

MEMORANDUM

TO: City Planning Commission, Committee of the Whole

FROM: [Aaron Hanauer](#), Senior City Planner, (612) 673-2494
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DATE: June 30, 2016

SUBJECT: Proposed zoning code text amendment: skyways

On May 15, 2015, Council Members Gordon and Palmisano introduced the subject matter of an ordinance amending the zoning code to incorporate requirements for the design of skyways.

With the exception of projects that are requesting a floor area ratio premium in downtown for constructing a skyway (Section 549.220-Floor area ratio premiums), there are no city code and zoning code requirements for the design of new skyways. Skyways built as part of the Downtown Skyway System are required to be reviewed by the Skyway Advisory Committee and then receive an encroachment permit from Public Works. The proposed amendment would codify in the zoning code the placement of the skyway on the block, as well as the design and public access requirements for new skyways that cross a public street or alley. Many of the proposed design requirements are derived from the current guidelines administered by the Skyway Advisory Committee. The proposed standards also include a requirement for bird-safe glazing. The City sees skyways as an important step toward greater consideration of bird-safe building design. Note that the proposed code text would authorize a variance from the skyway standards where unique circumstances would cause practical difficulties.

The current City policy in regards to the design and expansion of skyways is outlined in the Urban Design chapter of the Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth and the Downtown Action Plan section of Access Minneapolis (see attached).

Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth (2009)

- Urban Design Policy 10.3: Use skyways to connect buildings Downtown.
 - 10.3.1 Provide maximum transparency of skyway walls in order to provide views to the outside that help users orient themselves.
 - 10.3.2 Maintain uniform skyway hours of operation wherever possible.
 - 10.3.3 Provide consistent and uniform directional signage and accessible skyway system maps near skyway entrances, particularly along primary transit and pedestrian routes.
 - 10.3.4 Provide convenient and easily accessible vertical connections between the skyway system and the public sidewalks, particularly along primary transit and pedestrian routes.
 - 10.3.5 Maintain functional links in the skyway system while adjoining properties undergo redevelopment or renovation.

- 10.3.6 Limit skyway expansion to the downtown core and at other key sites with high-intensity uses in order to minimize low-usage skyways and maximize street-level pedestrian activity in growing downtown neighborhoods and historic areas.

Downtown Action Plan of Access Minneapolis (2007)

Skyway Expansion - “Encourage skyway expansion only within the downtown core and other key high-intensity uses, such as the new Ballpark. This strategy promotes street level pedestrian activity in growing downtown neighborhoods and historic areas and ensures that new skyways will have high levels of use (see attached for additional details).”

The proposed text amendment does not propose to change the city’s policy regarding the expansion of the skyway network. As previously mentioned, the text amendment would codify the requirements for the placement of a new skyway on the city block, as well as the design and public access requirements for new skyways that cross a public street or alley.

**AN ORDINANCE
of the
CITY OF
MINNEAPOLIS**

By Gordon and Palmisano

**Amending Title 20, Chapter 525 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances relating to Zoning Code:
Administration and Enforcement**

The City Council of the City of Minneapolis do ordain as follows:

Section 1. That section 525.520 of the above-entitled ordinance be amended to read as follows:

525.520. Authorized variances.

Variances from the regulations of this zoning ordinance shall be granted by the board of adjustment, city planning commission, or city council only in accordance with the requirements of section 525.500, and may be granted only in the following instances, and in no others:

(28) To vary the width and location restrictions on attached garages facing the front lot line for residential uses.

(29) To vary the development standards of Chapter 535, Plazas and Skyways.

(30) To vary the requirement for enclosed off-street parking for new single- and two-family dwellings established after November 1, 2009.

**AN ORDINANCE
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By Gordon and Palmisano

**Amending Title 20, Chapter 535 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances relating to Zoning Code:
Administration and Enforcement**

The City Council of the City of Minneapolis do ordain as follows:

Section 1. That article XIV of the above-entitled ordinance be created and read as follows:

ARTICLE XIX. – SKYWAYS

535.890. - Purpose.

Regulations governing skyways are established to provide for appropriate location of skyways and to ensure the design of skyways contributes to the built and natural environment.

535.900. - Definitions.

As used in this article, the following words shall mean:

Bird-safe glazing: Bird-safe glazing treatment includes either façade materials with a LEED Material Threat Factor not less than twenty-five (25) or a combination of physical structures and visible glass patterns that are visible from the outside and do not create transparent spaces no wider than four (4) inches horizontally and two (2) inches vertically.

Downtown skyway system: Skyway corridors, courts, bridges and access facilities for which there is a public easement, encroachment, or ownership for the purpose of pedestrian travel within the city's Downtown Skyway Zone.

Skyway bridge: An enclosed elevated pedestrian bridge extending from building face to building face which shall span a street, alley or be located within private property.

Skyway corridor: a skyway-level pathway of the downtown skyway system which is within, along or on top of a building or is part of a separate structure over private property and whose termini are skyway bridges, other skyway corridors or an opening in a building through which the skyway corridor connects to an adjacent building. The primary public purpose of a skyway corridor is the accommodation of public pedestrian travel from point to point at the second-story level.

535.910. – Permitted uses subject to administrative review and approval.

The construction or expansion of skyways that cross public streets and alleys shall be in conformance with applicable development plans or objectives adopted by the City Council. Skyways shall be subject to

administrative review and approval by the zoning administrator, as specified in section 535.920, and shall comply with the standards of section 535.930.

535.920. - Administrative review process.

(a) In general. The zoning administrator shall approve or deny such application prior to the issuance of an encroachment permit. The zoning administrator may impose such conditions and require such guarantees deemed reasonable and necessary to protect the public interest and to ensure compliance with the standards and purposes of this zoning ordinance and policies of the comprehensive plan. If proposed as part of a project that includes a separate land use application, a skyway shall be reviewed concurrently with said application, provided all requirements of this section have been met.

(b) Submittal requirements. The applicant shall comply with general application requirements of Chapter 525, Administration and Enforcement.

(c) Appeals. Notwithstanding the provisions of Chapter 525, Administration and Enforcement, decisions of the zoning administrator regarding the administrative review of permitted skyways shall be subject to appeal to the city planning commission.

535.930. – Development standards for all permitted skyways.

All skyways that cross a public street or alley shall be subject to the following standards:

- (1) Placement
 - a. Skyway bridges shall be developed at only the second floor of a building.
 - b. All skyway bridges shall run perpendicular to the sidewalks, streets, and alleys that they cross. It is encouraged that skyway bridges cross sidewalks, streets, and alleys in the middle portion of the block . Skyway bridges shall not be allowed within fifteen (15) feet of the end of a block.
- (2) Architectural form
 - a. The bottom of skyway bridges shall be a minimum of sixteen (16) feet six (6) inches above the street or alley.
 - b. Skyway bridges and corridors shall have a minimum interior clear width of twelve (12) feet between hand rails. Skyway bridges within the downtown skyway system shall be no wider than thirty (30) feet. Skyway bridge width (interior clearance between handrails) shall be carefully considered in relation to each skyway's relative location within the system, and the projected intensity of use for that skyway. It is encouraged that skyway bridges and corridors within the core of the downtown skyway system have a minimum interior clear width of eighteen (18) feet between hand rails.
 - c. Skyways bridges shall be a single story.
 - d. Skyway bridges shall be designed to be horizontally level with the street. Changes in grade shall be accommodated so that the skyway bridge appears level from the exterior.
 - e. Skyways in new buildings shall be designed to facilitate access between street and skyway levels with a public entrance on the exterior of the building or access lobby. Elevators, stairs and escalators linking the street and skyway levels shall be conveniently located with clear directional signs.
 - f. Recessed street lighting shall be provided at the bottom of the skyway bridge in accordance with the City of Minneapolis ordinances regarding street lighting. Lighting shall provide the same level and character of illumination as street lighting in the surrounding block. All

lighting shall be provided in accordance with the City of Minneapolis ordinances regarding street lighting.

- g. At least eighty (80) percent of the vertical enclosure of the skyway bridge shall be glazing that allows views into and out of the skyway bridge.
- h. At least eighty-five (85) percent of the glazing area within a skyway bridge shall meet the bird-safe glazing definition.

(3) Building System, Access, and Maintenance

- a. Skyways shall be heated to a minimum of fifty-five (55) degrees in winter and ventilated to not exceed outdoor temperatures in the summer.
- b. Skyways that are part of the downtown skyway system shall remain open to the public Monday through Friday, from 6:30 a.m. to 10:00pm, Saturday, from 9:30a.m. to 8:00pm, and Sunday, from 12:00pm to 6:00pm. Property owners are encouraged to keep their skyway bridges, corridors, and vertical circulation elements open beyond standard hours of operation.

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**AN ORDINANCE
of the
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MINNEAPOLIS**

By Gordon and Palmisano

**Amending Title 20, Chapter 549 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances relating to Zoning Code:
Downtown Districts**

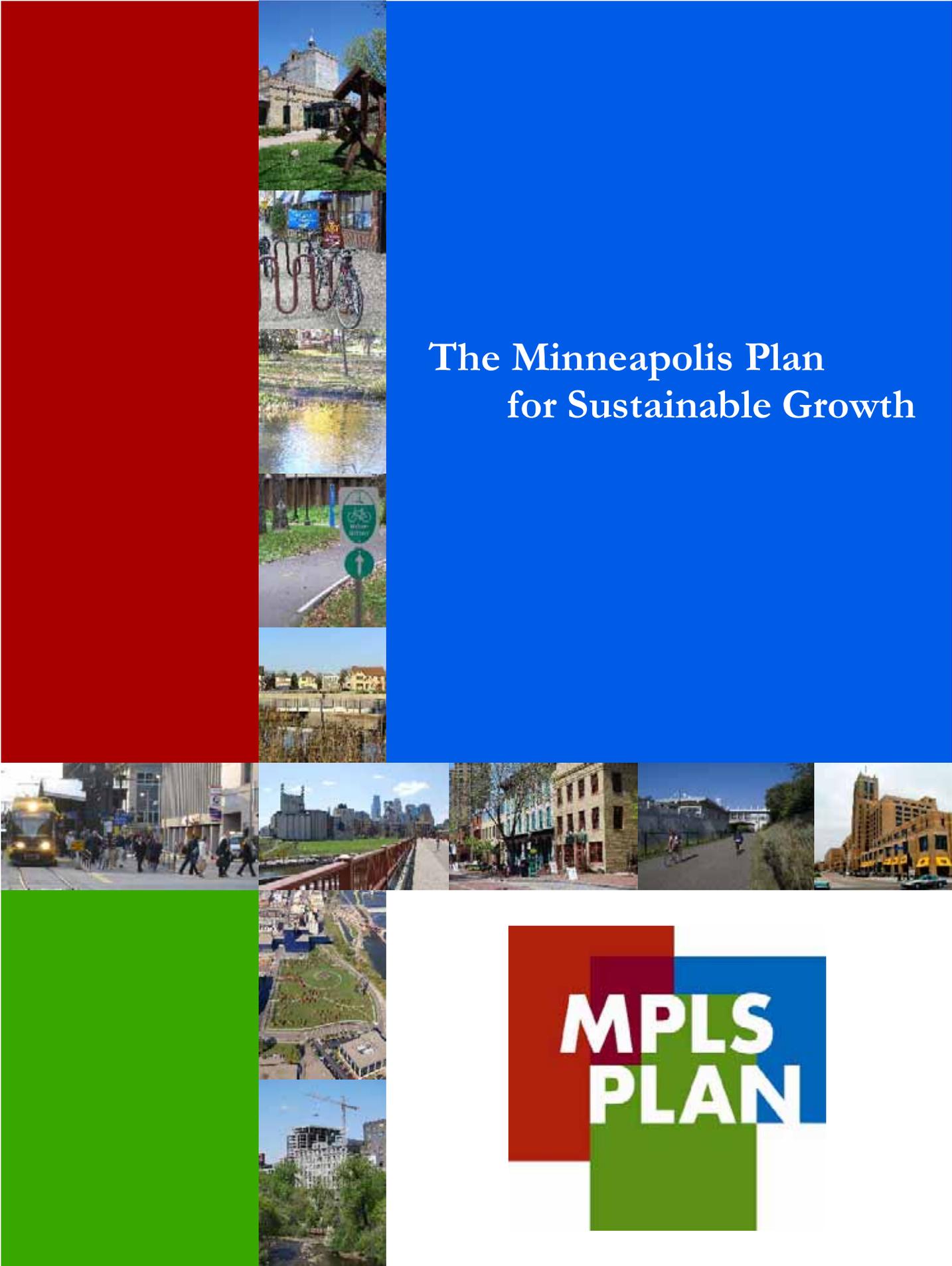
The City Council of the City of Minneapolis do ordain as follows:

Section 1. That section 549.2220 of the above-entitled ordinance be amended to read as follows:

(4) Skyway connection, subject to the following standards:

- a. The skyway shall connect two blocks on opposite sides of the street.
- b. The bottom of the skyway shall be a minimum of sixteen (16) feet six (6) inches above the street. If street lights are removed, street lighting shall be provided at the bottom of the skyway.
- c. Skyways and connecting corridors shall have a minimum interior clear width of twelve (12) feet. Skyways shall be no wider than thirty (30) feet. The maximum skyway premium shall be increased by one (1) where the skyway and connecting corridor have a minimum interior clear width of sixteen (16) feet.
- d. Skyways shall be single story and designed to be horizontally level with the street. Changes in grade shall be accommodated so that the skyway appears level from the exterior.
- e. Except where crossing streets and alleys, skyways shall be located within private property.
- f. At least eighty (80) percent of the vertical enclosure of the skyway shall be windows of clear or lightly tinted glass that allow views into and out of the skyway.
- g. Skyways in new buildings shall be designed to facilitate access between street and skyway levels with a public entrance on the exterior of the building or access lobby. Elevators, stairs and escalators linking the street and skyway levels shall be conveniently located with clear directional signs.
- h. Skyways shall be heated to a minimum of fifty-five (55) degrees in winter and ventilated to not exceed outdoor temperatures in the summer.
- i. ~~The skyway shall be open to the general public at least during the hours recommended by the skyway advisory board and approved by the city council. Skyways that are part of the downtown skyway system shall remain open to the public Monday through Friday, from 6:30 a.m. to 10:00pm, Saturday, from 9:30a.m. to 8:00pm, and Sunday, from 12:00pm to 6:00pm.~~
- j. The skyway shall be maintained in good order for the life of the principal structure.

The Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth



Skyways

Skyways play an integral role in the movement of pedestrians in Downtown Minneapolis. Because skyways connect office buildings, retail stores, parking structures and residential structures to one another, priorities should be placed on maintaining uniform hours of operation, consistent directional signage, and convenient and easily accessible vertical connections between street and skyway levels. All new internal skyways should be designed in such a way that allows pedestrians to maintain a visual connection with the street in order to help them orient themselves while navigating through the system.

Policy 10.3: Use skyways to connect buildings Downtown.

- 10.3.1 Provide maximum transparency of skyway walls in order to provide views to the outside that help users orient themselves.
- 10.3.2 Maintain uniform skyway hours of operation wherever possible.
- 10.3.3 Provide consistent and uniform directional signage and accessible skyway system maps near skyway entrances, particularly along primary transit and pedestrian routes.
- 10.3.4 Provide convenient and easily accessible vertical connections between the skyway system and the public sidewalks, particularly along primary transit and pedestrian routes.
- 10.3.5 Maintain functional links in the skyway system while adjoining properties undergo redevelopment or renovation.
- 10.3.6 Limit skyway expansion to the downtown core and at other key sites with high-intensity uses in order to minimize low-usage skyways and maximize street-level pedestrian activity in growing downtown neighborhoods and historic areas.

~~Multi-Family Residential~~

~~New housing development provides an opportunity to reinforce the urban character of specific areas of the city. Building more housing close to or within commercial developments is the key to stronger commercial and other mixed use markets. The location of new housing developments within close range of amenities such as shopping, cultural or recreational facilities, job targets, or transportation corridors focuses the city's growth into specific areas, as designated in this plan. At all times, multi family residential development needs to have a clear connection to the street with adequate windows, architectural details and landscaping. The scale of the development should be compatible with the character of the surrounding area.~~

~~The character of Minneapolis' urban neighborhoods is a great asset to the city and is~~

Citywide Action Plan



A C C E S S **MINNEAPOLIS**

Ten-Year Transportation Action Plan

July 17, 2009



business hours, causing pedestrian traffic on street-level sidewalks to be lighter than in typical downtowns, which hurts opportunities for street-level retail, isolates transit riders waiting for buses and trains, and generally diminishes the comfort of walking on downtown streets.

To support the underlying modal-shift goals of *Access Minneapolis* and the continued residential and employment growth in downtown Minneapolis, better integration of the skyway system with the street-level sidewalk and transit systems is needed. The adopted 2003 Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan provides a good basis for this integration, including the following recommendations for new developments:

- **Skyway Expansion** – Encourage skyway expansion only within the downtown core and other key high-intensity uses, such as the new Ballpark. This strategy promotes street-level pedestrian activity in growing downtown neighborhoods and historic areas and ensures that new skyways will have high levels of use. In addition to these recommendations for new developments, the following actions will be taken to address existing buildings and skyways:
- **Physical and Visual Connections** – Promote building architecture and skyway bridge design in new developments to physically and visually connect the sidewalk with the skyway, through the use of highly visible vertical circulation and skyway concourses located along the outside perimeter of buildings, such as in the new Target store on Nicollet.
- **Connections Between Sidewalks and Skyways** – Construct skyway stair towers at the edges of the Skyway System to facilitate interface with the sidewalk system and proposed green spaces.
- **Wayfinding** – Expand the use of skyway wayfinding signage. The standard “Blue Water” signage exists throughout much of the skyway system; it will continue to be used and expanded in buildings that do not use it. In addition, the wayfinding signage program will be expanded to identify points of access between the street and the skyway system through wayfinding strategies located at both levels. This will be coordinated with any other wayfinding programs for transit or walking in downtown.
- **Vertical Access** - Work with individual property owners to improve vertical access between the existing skyway and sidewalk systems at key transit nodes downtown through signage, operating procedures, street level uses, etc. It is especially important to ensure that there is convenient access from major transit stops into the skyway system.
- **Hours of Operation** – Work with property owners to implement and maintain more consistent hours of operations throughout the skyway system.
- **Maintenance** – Work with property owners to ensure a consistent high level of maintenance throughout the skyway system.
- **Security** – Work with property owners to ensure that skyways are safe and comfortable for people to use.