

August 12, 2020

MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation and Utilities Committee Members
From: Lish Whitson, Analyst
Subject: Council Bill 119844: Pacific Place Skybridge

On Monday, August 17, 2020 the Transportation and Utilities Committee will consider [Council Bill \(CB\) 119844](#), which would extend approval to maintain a skybridge linking Pacific Place to Nordstrom and update terms in the City's approval. The CB would grant approval for a ten-year extension, which would be the final ten-year term available under the initial skybridge approval granted under [Ordinance 118631](#) in 1997. The skybridge is located across Sixth Avenue, north of Pine Street.

Because this skybridge crosses a city street, approval must be granted by the City Council pursuant to [Seattle Municipal Code \(SMC\) Chapter 15.64 "Skybridge Term Permits"](#). The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) has worked with the new owners of Pacific Place to update the terms of approval for the skybridge.

This memorandum summarizes the skybridge approval process and describes the effect of CB 119844.

Skybridge Term Permits

A skybridge is a structure that provides for pedestrian access over a City street or right-of-way. SMC Chapter 15.64 establishes the procedures and criteria for approval of skybridges. The City's general policy is to limit the proliferation of skybridges. When the City grants approval for a skybridge, the City's approval is for a fixed length of time. Historically, the City has granted initial approval for a ten-year term, renewable two times for a total of thirty years.

[SMC 15.64.086.C](#) identifies thirteen considerations for the renewal of skybridge term permits upon the expiration of a term:

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.

The Director of the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT Director) reviews the term permit renewal petition, and transmits a recommendation to the City Council. The Council's review of the proposal considers the thirteen items noted above. SMC [15.64.087.A](#) describes the conditions under which the Council can approve an application for a skybridge:

“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.”

If the Council determines that it is appropriate to grant a new term for an existing skybridge, the Council may impose terms and conditions on the renewal. The Council must, in its approval of a skybridge term permit, “preserve the right to require the permittee to remove the skybridge at the permittee's sole cost and expense if necessary.”

Pacific Place Skybridge

The Pacific Place skybridge was built alongside the Pacific Place shopping mall to provide a connection between Nordstrom and the new parking garage and stores at Pacific Place. The skybridge provides shoppers with weather-protected passage across 6th Avenue between the two major shopping facilities.

Approval for the skybridge was granted in 1997 through Ordinance 118631. The first renewal of the term permit was granted in 2014 through Ordinance 121855, which also updated the terms of the agreement through 2017.

CB 119844

CB 119844 further amends CB 118631 to update the terms of agreement based on current best practices for drafting term permits and extends approval for a final ten-year term. CB 119844, if adopted, would be in effect through July 26, 2027. At that time, the owners of Pacific Place could apply again for approval of the skybridge and would need to provide new public benefits.

cc: Kirstan Arestad, Executive Director
Aly Pennucci, Supervising Analyst