

August 12, 2020

MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation and Utilities Committee Members
From: Lish Whitson, Analyst
Subject: Council Bill 119846: Marketside Skybridge

On Monday, August 17, 2020 the City Council will consider [Council Bill \(CB\) 119846](#), which would extend approval to maintain an existing skybridge linking the Marketside Flats apartments to the extension of Union Street west of 1st Avenue. The CB would update terms in the City's approval and grant approval for a new fifteen-year term, which could be renewed once for a total of thirty years. The skybridge was originally approved in 1987 under [Ordinance 113517](#). The skybridge crosses Post Alley on the north side of Union Street.

Because this skybridge crosses a city alley, 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 Marketplace Flats to update the terms of approval for the skybridge.

This memorandum summarizes the skybridge approval process and describes the effect of CB 119846.

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. Generally, the City grants approval for a ten-year term, renewable two times for a total term 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.”

Marketside Skybridge

The Marketside skybridge was built to connect the Marketside Flats, an apartment building located at the northeast corner of Union Street and Western Avenue, to 1st Avenue. Marketside Flats, a [City of Seattle Landmark](#), was previously the United States Immigration Center, the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union headquarters, and the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union headquarters. The skybridge provides residents with street-level access to the heart of Downtown Seattle and has been in place since the conversion of the structure to residential use.

CB 119846

CB 119846 provides approval for up to another thirty years for the skybridge, starting with an initial 15-year term. The bill updates the terms of agreement based on current best practices for drafting term permits. As part of the approval process for this new term, Marketside Flats has agreed to provide the following public benefits in the immediately surrounding area:

- Street improvements at the intersection of Western Avenue and Union Street to extend the waterfront connection at Union Street, including: new paving and landscaping, a bench/traffic barrier on the west side of Western Avenue, four new Americans with Disabilities (ADA) compliant ramps, and two marked pedestrian crossings.

- Six additional signs indicating routes connecting 1st Avenue and the waterfront and the availability of the public access elevators.
- Upgrades to the “Post Alley” sign, replacing the neon and new painting, and increasing wattage of lights along Post Alley.
- A historic marker at the front door of Marketside Flats celebrating its history as a United States Immigration center and Longshoreman/Cannery union headquarters.

CB 119846, if adopted, would be in effect through August 8, 2032, after which the owners could apply for another 15-year term.

cc: Kirstan Arestad, Executive Director
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