

April 25, 2022

MEMORANDUM

To: Land Use Committee
From: Ketil Freeman, Analyst
Subject: Council Bill 120287 – Modifications to Regulations for Rooftop Features

On April 27, the Land Use Committee (Committee) will have an initial briefing and discussion and will hold a public hearing on [Council Bill \(CB\) 120287](#), which would modify regulations for rooftop features.

This memo: (1) briefly describes what CB 120287 would do; (2) identifies potential amendments for future discussion that have been identified by the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) and stakeholders; and (3) sets out procedural next steps.

What Would CB 120287 Do?

To mitigate the appearance of the height, bulk, and scale of structures, the Land Use Code (Code) regulates rooftop features. Rooftop features are defined by the Code as, “any part of or attachment to the structure that projects above a roof line,”¹ and include things like mechanical equipment, parapets and railings, penthouses for stair and elevator overruns, solar collectors, greenhouses, and amenity areas. Generally speaking, the lower a building, the more likely it is for a person to see rooftop features from the street and for the building to, consequently, appear taller and bulkier.

The Code regulates rooftop features through three primary means: (1) percentage limits on rooftop coverage, (2) limitations on the height of rooftop features, and (3) screening and roof-edge setback requirements.

Changes to construction codes, such as the Energy Code, to limit carbon emissions have increased space requirements for mechanical equipment to meet code requirements. Additionally, changes in market preference have increased demand for amenity areas for building tenants and eating and drinking establishments on rooftops.

CB 120287 would primarily:

- Increase rooftop coverage limits (the amount of the proposed increase varies by zone);
- Clarify the types of allowed rooftop features and make allowable features more consistent across zones;

¹ [Seattle Municipal Code 23.84A.032](#).

- Allow penthouses for lodging uses and eating and drinking establishments to exceed the height limit, subject to coverage limits, in some Pioneer Square Mixed zones; and
- Make other clarifying edits to the text of the Code.

Potential Amendments for Future Discussion

SDCI and other stakeholders have identified three potential amendments for Committee consideration:

1. SDCI has identified a clarifying amendment that would allow solar collectors in commercial zones with a 55-foot height limit to exceed that maximum height by up to seven feet. Otherwise, the Code would be silent on the extent to which solar collectors could exceed the height limit for those zones at that height limit.
2. Weber Thompson, an architecture firm, has identified an amendment to increase the elevator overrun height from 25 feet to 40 feet for buildings taller than 150 feet in the International Special Review District to accommodate higher speed elevators.
3. Weber Thompson has also identified an amendment to increase rooftop coverage from the current 15 percent to 75 percent (CB 120287 proposes an increase to 25 percent) in the International Special Review District for structures, like towers, that are subject to floor plate size limits.

These amendments are currently under review by staff.

Next Steps

The Committee will hold a public hearing on CB 120287 on April 27. Committee discussion and a potential recommendation on the bill to the City Council could occur at the next regularly scheduled meeting on May 11.

cc: Aly Pennucci, Deputy Director
Yolanda Ho, Lead Analyst