

How Des Moines governs its skywalk, *and what Saint Paul lacks.*

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Sources and the full plan:
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Des Moines wrote its skywalk into the city code as one system: uniform hours no owner can close, a standing committee with real powers, design and operating standards with teeth, a mandatory security organization the buildings pay for, and a city duty for the bridges. Saint Paul regulates conduct and hours; it does not run the system.

SIDE BY SIDE: THE DES MOINES SKYWALK ORDINANCE AND SAINT PAUL’S CHAPTER 140

	DES MOINES (MUNICIPAL CODE CH. 102, ART. IV, THE “SKYWALK ORDINANCE”)	SAINT PAUL (CHAPTER 140 AND THE 1980 GENERAL POLICY STATEMENT)
Hours	6 a.m. to 2 a.m., seven days a week. While open, no owner may block or close a segment; violation is a misdemeanor. Reductions only for a dead-end serving one building, with every owner’s written consent. Extensions granted by the committee; a request it ignores for 15 days is deemed approved.	6 a.m. to midnight minimum (Ord 17-35, 2017), and today’s hours; exceptions by council resolution after a hearing. Temporary reductions by executive order in 2020 and 2022 have lapsed.
Who decides	A five-member Skywalk Committee created by code (two design-board members, an owner, a tenant, an association board member), council-confirmed. It sets operating standards, approves every sign and map, rules on hour changes, and judges corridor conformity on complaint. Appeals go to binding arbitration.	The Skyway Governance Advisory Committee, a committee of the CapitolRiver Council with recommendation and notice roles only. Decisions sit with the council and the Department of Safety and Inspections.
Standards	In the code: 14-foot corridors, 9-foot height, 30 footcandles, 65 to 85°F at all times, one bridge per block face, accessible vertical access every block, committee-approved signs only.	Light and temperature in the code (10 footcandles, 70°F ± 8). Widths, colors and the truss design live in the 1980 policy, enforced only through each building’s easement.
Security	Every owner who signed after 1992 must join a security organization under a joint agreement with the city: the Des Moines Skywalk Association, whose member fees (about \$708,000 in 2025) pay for 24-hour contract patrols and a camera network.	Each owner files its own camera or patrol plan with the City, reviewed annually by police.
Bridges and cost	The city builds and rebuilds the bridges over public rights-of-way (52 city-owned bridges on about 4.2 miles). Owners pay a 1/N share of connected bridges and all corridor costs; work an owner fails to do is done by the city and assessed to the property after a hearing.	The City “may pay a portion” of a bridge; owners carry operation and repair “without cost to the City.” No cost-share formula.
Closures	Blocking an open segment is a misdemeanor.	Since Ordinance 23-61 (December 2023), making a skyway element “inaccessible to patrons during the hours of operation” is a safety hazard the City can abate at the owner’s cost.

WHY IT MATTERS HERE

Saint Paul has firmer legal footing than Des Moines or Minneapolis: Ordinance 23-61 recites that the system “was developed by the City and is governed by easements with building owners,” and Chapter 140 defines skyway space as the “easement area.” In Minneapolis, where most of the system is privately owned, building owners argued in 2025 that enforced uniform hours would be an unconstitutional taking. Saint Paul’s easements are granted to the City for public passage.

The gap is not law; it is governance. One committee with decision powers, standards written into Chapter 140, one security organization for the whole corridor, a city duty for the bridges with a cost share, and real use of the 2023 abatement power. That is what the Jumpstart Plan proposes to draft.

THE HONEST CAVEAT

Des Moines is a model, not a paradise. After assaults in 2022 and 2023, the Skywalk Association began locking seven doors from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. as a trial, and residents, including people with disabilities and shift workers, objected (Des Moines Register, October 28, 2023). The code’s 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. minimum is unchanged. The lesson Saint Paul should take: hour changes go through a committee, in public, with a detour plan, the way Calgary’s Plus 15 policy requires.

SOURCES

Des Moines Municipal Code ch. 102 art. IV (Municode, current to Aug 28, 2026); City of Des Moines Skywalk Committee page and Jan 31, 2022 council work-session deck; Des Moines Skywalk Association Form 990, FY2025 (ProPublica); Saint Paul Legislative Code ch. 140 (Ord 17-35, 2017; Ord 23-61, adopted Dec 13, 2023); Executive Orders 2020-05 and 2022-12; General Policy Statement for the Construction of the Saint Paul Skyway System (1980, amended 2006); BOMA Greater Minneapolis public comment, Aug 27, 2025; Calgary Council Policy CP2021-03. Full links in the Jumpstart Plan.