and activation on 8th Avenue adjacent to its building, including new plantings, furnishings, and pet relief area;
2. Integrated public art in the enhanced 8th Avenue landscape area;
3. Pedestrian improvements at 8th Avenue and Marion Street, including extending the existing curbs and curb ramps; and
4. Interpretive wayfinding signage for the Park to Park Loop project.

Skybridge Review

This is the second time that a skybridge has been proposed to connect these facilities. A previous proposal, submitted in 2019 when the Olympic Tower was undergoing permitting, was rejected by the Seattle Design Commission (SDC) and the Skybridge Review Panel, and was withdrawn. A new application was submitted in 2024, informed by residents' experience in living and moving between the two towers. In 2024, the Skybridge Review Panel recommended against approving the skybridge, but the SDC did recommend approval, and the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) has recommended approval.

On May 2 and October 17, 2024, the Seattle Design Commission recommended approval of the skybridge and the public benefit package respectively. In its minutes from the May 2 meeting, the Commission notes:

Commissioners were concerned about the precedent that this skybridge will set if it is approved by the City Council. Commissioners support for the skybridge is based on the unique set of circumstances in this proposal – improving mobility beyond ADA for residents of an existing senior living community located in two buildings divided by a right of way. Commissioners expressed that this use should not be considered like other residential uses for the purpose of future policy or precedent. Commissioners look to the City Council to ensure that if the skybridge is approved, that its approval will not establish a precedent that would conflict with Council policies that discourage the proliferation of skybridges.

In the Summary and Fiscal Note for Resolution 32166, SDOT made the following statement regarding the criteria for new skybridges in Chapter 15.64:

SDOT reviewed the proposal against the following criteria: the skybridge provides adequate clearance above-grade; is not on a view corridor; there will not be a significant reduction in natural light; it will not have a significant impact on traffic or pedestrian safety; and it will provide another accessible route for residents of the buildings to move between them to access amenities or visit friends/family. A below-grade pedestrian tunnel was not feasible. SDOT determined that the proposal was sufficiently consistent with Seattle Municipal Code 15.64.050 and recommends approval.

Next Steps

Resolution 32166, if adopted, would grant conditional approval for the Skyline skybridge. It would direct SDOT to develop a term permit ordinance for Council consideration which would respond to the conditions included in the Resolution. Approval of this resolution is a required step in the skybridge approval process and sets the terms of final approval. If the Council votes to adopt this resolution, the Council will be committing to approve future Ordinances that meet the conditions laid out in the Resolution.

If the Committee votes on Resolution 32166 at its April 1 meeting, it could be considered by the City Council as early as April 8.

Attachments:

1. Skybridge Term Permits

cc: Ben Noble, Director
Yolanda Ho, Deputy Director

Attachment 1: Skybridge Term Permits

Skybridge Permits

Property owners who seek to build a pedestrian bridge over a City street, alley, or other public place¹ must seek skybridge permit approval from the City Council under Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) [Chapter 15.64](#).

The City's skybridge regulations state that:

It is the intent of the City Council to limit the proliferation and adverse effects of Skybridges. Council will consider requests for new skybridges, and the repermitting of existing skybridges upon expiration of the term of the permission, with regard to how well they serve the public interest, and their relationship to the cityscape. The provisions of Chapter 15.64 shall be liberally construed in carrying out the intent of the Council.

Consistent with that intent, in the last ten years, new skybridges have only been approved for hospitals and medical centers, where the need to safely move patients between buildings without exposure to the weather is essential.

After receiving a skybridge application, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) files the application with the City Clerk and circulates it to interested City departments, utilities, and the Seattle Design Commission (SDC). SDOT convenes a Skybridge Review Committee to consider the application and make a recommendation to the SDOT Director who makes a recommendation to the City Council based on the Committee and Commission's recommendations.

SMC 15.64.050.C lays out a series of topics to consider in determining whether to approve a skybridge application:

1. Adequacy of horizontal and vertical clearance;
2. View blockage;
3. Interruption or interference with existing streetscape or other street amenities;
4. Impacts due to reduction of natural light;
5. Reduction of and effect on pedestrian activity at street level;
6. Number of pedestrians projected to use the skybridge;
7. Effect on commerce and enjoyment of neighboring land uses;
8. Availability of reasonable alternatives;
9. Effect on traffic and pedestrian safety;
10. Accessibility for the elderly and handicapped; and
11. The public benefit mitigation elements provided by the proposal.

Skybridges must allow continued use of the street, alley or other public place for travel, utility purposes, and other public purposes.

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](#))

When the Director is ready to make a recommendation, SDOT will transmit the recommendation along with background information to Council. A recommendation to approve the skybridge application will take the form of a Resolution.

Council Action

Upon receiving the Director's recommendation, the Council may "approve, deny, or approve with requirements or conditions" the skybridge application by Resolution. The Council's decision must consider the topics listed in SMC 15.64.050.C. According to SMC 15.64.065, the Council may not grant approval for a new skybridge "unless it finds that the skybridge is in the public interest and no reasonable alternative to the skybridge exists." If the Council seeks to approve the application, it will adopt a resolution that provides "conceptual approval." Council denial of an application is the final step in the process for a skybridge that is not approved.

Conceptual approval of the skybridge allows for publication of Master Use Permit decisions for development that includes the skybridge and allows for submission of construction plans for the skybridge. Once SDOT and the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) have determined that the construction plans are consistent with the initial plans and meet all applicable codes, SDOT will prepare a final Ordinance for Council consideration. The Ordinance will reflect any conditions for approval. SDOT will typically include conditions responding to [SMC 15.64.090](#) with language developed in consultation with the City's Risk Managers. The conditions will include the following:

- the term of years that permission is granted and renewal periods, if any;
- provision for regular inspection of the skybridge;
- 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 recorded covenant ensuring that obligations and conditions imposed on the permittee run with the land, where applicable;
- public benefit mitigation elements; and
- repeal of approval in the face of untimely acceptance of permission.

Every skybridge permit must allow the City to require that the skybridge be removed for any reason.

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 30 years, 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, which requires a new permit, or during the renewal of a term permit if amendments are proposed.