

Honorable City Council Members,

I attended and spoke at the public hearing last night regarding the proposed skyway ordinance changes. Here is a quick summary of my views after listening to what others said at the hearing.

Skyway Hours: The current 2AM closing time works well as many bars and restaurants are open until that time. Especially in the winter, patrons of downtown businesses really appreciate having skyway access, as do those with disabilities. Certainly closing earlier saves money for building owners, but it also reduces the value of the skyway system to users, and business owners would be hurt when fewer patrons come downtown and stay late.

I think a better solution is to keep the 2AM closing time for the system as a whole while considering shorter hours for segments that truly do not benefit many users late at night. Give the other ordinance changes and the various efforts to improve skyway vitality a chance to work before reducing skyway hours, and keep in mind that skyways which do not get much late-night usage now could be getting a lot more as downtown vitality improves.

Sitting: Building owners have a legitimate concern about dropping the No Sitting rule. If sitting is permitted in easements, people will also sit in other areas despite buildings having rules against it. Furthermore, do we really want to encourage sitting in skyways and easements? A better idea would be to ban sitting except in designated areas and put a time limit of 15 minutes where permitted. Skyways are for getting around, not hanging around.

I will also point out that some of the worst places for people hanging out are in the Metro Transit controlled skyway and elevator at Central Station. Metro Transit can and should post their own conduct code, including a no sitting rule, and it should enforce those rules, just as any other private building owner should.

Enforcement: I agree with Pat Wolf that there should be a dedicated Skyway Beat to patrol the system and focus on trouble spots. If jointly funded by SPPD and Metro Transit Police, this could be less costly and more effective than what is being done now. I also agree with building owners that, as times have changed, expectations of what private security guards should do exceeds the reality of what they can do. While building owners should not get off the hook for their share of security funding, we need a more effective police presence in the skyways.

In conclusion, I recommend adoption of the proposed ordinance changes, but without the hours change and with a prohibition on sitting except in designated areas for limited periods of time. I also suggest reorganizing how policing is done in the skyway system, although that need not be a part of this proposal.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me should you wish to discuss any of these ideas.

Sincerely,

Andy Flamm
, Chair, Skyway Governance Advisory Committee

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