

Skyway Governance Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

March 22, 2019, 9:00 – 10:30 a.m. Location: Conference Room B

Attendees: Chair Andy Flamm, Ron Anderson, Charles Barklind, Heather Bunch, Barry Cipra, Thomas Dunne, Jon Fure, Peg Guilfoyle, Bill Hanley, Bill Huepenbecker, Bill Jones, Mark Jones, Nancy Kehmeier, Sanna Towns and Will Travis.

Chair Andy Flamm called the meeting to order.

Motion by Bill Hanley, seconded by Will Travis, to approve the agenda. Motion passed.

Motion by Linda McBrayner, seconded by Sanna Towns, to approve the previous committee meeting notes. Motion passed.

Chair report – Flamm explained that the committee's recommendations go to Skyway Work Group. The group has not met for the past two months, and it's his understanding that the reason the work group has not met is that this committee has not given them anything to consider. So he plans to talk with Council Member Rebecca Noecker and City staff to clarify the roles and responsibilities of this committee and the work group. He also hopes to pass a couple of resolutions today that will be passed along to the work group.

CRC staff report – Jon Fure, CRC Executive Director, said the role of any advisory committee can be difficult. Some people feel like an advisory committee can't be effective because it lacks power or authority to act. One strength of this advisory committee is its ability to engage the public in discussions and make recommendations to the work group, which is comprised of people in City government who are able to take the recommendations and determine how to implement them. A similar example is that the CRC Development Review Committee recently requested a zoning study concerning signage regulations. Community engagement is sometimes difficult – there might not be many people who want to spend time discussing things like specific zoning requirements or application processes, but that's why CRC and its advisory committees exist. A question was asked about the composition of the Skyway Work Group, and Flamm said it includes staff in the Office of the City Attorney, Dept. of Safety and Inspections (DSI), St. Paul Police Dept., Council Member Noecker's office, and a representative of the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA).

Project updates

- Wayfinding: A draft resolution was read aloud by Flamm and discussed by the group.

Motion by Bill Hanley, seconded by Will Travis to approve the following resolution. Motion passed.

Skyway Governance Advisory Committee Resolution 2019-03

Whereas: The Skyway Governance Advisory Committee (SGAC) is charged by the Saint Paul City Council with advising the Council, City staff and other interested parties on issues of concern to skyway users and other stakeholders. The SGAC holds monthly public meetings where stakeholder concerns are heard and discussed, and sponsors other outreach activities to solicit input from the entire skyway community.

Temporary skyway closures occur from time to time due to redevelopment, maintenance, repairs or other causes, preventing residents, businesspeople, visitors and other skyway users from taking their intended routes and requiring them to detour within or outside the skyway system.

There are often no signs posted giving the dates of the closure and recommended detour options, creating confusion for users and leaving them with negative impressions of Downtown Saint Paul. Those requiring accessible routes may have a difficult time finding an alternate way to get to their destinations unless adequate signage with detour information is present at skyway closures.

The City and owners of skyway-connected buildings share the responsibility for maintaining the skyway system per City ordinance and various easement agreements.

We Therefore Recommend:

That the Skyway Work Group work with building owners, managers and developers to ensure that any planned skyway closure be posted with a reasonable number of signs, in reasonable locations, giving the dates of the closure, a map showing recommended detour options and contact information should users have further questions about the closure.

That such signage be in a consistent and recognizable format in size, layout and color.

Approved and forwarded to the Skyway Work Group.

A suggestion was made to develop an email list that would include stakeholder groups, including the Downtown Alliance, the mayor's office, and other people who might be interested, and send the resolution to that list.

A question was asked about proposed detours when skyways are temporarily closed. When this has been discussed in previous committee meetings, DSI representatives have said that building owners and managers need to be engaged, because there is no way to require a sign to be put up in one building that points people to a different building. Flamm said the Skyway Work Group will hash that out.

- Safety / security: A downtown resident thanked City and Metro Transit police departments for their work. The Community Ambassadors program has also been helpful, but there are still issues at the vertical connection and skyway over the Central Station block when police officers and / or ambassadors are not there.

The group discussed whether the specific concerns were about a large number of people in the skyway at that location, such as blocking people from walking through the area, or if there are other concerns, like playing loud music or using drugs, or if some people simply are afraid to walk near people who don't look like them.

Union Depot, especially on weekends, seems to have a lot more people recently going into the skyway system and lounging around. St. Paul Police Dept. Commander Wes Denning said the department has increased the police presence in and around Union Depot as disorderly conduct has been a real problem.

- Access and Accessibility: A draft resolution was read aloud by Flamm and discussed by the group.

Motion by Linda McBrayer, seconded by Bill Hanley, to approve the following resolution. Motion passed.

Whereas: The Skyway Governance Advisory Committee (SGAC) is charged by the Saint Paul City Council with advising the Council, City staff and other interested parties on issues of concern to skyway users and other stakeholders.

The SGAC holds monthly public meetings where stakeholder concerns are heard and discussed, and sponsors other outreach activities to solicit input from the entire skyway community. Street-level ingress to the skyway system is limited and some access doors are not always required to be unlocked during skyway hours.

Skyway users have complained that they often cannot enter the skyway from street level during evening hours when certain buildings are not currently required to keep their doors unlocked.

Skyway users, especially visitors unfamiliar with skyway rules and regulations, sometimes exit the skyway system only to find they cannot get back in, despite the skyways being open. Most, if not all, street-level ingress doors do not feature signage indicating door hours.

In addition to the inconvenience caused by street-level ingress doors being locked, a concern has been raised that users may suffer harm during wintertime if they exit the skyway system and do not know how to get back in.

We Therefore Recommend:

That the Skyway Work Group explore options for increasing street-level skyway access, especially during evening hours and in key areas currently lacking adequate access such as Wabasha Street near the 7th Place theater and restaurant district.

That all street-level entrances providing access to the skyway system are posted with signs or decals indicating door hours, accessibility information and, if appropriate, directions to the nearest ingress door with longer hours and/or better accessibility accommodations.

That such signage be in a consistent and recognizable format in size, layout and color.

Approved and forwarded to the Skyway Work Group.

- Skyway Closure Signage – The group discussed the closed skyway to the Intercontinental hotel. Without signage, people have a hard time finding their way to street level and then back into the skyway system. A resident contacted the building owners and got no response, so they posted three signs that gave detour info, and as of today, two of them are still up. Also, the skyway door between the Athletic Club and Press Apartments buildings hadn't been working for over a month, and people with accessibility issues have had problems getting through those doors. It's been fixed now, but it seems like it was a fire hazard. This group should have some emergency response procedures.
- Outreach: Flamm said a comment was posted on the committee's Facebook page about skyway hours and access into the skyway system. The escalator by Stacked Deck Brewing is mandated to be open, but it isn't due to maintenance. The group talked about ways that we can increase attendance at these meetings and engage more people in discussions about skyway issues. Linda McBayer said she would like to lead outreach and engagement activities for the committee. This would include engaging the mayor's office and other stakeholders, keeping people informed of committee actions, engaging under-represented populations and identifying shared concerns.

DSI Updates: Joe Voyda said the broken glass on a door in 345 Cedar Street is scheduled to be replaced on March 30. He provided updates on some of the other complaints and permit requests that he and his colleagues are addressing.

Police Updates: St. Paul PD Central District Commander Wes Denning provided updates on public safety issues that are being addressed.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m.