The Planner's Guide to Tactical Urbanism

IT'S A
16 MINUTE
WALK TO
SEABOARD
STATION

IT'S
17 MINUTES
BY FOOT TO
OAKWOOD
CEMETERY

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INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover photo: @dtraleigh (Leo Suarez)

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PURPOSE

As planners and policymakers work to improve the public realm in cities, the task can seem daunting. The cost of making improvements in cities can be prohibitive and there is often a lack of resources allocated for this task in municipal budgets. Meanwhile, new planning and design strategies that are implemented may come with unforeseen costs and impacts, and completed projects may fail to properly address the concerns of local stakeholders. Strategic planning processes with long-term implementation horizons can also make it difficult for planners to respond to local social and economic changes and to actively engage citizens in the process of planning.

Temporary interventions have emerged as an important way to make improvements to local neighbourhoods that present fewer risks for both citizens and municipal administrations. In the last decade, numerous citizen-led initiatives have sprung up across North America, following examples in Europe, to improve public spaces using low-cost, temporary measures. These informal initiatives, popularly known as "tactical urbanism", have also inspired planners and municipal officials to experiment with low-cost pilot projects as a tool to make local improvements.

Current resources regarding tactical urbanism are often directed toward informal actors (citizens, non-profit organizations). The purpose of this guide is to offer insight to urban planners and municipal administrators who are interested in incorporating low-cost, temporary interventions into planning practice. It provides case studies of how planners and officials have engaged in tactical and temporary projects and have addressed some of the common issues inherent in tactical urbanism. By understanding the potential challenges and opportunities of tactical and temporary urbanism, planners will be able to determine the extent to which they can take advantage of these projects and collaboratively work with citizens in the process of city-building.

SCOPE

The guide begins with an introduction to tactical urbanism, including a definition of the movement and current drivers of tactical and temporary projects. This is followed by a brief discussion of the practical considerations of incorporating tactical urbanism within planning practice*.

Most of the guide is dedicated to presenting case studies of tactical and temporary projects from across the U.S.A. and Canada, highlighting the different roles and perspectives of planners and officials who were involved. The case studies are presented under five themes with associated recommendations for planners. The guide concludes with general commentary on the role of urban planners with respect to tactical and temporary urbanism and the usefulness of these projects as a tool to incorporate within planning practice. A list of additional resources that may be of use to planners and other official actors is also included.

Credit: Rebar/Andrea Scher

* A more thorough examination of these topics is available in the full research project.

WHAT IS TACTICAL URBANISM?

The term tactical urbanism is often used to refer to low-cost, temporary interventions that improve local neighbourhoods. Although the Berlin-based Studio Urban Catalyst explored tactical and temporary uses in post-industrial Europe in the early 2000s[1], the term "tactical urbanism" came into common use in 2010-2011 when a group of young urbanists created the publication *Tactical Urbanism: Short-term Action, Long-term Change*, which showcased temporary public space improvement projects from across North America. The authors define tactical urbanism as small-scale, short-term interventions meant to inspire long-term change, adding that tactical urbanism as a city-building approach features five characteristics:

- A deliberate, phased approach to instigating change;
- An offering of local ideas for local planning challenges;
- Short-term commitment and realistic expectations;
- Low-risks, with possibly a high reward; and;

- The development of social capital between citizens, and the building of organizational capacity between public/private institutions, non-profit/ NGOs, and their constituents.[2]

The intentions behind tactical urbanism projects are diverse – some projects are intended to boost economic revitalization while others are aimed at improving pedestrian safety and offering opportunities for citizens to connect with one another. The way in which tactical projects are manifest also varies greatly, with projects at different physical and temporal scales, though most projects are designed to be temporary in nature and be implemented at a local scale – block, street, or building.

Tactical urbanism as a movement has gained momentum and visibility in popular culture and planning discourse. It was named one of the top planning trends of 2011-12[3], and was a focus of the official U.S. pavilion, *Spontaneous Interventions: Design actions for the common good*, at the 13th International Architecture

1)   Studio Urban Catalyst, Strategies for Temporary Use: Potential for Development of Urban Residual Areas in European Metropolises, 2013.

2)   Lydon, Mike, Dan Bartman, Ronald Woudstra and Aurash Khawarzad, *Tactical Urbanism: Short-term action Long-term change (Vol. 1)* (New York City: The Street Plans Collaborative, 2011).

3)   Nettler, Jonathan, "Top planning trends of 2011-12," *Planetizen*, 27 February 2012.

Credit: Team Better Block

Credit: Team Better Block

Credit: Julie Roth

Credit: Alanah Heffez

Exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2012.[4] Online and print publications on urban affairs consistently report on tactical projects as well as the overall increase in temporary urban interventions in cities.[5,6,7] Local media outlets are attracted to projects where citizens actively improve their communities and projects that touch on issues relevant to cities more generally (e.g., improvements to walkability) have gained media attention on an international scale.

These citizen-led interventions have also inspired a larger discussion around incremental planning and the involvement of informal actors in urban planning processes. Temporary interventions are starting to be incorporated into official planning processes in some cities – making improvements to the public realm in a way that is low-cost and low-risk. The temporary nature of tactical projects may also provide an opportunity for planners and citizens to collaborate on local projects. Both can observe an intervention on the ground and make adjustments before committing to long-term, costly improvements. If successful, temporary and pilot projects that gain local support can be made permanent over time.

A number of conditions are considered to be driving the recent interest in tactical urbanism and locally-led interventions in cities. Political, economic, and environmental uncertainty; the deindustrialization of cities that has led to an increase in vacant lots and buildings; and an increasingly mobile workforce all support the desire for more flexible and adaptable spaces and uses.[8] The 'Millennial' generation has a heightened interest in cities, and the ease of sharing new ideas and resources via the Internet and social media applications has increased the visibility of projects and raised awareness among citizens that they can actively impact their communities[9].

The inefficiency of bureaucracy has also been identified as a reason citizens may be taking local improvements into their own hands. There is an increasing awareness that traditional planning processes may not be adaptable and resilient enough to respond to local needs. Planning processes that are flexible and engage many different actors in the process of responding to local issues is a topic of growing interest.

Citizens are also interested in actively responding to local situations. Although some still choose to contribute through traditional processes – attending planning consultations, sitting on community boards and commissions – many are choosing to directly impact their communities by spearheading local initiatives. This increased sense of responsibility among citizens to contribute to their communities as well as the growing recognition of the value of citizen participation in official planning processes has provided an opportunity for planners to find more meaningful ways to empower citizens and work together to address larger planning issues.

4)   Lang Ho, Cathy, "Introduction," Spontaneous Interventions: Design actions for the common good, 2012.

5)   Lepeska, David, "The rise of the temporary city," *The Atlantic Cities*, 1 May 2012.

6)   Arieff, Allison, "The rise of tactical urbanism," *The Urbanist*, 508, 1 December 2011.

7)   Pamela Robinson, "The city of no fun," *Spacing*, Winter 2012/2013, 34.

8)   Peter Bishop and Lesley Williams, *The temporary city* (London: Routledge, 2012).

9)   Lydon, Mike, "Tactical urbanism: A look back at 2012," *Planetizen*, 30 December 2012.

TACTICAL URBANISM IN PLANNING PRACTICE

Planners are starting to see the potential that temporary and low-cost projects hold for responding to local conditions and making incremental changes in cities. Although the momentum around tactical and temporary projects is growing, the place for these initiatives within professional planning practice and the role of the planner is still unclear. This may simply be a condition of the recent increase in popularity of these projects; tactical urbanism as a 'movement' is still new to many municipal administrators.

Yet, the use of tactical and temporary urbanism as a planning tool appears to have potential. Temporary spaces and short-term uses are already being integrated into planning through the simplification of permitting processes for short-term projects and embedding more flexibility into existing zoning codes. Additionally, planners are seeing the potential for using tactical and temporary projects within planning methodology - measuring the impact of an intervention and using pilot projects as a form of community consultation where citizens can experience a project as opposed to being shown a rendering.

There are, however, several practical considerations for planners with respect to integrating short-term, tactical projects into official planning processes. Risk management and liability are important considerations for all municipal projects. The slow pace of bureaucracy and need for support from other municipal departments may also limit a planner's ability to complete new projects. Further, planners must balance the need for a robust level of citizen engagement with the desire of community stakeholders to implement projects quickly.

To better understand how tactical and temporary projects are being integrated into planning, I conducted semi-structured interviews with citizens, non-profit organizations, and municipal officials who have engaged in these projects. I focused on projects from cities across North America in which planners and officials had been active in some capacity. This included projects initiated by bottom-up actors as well as top-down actors. The following case studies provide insight into the role of planners with respect to tactical urbanism.

Credit: Miguel Sternberg

CASE STUDIES

It can be difficult to compare tactical urbanism projects – each is very context specific and the process through which each project comes to fruition is informed by local regulatory policies, politics, and relationships. However, a number of common themes arise with respect to the role that planners and officials should play and the actions they can take to make tactical and temporary projects successful. The following case studies provide examples of how planners and officials in cities across North America are engaging in tactical and temporary projects.

The case studies have been organized into the following themes:

1. Working with citizen initiatives – responding to and learning from informal citizen-led tactical projects

2. Demonstrating what's possible – using temporary projects to highlight opportunities for other actors

3. Getting internal buy-in – championing tactical projects and working with other municipal departments

4. Adapting ideas to your context – integrating tactical projects and ideas from other cities

5. Using existing resources – leveraging current policies and publicly owned resources to support and advance new ideas

FEATURED PROJECTS

<u>United States:</u>

Better Block Project (Dallas TX)

Buffalo Green Code (Buffalo NY)

Innovation Delivery Team (Memphis TN)

Intersection Repair (Portland OR)

Parklet Program (Philadelphia PA)

Pavement to Parks (San Francisco CA)

Public Plaza Program (New York City NY)

Temporary Urbanism Initiative (Washington DC)

Walk Raleigh (Raleigh NC)

<u>Canada:</u>

Celebrate Yonge (Toronto ON)

Pop-Up Places (Calgary AB)

Viva Vancouver (Vancouver BC)

Map generated by Laura Pfeifer, at http://maps.stamen.com

WORKING WITH CITIZEN INITIATIVES

Citizens often lead tactical urbanism projects – both those that are sanctioned and those that are not. While officials and planners have a professional responsibility to manage risk and ensure public safety, there can be value in considering how the ideas and intentions behind citizen actions can inform planning practice. The Walk Raleigh project is a good example of how planners can harness the momentum and enthusiasm of an unsanctioned project and avoid being reactionary. Portland's Intersection Repair project shows how officials embraced and formalized a citizen-driven community building activity.
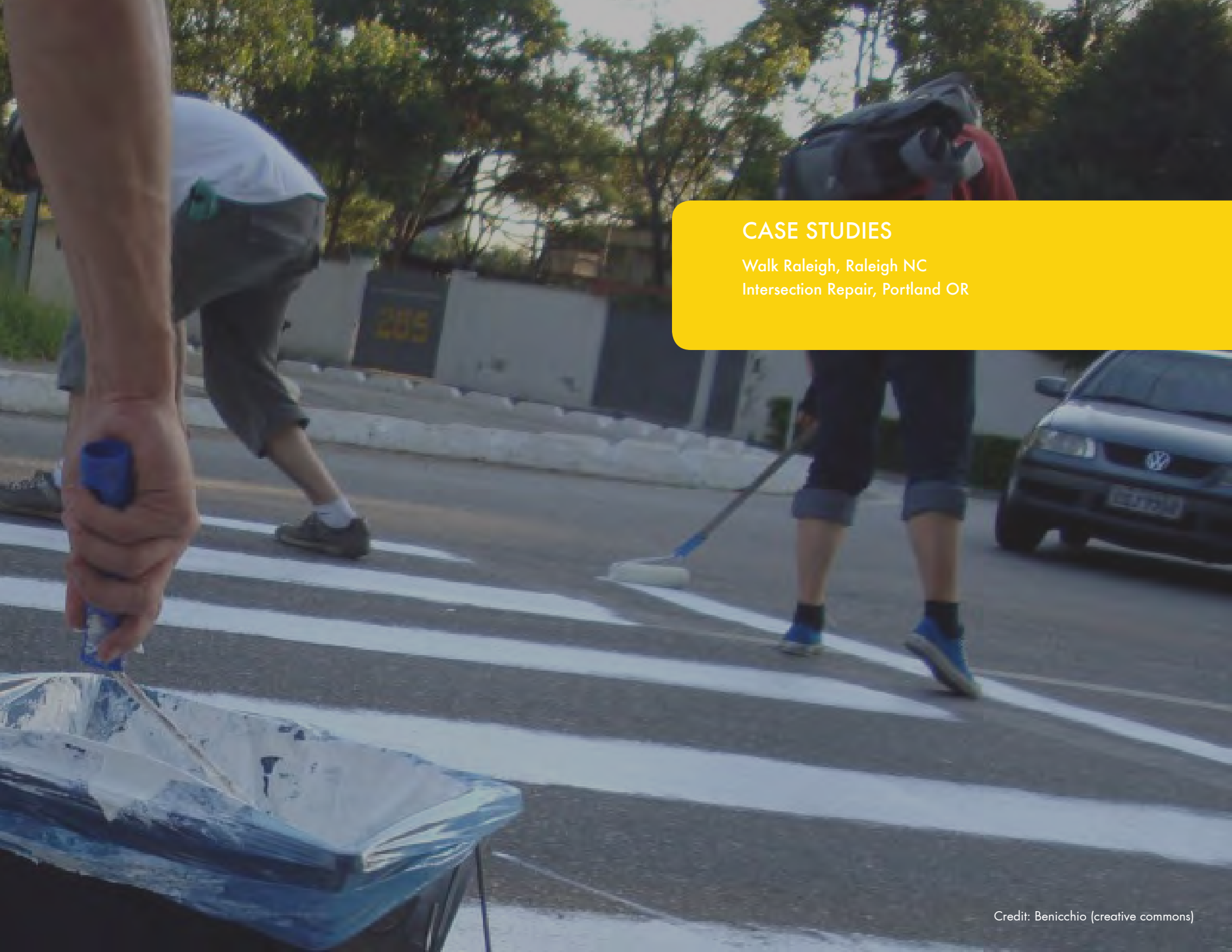
In 2012, Matt Tomasulo, a former urban planning student, started The WalkRaleigh project. Though Raleigh is a largely auto-oriented city, Tomasulo observed that neighbourhoods in the downtown were quite walkable. To lower the perceived barriers to walking in downtown Raleigh, Tomasulo produced 27 corrugated plastic pedestrian way-finding signs directing people to local landmarks and public spaces and providing estimated walking times. The signs were placed at three intersections selected to target different mixed-use communities: a neighbourhood near NC State University, a commercial centre with grocery store and post office, and an area near the Central Business District.

The project generated local and international media interest and gained support from local citizens. The signs did not initially draw attention from City staff, in part because they were well designed and some mistook the signs to be City-issued. Further, since they did not advertise a business, the signs did not raise immediate concern. "We typically remove a sign if there is a complaint. Since nobody complained, I didn't take [the signs] down," says Mitchell Silver, Chief Planning and Development Officer and Planning Director for the City of Raleigh. However, with increasing media attention, City officials were

Credit: Nicole Alvarez

prompted to respond: "A news anchor asked if the signs were illegal…and asked why they hadn't been taken down. This was taken as a formal inquiry and complaint… at that point we had a responsibility to respond."

As the signs were unsanctioned – to legally post the signs in the public right-of-way, Tomasulo

would have had to apply for an encroachment permit – the Planning Department had to remove the signs. However, Silver worked with City staff to build on the positive momentum of the project. "I liked the creativity of the program, so my staff and I came up with a way of getting [the signs] back up as quickly as possible…If [Matt] donated the signs to the City, then they would be ours and

we wouldn't need an encroachment permit to allow them to be placed on City property."

The Planning Department prepared a proposal to use the signs as a three-month pilot educational program to determine if they could be incorporated into the City's way-finding system. A community petition to support the proposal was circulated online and presented to City Council; 1255 people signed within three days. Since the proposal supported a number of objectives in the City's Comprehensive Plan and had support from community members, City Council approved the pilot program and the signs were reposted within a few weeks.

WalkRaleigh has provided an example of how planners can create an atmosphere of collaboration and support between citizens and officials. "[Mitchell Silver] has been recognized through all of this as being very tolerant and accepting that things are changing," says Tomasulo. "[Officials are] having to figure out how to operate in these grey areas."

Silver feels that officials can use the emergence of unsanctioned tactical and temporary projects as an opportunity to examine current policies and practices and increase flexibility in rules

Credit: Nicole Alvarez

and regulations: "I asked my staff...did Matt do something wrong or are our codes out of date?... Are our rules becoming an obstacle or are they addressing 20th century issues?"

The Raleigh Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission is currently examining ways to incorporate the WalkRaleigh concept into the City's way-finding system. "[That impact] is next to impossible to initiate from our end. It was

What role should planners play with respect to tactical projects?

"In my opinion it would be a supporter, but also being flexible when it comes to code enforcement... look at [a] rule or code... to find out if it needs to be changed, [if it's] really meeting its intended purpose... not just be a regulator and an enforcer. Sit back and question what's being done."
- Mitchell Silver

"...it's [supporting] a cultural shift in values...figuring out ways to amend [temporary permits]so that [communities] can [lead] a proactive, tactful project...that has a mission versus just entertainment.."
- Matt Tomasulo

pretty great to see that the City acknowledged the potential and actually formally wrote [WalkRaleigh] into their vision," says Tomasulo.

Building on the success of his project, Tomasulo recently launched Walk [Your City], an online resource allowing individuals to create and print the way-finding signs for use in their own communities.

Intersection Repair, Portland OR
Year Started: 1996
Instigator: Citizen

City Repair is a non-profit organization whose focus is empowering citizens to build community connections and transform the places they live. They are well-known for their Intersection Repair projects, citizen-led initiatives that transform local residential intersections into public gathering spaces including painting on the roadway. The first Intersection Repair project took place in 1996 led by Mark Lakeman, founding member of City Repair. Lakeman started to build an alternative gathering place in his childhood neighbourhood including the creation of a small tearoom in a neighbour's yard and planting sunflowers and corn to define the edges of the space. "I wanted to see how people would respond if they were able to create their own experience on their own terms...it was really important to just start," says Lakeman.

Credit: City Repair

Initially, the City's Bureau of Transportation opposed the project and was concerned with the violation of existing codes. Eventually, after communicating back and forth with the Bureau and receiving threats of fines, members of City Repair met with the mayor. She was ultimately supportive of the initiative and advised the group to organize the goals and objectives of the project and to create an official proposal to present to City Council. The project ultimately gained support and within a few months, a municipal ordinance was developed that would allow citizens to create intersection repair projects throughout the city. To date there have been approximately 30 intersection repair projects.

Currently, the City's Bureau of Transportation administers the permitting process to facilitate Intersection Repair projects. While the City does not initiate or fund the projects, they have a standard set of rules that allow community members to deliver projects safely and with strong local support. The permits are issued at no cost and are active unless and until they are revoked, though this has never happened. "The projects really are not ours, they are the community's...[the] projects are wonderful for building community, building relationships between people, [and] helping people own where they live," says Greg Raisman, a planner

with the Portland Bureau of Transportation. Lakeman agrees that the intent of the projects is to build strong connections, "What it ends up looking like is really not nearly as important as how you've done it."

Intersection Repair projects are installed during an annual event run by City Repair called the Village Building Convergence. Approximately three months prior to the Convergence, the City provides opportunities for community groups to present their proposals to staff for feedback. "[These groups] need to go through the process… so that [they] are confident that [they] have a project that is building community that does have community endorsement," says Raisman. At the initial meeting, community members present a

basic draft design and proposed location for their project on which Transportation staff provide feedback. The intersection must be located on residential streets with no public bus service and where traffic flows are low. The City also requires the paintings to be easy for all citizens to execute and that the proposed designs are an accurate reflection of how the final project will look once completed.

Once a City traffic engineer feels the design and location do not pose safety issues, the City provides a petition for the applicant group to present to local residents. Intersection Repair projects must show a high level of community support prior to receiving a permit. All residents adjacent to the intersection and 80% of residents

within 400ft of the intersection along each intersecting street must approve of the proposal befor the City will issue the permit. The applicant is then responsible for providing the supplies, liability insurance, and must also apply for a permit to close the street for painting. With such a high level of local support required, Raisman is confident that intersection repair projects are successful, "The level of community buy-in is so high, and the level of community consensus…is so great that we know we have a solid program."

Credit: donkeycart (creative commons)

"Portland prides itself on being open-minded and forward leaning and wanting to explore what's possible… we are careful, but we also are willing to try new things… it's that kind of [openness] that really sets the playing field for this kind of [project] to work."

– Greg Raisman

"The role of the planner…is to be facilitative. Not just to accomplish a project, but to facilitate the development of the literacy of the population so that everyone can start to become familiar with design principles and design practices… they become better participants."

– Mark Lakeman

Credit: Nicole Alvarez

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Resist being reactionary to citizen-led actions:
Consider that a citizen-driven project may be responding to an unmet need or desire in the community

2) Educate citizens about existing bylaws:
Create a guide to highlight existing municipal processes or facilitate a citizen planning education program

3) Harness the energy and creativity of citizens:
Build upon existing civic participation and encourage citizens to work with fellow residents on local issues

4) Find ways to accommodate citizen initiatives:
Pilot community-led initiatives within existing policies (include citizens in this process)

5) Create a standardized process:
Ensure new formalized or semi-formalized programs outline the role and responsibility of all actors involved

6) Designate a central contact or community liaison:
Identify a staff person to answer questions and help citizens navigate regulatory and policy issues

DEMONSTRATING WHAT'S POSSIBLE

Private and non-profit actors are not always willing to invest time and resources into piloting projects. Cities wishing to encourage new models of community and economic development and promote temporary uses may need to experiment and show other actors the opportunities and benefits of temporary spaces and uses. The Better Block project helps public and private actors rethink existing spaces at the block level, and actively involves citizens in the planning process. On a larger scale, the Memphis Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team and the Washington Temporary Urbanism Initiative are City-run programs that showcase economic and community development opportunities through temporary uses.

CASE STUDIES

Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team, Memphis TN
Temporary Urbanism Initiative, Washington DC
Better Block Project, Dallas TX

Credit: Better Block OKC

Temporary Urbanism Initiative, Washington DC
Year Started: 2008
Instigator: Officials

After the US economic downturn, the DC Office of Planning began to examine new economic development strategies to address the many vacant lots and abandoned retail spaces throughout the city. Two previous studies, the Creative DC Action Agenda and the Retail Action Roadmap, contained objectives related to activating commercial corridors, supporting entrepreneurs, and boosting local neighbourhoods. The Office of Planning began to engage community partners to find new ways to leverage private and public resources to implement these objectives.

The actionomics[dc] forum in 2009 brought together 150 public, private, and non-profit stakeholders to address topics related to economic development and to create working groups to find local solutions. One working group focused on temporary urbanism and identified a set of locations within the city where temporary projects could take place. The Temporary Urbanism Initiative (TUI) was created to focus on transforming vacant spaces throughout the city, highlighting their potential to provide services and activities to local residents and to boost economic development.

The Office of Planning began piloting temporary projects to act as a catalyst and to demonstrate

Credit: Daniel Rosenstein

opportunities for non-municipal actors to become involved. Planners first looked at quick-win projects that could be addressed with existing public resources– using spaces that were municipally owned and did not require extensive resources or time to make them operable. One of the first projects was a Digital Pop-up Lab, a space for computer code programmers participating in Digital Capital Week to meet up and work. The Lab was hosted in an unused City-owned library kiosk from the 1970s. Staff in

the Department of General Services completed minimal improvements to the site and helped develop a contract agreement to ensure the City was not taking on unnecessary risk by allowing people to use the space. This first project helped the Office of Planning to define what they wanted to achieve through the TUI and allowed them to demonstrate what was possible to community stakeholders.

After the initial Pop-Up Lab, the library kiosk was presented as a contracting opportunity and became the TUI's "Temporium" project. The "Temporium" was both a retail shop for local designers and artists, as well as an event space for musicians and community-based initiatives. The project spanned four weekends in 2010 and was well received by citizens. In 2011, the Office of Planning won a grant from

ArtPlace America to focus on creating four Arts and Culture Temporiums to active vacant lots and underutilized storefronts to promote artist entrepreneurship and community building. As part of the ArtPlace Grant, the Lumen8Anacostia arts event was created which showcased performances, art installations, gallery shows and events over a three-month period. The festival is currently in its second year.

As a result of the Temporary Urbanism Initiative, local Business Improvement Districts are starting to take the lead and employ pop-ups and temporary projects to bring programming and events to their areas. Private actors are repurposing a number of marginal sites around the city for other uses: One neighbourhood created a rolling park to address the lack of green space while another has transformed a vacant site into a mini park and hosts a summertime movie series.

For the Office of Planning, the transition towards private and community-driven leadership of projects is exactly what they were hoping for by creating the Temporary Urbanism Initiative. They knew they didn't have the capacity or mission to run events, and instead wanted to champion new ideas, show what was possible, and open the door to new initiatives. By working through the process of implementing temporary projects, the Office of Planning has been able to develop a framework that allows others to lead.

Credit: David Y. Lee for ARCH Development Corporation

"[As planners,] we've got the tool in the toolbox... now the tool is out there and others are using it in an exciting way"
- Planner, DC Office of Planning

Better Block Project, Dallas TX
Year Started: 2010
Instigator: Citizen

Jason Roberts, an IT consultant in Dallas, started the Better Block project in April of 2010. He noticed a mixed-use block in his neighbourhood that contained a cluster of older buildings that were vacant; however zoning in the area prevented retail uses. At the time he had also been reading about different design and planning ideas that contribute to the creation of great urban spaces. "I wonder[ed] how many of these things I could put into this block and try to recreate this great place," Roberts says. He approached friends and neighbours with the idea of trying to create their ideal block – one that included bike lanes and wider sidewalks to accommodate cafe seating and uses such as bookstores, art galleries and fruit stands: "The goal really was just to create that dream, European-looking block in our part of town."

The group knew that doing the project in a more sanctioned manner would require zoning changes – a process that could take years and likely significant expenditures. Instead, they decided to proceed without City approval. Over one weekend, the group leveraged their collective resources and contacts to implement their ideas: painting bike lanes on the roadway, providing patio seating, and opening the vacant buildings for pop-up shops. "We were just trying

Credit: Girls' Club Collection, Fort Lauderdale

to show what happens if we just did something on the fly... it was to illustrate why [the existing] zoning ordinances were bad," says Roberts. The group posted copies of all the rules and local ordinances they were breaking – ones they felt were overly restrictive to redeveloping and improving the area. City staff and council members were invited to the event and many were supportive of the interventions.

Two years after the first Better Block project, a number of the old ordinances are undergoing revision to meet current needs. The modifications represent a handful of smaller policy changes including easing restrictions on cafe seating, allowing merchandize to be sold by street vendors, and lowering permit costs for installing awnings and landscaping.

Roberts says it's important for citizens to actively advocate for the changes they want and show City administrators what is possible: "Often times I've found that many people at City Hall are actually your advocates... [but] they have a

playbook they have to go by and they are forced to play by those rules even if those rules no longer make sense...it is the public's job to try and get those things changed."

After completing a number of other projects and gaining international attention for their work, the Better Block team has taken on a mentorship role. They've open-sourced the tools they use and provide "how-to" information on their website, allowing others to lead similar projects. They also work as consultants to design and implement projects with cities across North America – getting citizens actively involved in creating projects and advocating for change, and working with officials to find ways to make the changes permanent. By building a cooperative relationship between government and community stakeholders, they are able to address issues in both the public and private realm. Further, by actively involving community members in the process of creating spaces (both conceptually and physically) they help citizens gain a sense of responsibility and ownership over their local neighbourhood.

Roberts says it is important for officials to understand the need to maintain a certain level of tension between sanctioned and somewhat unsanctioned actions. If a project becomes too controlled or over-regulated it can lose momentum and be off-putting to community members. He says officials need to honour that tension and allow citizens some freedom to experiment with new ideas and take ownership: "Having cities be open to the idea of flexible, temporary space and peeling back the rules a bit – almost creating a bureaucracy free zone...because an area has been under-utilized...It's a chance for a city to say to the public...show us what you've got."

Credit: Team Better Block

"The Better Block process does away with a lot of the fear that you would see in a typical planning process...Our goal is to institutionalize experiential planning. Allow these things to be put on the ground and tested...[for planners] to better illustrate [their] point".

- Jason Roberts

Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team, Memphis TN
Year Started: 2012
Instigator: Officials

In 2012, Memphis was chosen as one of five U.S. cities to receive sponsorship through Bloomberg Philanthropies' Government Innovation program. Each of the five cities is to focus on transforming local government by bringing innovation to bear on decision-making and the delivery of services, and to address two local issues. Responding to the challenge of attracting people back to the core of the city, the Memphis Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team is focusing on innovative ways to generate neighbourhood economic vitality.

"For the past 60 years there has been a severe disinvestment in the core of Memphis right along the same time that this next generation, the Millennials, are gaining a new interest in cities…it comes right at the time that the federal government…state government…local government are out of money…so how do we transform these dead spaces?," says Thomas Pacello, a member of the Innovation Team. There was a desire at the City to shift the local mindset towards residents having more agency and being active in addressing city problems. "We started to look at some of these tactical projects… [it made] a lot more sense for us to stop relying on silver bullet answers… and instead…test some basic, small ideas, see what works and then double down on those things that work".

Credit: Troy Glasgow

The Innovation Team was inspired by a project in 2010 where community leaders and business owners rallied around a local thoroughfare, Broad Street, and launched a project called "A New Face for An Old Broad". The project included painting crosswalks and bike lanes and temporarily activating vacant store spaces with retail shops over a weekend. Two years later, eight new businesses had opened, there had been 12 million dollars in private investment, and the City was installing a two-way cycle track. The Innovation Team wanted to experiment with projects like this to see what could be learned before making large investments. "We said let's take the same idea and expand it out to other commercial corridors and neighbourhood centres," says Pacello.

Credit: Memfix

The Innovation Team developed three initiatives to increase neighbourhood economic vitality: MEMshop, a pop-up retail project to temporarily activate vacant storefronts; MEMmobile, to promote mobile retail including food carts and dry goods; and MEMfix, a program to allow temporary street events that help revitalize blocks with temporary uses and low-cost materials.

For the first MEMfix project, the Innovation Team acted as the applicant on all of the permits – they felt it was important for them to experience the process citizens would go through in order to understand the potential challenges. Working through the system, they saw what worked, identified bottlenecks in the process, and educated other City departments about these new types of events. Now, MEMfix events are transitioning to leadership and organization by community members, with the Innovation Team shifting to a role of facilitatoin. The Innovation Team now works with City departments to see what resources can be made available, while also working to streamline the permitting process and reduce the number of meetings applicants need to attend. They have been documenting the lessons learned from the projects and are formalizing a toolkit to help community leaders establish a budget, address issues related to permitting, and run safe and successful events.

The Innovation Team is also currently creating a framework for both City officials and citizens to understand the potential for temporary projects with respect to investing more permanently, strategically, and effectively. The hope is to create a policy document to show what tactical interventions are, the impact they can have on a neighbourhood, and how the local government can experiment with them and support them.

At the same time the Innovation Team is developing a policy to engage local residents to develop new ideas for their communities and support neighbourhood projects through volunteer hours and crowd-funding. Pacello sees opportunity in creating "a platform...a system in which Memphians can be disruptive on their own and in a positive way within their neighbourhoods".

Credit: zflanders (creative commons)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Foster communication and connections between actors:
Host a meeting of private, public, and non-profit sector actors to discuss new ways to address local needs

2) Offer to be the test case:
Pilot the first few projects in City-owned venues or on publicly-owned land

3) Work through your official permitting process:
Collaborate with other City departments to problem solve regulatory bottlenecks and address local ordinances

4) Partner with relevant groups in the community:
Pilot projects with citizens and non-profit groups to gain their insight as well as increase credibility and local interest

5) Share what you learn:
Develop a framework of the lessons learned and share it with public and private partners so they can lead projects more successfully

6) Look for quick wins while planning:
Find actions that are easy to accomplish and act on them to build momentum and gain community support

GETTING INTERNAL BUY-IN

Sometimes the challenge for planners wishing to pilot new projects is not getting acceptance from community stakeholders, but rather getting support from other municipal departments and agencies. As many tactical and temporary projects take place within the public realm, a number of actors need to be involved. Securing that internal buy-in can be a challenge. Viva Vancouver provides an example of how building inter-departmental relationships can help projects move forward, while San Francisco's Pavement to Parks program highlights the importance of having a champion within the City to progress new ideas.

Credit: Laura Kaminski

Viva Vancouver, Vancouver BC
Year Started: 2009
Instigator: Officials

In 2009, Vancouver City Council approved a planning process to make Vancouver the greenest city in the world by 2020. One of the quick implementation ideas that came forward as part of the Greenest City 2020 Action Plan was the temporary closure of certain commercial corridors to promote the use of streets for different community activities. In contrast to previous street closures associated with a specific event, this initiative focused on closing the street to allow more space for pedestrians. The City piloted the Summer Spaces program to test the closure of four commercial streets every Sunday during the summer of 2009. The City waived the road closure cost and provided funding for community groups to run activities. Additionally, a planner was assigned to manage the promotion, coordination and implementation of the program.

The following February, the City established a series of pedestrian corridors in downtown Vancouver as part of the 2010 Winter Olympics. The downtown Vancouver BIA expressed interest in returning one corridor as an active space that summer. Building on their experience with the Summer Spaces program and the interest in pedestrian corridors, the City rebranded these initiatives as Viva Vancouver in 2011. The Viva Vancouver program focuses on

Credit: Vancouver Public Space Network (creative commons)

temporarily transforming streets into public spaces and raising the profile of active forms of transportation. As part of this initiative, the City has launched a number of creative public space projects in downtown Vancouver including Picnurbia, an undulating pop-up park, and Pop Rocks, a series of large beanbags that provide temporary seating.

The process of implementing the program has highlighted the importance of building strong inter-departmental relationships to help facilitate the learning process that comes with any new program. "The approach for Viva has been

implement...and figure out policy later," says Krisztina Kassay, the urban planner working on Viva Vancouver projects. "It's hard work to write policy and integrate [it]... but the really hard work is changing the mindset."

Since the Viva Vancouver program is not run out of the City's Planning Department, Kassay found it essential to communicate planning considerations to other City departments. Street closures, typically administered through the Engineering Department, are often evaluated on the basis of public safety or of providing a core service. In contrast, projects led by Viva Vancouver are often motivated by other community interests. For Kassay, the working relationships she established with other departments proved essential to building inter-departmental support. As a planner working within the City's Engineering Department, she was able to work closely with staff members that regulate road closures and work through the logistics of the projects. "What helped me was to be paired with an engineer that spoke everyone's language."

Through developing the program, Kassay found the City's existing approach to special events on the street to be both a help and hindrance. It was useful to have an existing model to build

from, but also created some confusion when trying to develop the new program. "There is always a desire to liken [Viva Vancouver] back to a special event," says Kassay. Determining how the new projects fit within existing municipal policies and how to categorize them was also a challenge for the City's Risk Management Office. However, Kassay found that by taking the time to thoroughly explain the different elements of the

project, they were able to develop a strategy that satisfied all departments.

Building on these first experiences, Viva Vancouver has now created a formal process for posting requests for expressions of interest from non-profits, community associations, and residents to host projects. The goal continues to be getting projects on the ground quickly. "Viva

is the platform for innovation... we innovate, we incubate, and then we try to integrate," says Kassay. Now that the program has become more established, staff are focusing on writing the policies and guidelines for these projects to be successfully integrated and supported within City policies. They recently unveiled a new guide for business and community leaders to create parklets in the city.

Credit: Krista Jahnke

The working relationships planners establish with people in other departments can make or break a project:

"It is a communication exercise of managing the mind shift. It is all about finding the right person in the other department...with projects like this, they can be very inspirational...people get really excited and want the project to succeed."

- Krisztina Kassay

Pavement to Parks, San Francisco CA
Year Started: 2008
Instigator: Officials

In 2005, design firm Rebar created the first Park(ing) installation in San Francisco – a small park that occupied an on-street parking space for two hours. A local loophole, which did not mandate that parking spaces could only be occupied by vehicles, inspired the group to "lease" the space and use it for a more community-focused purpose. The idea quickly spread to other cities and culminated in the annual global event, Park(ing) Day. The City of San Francisco had been supportive of Park(ing) Day and City planners were interested in exploring temporary projects in their work. In 2008, a challenge from Jeanette Sadik-Khan (New York City's DOT commissioner) motivated the City to establish an official program to convert excess roadway into pedestrian and public space.

Credit: Søren Schaumberg Jensen (creative commons)

Andres Power, then a planner with the City of San Francisco, was asked to bring together various departments and community stakeholders to develop a program through the Mayor's Office. Initially, Power looked to areas in the city that had a documented expression of need for improvement (e.g. pedestrian and bike safety concerns). From the initial list, four locations were chosen to pilot the creation of pedestrian plazas. The City legitimized the pilot plazas by going through an established review process with the

Municipal Transportation Agency, Department of Public Works, and the Public Utilities Commission as well as other relevant agencies (fire, police). For most on the review board the plazas were different from traditional projects they'd seen and there was apprehension and resistance to permitting this new type of public space.

Power argued that codes and regulations for permanent installations shouldn't apply to temporary projects. For him, it was important to

frame the project as being a trial and reversible if it didn't work. "The goal really was to get something on the ground almost overnight, and then to use the installation itself as an element to continue to engage the community… have the space itself be the planning exercise," says Power.

The first pilot plaza was eventually approved and installed with paint, cardboard bollards, and donated landscaping. The project was received

positively and enhancements were made to make elements of the space more permanent. At this time the program was officially named Pavement to Parks and the City installed the remaining three pilot plazas.

After receiving an expression of interest from a local business owner to create a similar project at a smaller scale, Power decided to build on the momentum and support of Park(ing) Day, to pilot the creation of "Parklets", small temporary sidewalk extensions that convert on-street parking stalls into public spaces. Power worked with Rebar and the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association to develop an initial design for Parklets as part of Pavement to Parks.

The Parklet model went through the same review and permitting process as the plazas. "The goal

was, again, to prove that this was something that could be done... even though it may not necessarily fit every single code section of various City departments," says Power. For Matt Passmore of Rebar, the idea of implementing first was refreshing: "Instead of having the design process slowed down by objection after objection, parklets allow us to test ideas at full scale and in real-time. Let's not let the process get shot down when it's still in a theoretical stage." The first six pilot Parklets were organized by Power, including securing funding to cover the cost of materials. At this time, planners at the City also started developing an official streamlined process to allow businesses, non-profits, and community groups to apply to create Parklets.

In addition to ensuring suitability of location, the City requires applicants to work with local

stakeholders to develop a Parklet design that will have support and ultimately be more successful. "The model lends itself to that ultra-localized planning and design, that, in my mind is... much more responsive to the immediate needs than anyone in City government could be," says Power. To date, 38 Parklets have been installed and 35 are at various stages of the City's approval process. San Francisco's official Parklet Manual was released in February of 2013.

"You have to be smart and informed about what you do, but it's better to try and succeed 80% of the time then to not try at all because you're afraid of failing with that 20%."

– Andres Power

"I look at planners as our collaborators and as advocates for looking for new responsible ways to produce space in a city that don't necessarily take as long as they have in the past."

– Matt Passmore, Rebar

Credit: Jeremy A. Shaw (creative commons)

Credit: Vancouver Public Space Network (creative commons)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Do your homework:
Educate yourself on the needs of individual City departments with respect to new projects (permit requirements, liability considerations)

2) Approach other departments early and be inclusive:
Don't wait until a project is in the ground to ask for the support you need

3) Communicate larger planning goals to other departments:
Demonstrate how a project will respond to a demonstrated community need or planning concern

4) Use failure as an opportunity to learn:
Where safety isn't compromised, take measured risks and learn from the experience

5) Promote dialogue:
Host interdepartmental discussions to share new projects and promote innovative thinking; Work together to address concerns and find solutions

ADAPTING IDEAS TO YOUR CONTEXT

Planners and officials are often inspired to experiment with innovative projects they see in other cities. Learning from tactical and temporary projects in other cities is important; however planners need to consider how a project can respond to local conditions and the context of their own city – the conditions that make a temporary project successful in one city may not be present in another. Examples from Buffalo and Philadelphia show how planners are integrating temporary projects from elsewhere into their own programs and policies. The Celebrate Yonge project meanwhile highlights the experience of being the test case and the process of working through local constraints.

Credit: Square 1 Sandwiches

Celebrate Yonge, Toronto ON
Year Started: 2012
Instigator: Non-profit; Officials

Celebrate Yonge was a four-week festival that involved the temporary redesign of Yonge Street in downtown Toronto in the late summer of 2012. The event was an initiative that developed out of the 'Yonge Street Planning Framework', an initiative spearheaded by City Councilor Kristyn Wong-Tam to address challenges along the street. The Framework touched on many aspects of the street (built form, heritage, signage) and presented an overall vision of the area including a focus on public realm improvements. One of the recommendations from the Yonge Street Planning Framework was to widen sidewalks on Yonge Street over time to accommodate the high level of pedestrian traffic, and to conduct an immediate pilot of the idea to test the potential impacts.

Observation had identified that Yonge Street wasn't functioning well for pedestrians or vehicles. Though the street had four lanes, service vehicles and delivery trucks often blocked one lane in each direction and narrow sidewalks didn't properly address the high level of pedestrian traffic. "The intent of [the Celebrate Yonge] initiative was ...to improve the conditions for everybody," says Evan Weinberg, former planning and development manager for the Downtown Yonge BIA. The redesign for

Celebrate Yonge included wider sidewalks with patios for businesses, a reduced number of traffic lanes (wide enough to accommodate cyclists and emergency vehicles), and designated lay-bys for service vehicles.

Though the Downtown Yonge BIA lead the process of implementing the pilot project, they worked closely with different City departments (transportation, public realm, operations) to consider all aspects of redesigning the street. Since this was a new type of project for Toronto – previously streets had only been completely closed to vehicles for street festivals – there was no set process to follow. The City was interested in using the event as a learning experience. As part of the process, the BIA was required to develop a traffic management plan, in addition to a physical plan for the site, to understand how traffic flow would be affected within a 20-minute walking radius of the site. "This was a precedent setting initiative and I think that's, in part, why we were asked to look beyond the scope of our work," says Weinberg.

In addition to the consultation that came out of the initial Planning Framework, the BIA conducted consultation events including surveying people in the event area, and inviting local residents

and business owners to discuss challenges and opportunities early on. As the plans were developed, a series of block-by-block meetings were also held to discuss and map specific issues. After incorporating feedback from community stakeholders and the results of the traffic management and road layout study, the BIA submitted their design for the street to the local community council and subsequently City Council, where it was approved.

This project was intended to be part of a larger process for the City to consider what a planning policy for temporary street redesign projects could look like. In this way, the process

Credit: Sam Schachar (TCAT)

of planning the design and coordinating with multiple partners was important as it helped to identify the potential complexities of translating the temporary project into a long-term permanent change. Here, during the four week event it was feasible for the City to change garbage pick-up schedules and locations; however, curb side collection would likely return and need to be considered in the final design if the installation were made permanent.

The choice to use the project as a catalyst to test how the City may address and incorporate temporary interventions in the public right of way appears to have been successful. It remains to be seen if the City will create an official policy to allow for the temporary redesign of streets for festivals, and if these projects will be used to promote more permanent change.

Credit: Craig James White

On the disconnect between planning and implementation:

"Planners are often asked to create the high-level tools, but they're not necessarily the ones who are going to be implementing [the projects], which is often challenging because it's through the implementation that you actually get to see the change...often, we as planners work as mediators...bringing people together."
– Evan Weinberg

Buffalo Green Code, Buffalo NY
Year Started: 2012
Instigator: Officials

The Buffalo Green Code, a comprehensive rewrite of the City of Buffalo's land use plan and zoning codes, is a current planning effort by the City of Buffalo to focus on implementing smart growth and sustainability principles originally outlined in the City's 2006 Comprehensive Plan. Buffalo has seen a considerable downturn in growth and development in the last few decades. Officials have chosen to see this situation as an opportunity to rethink the way the City functions and look for new ways to shape the outlook for the future. Since the previous zoning code and land use plan were outdated (both over 40 years old), planners felt it was necessary to make these documents reflect the current conditions and ideals of the city.

Credit: Zandria Marcuson

Chris Hawley, a city planner in the Mayor's Office, says the changing culture in City Hall is rooted in a growing interest in exploring new options. "Buffalo is currently a bit of a frontier for new and interesting ideas and is attracting a lot of people... there is a culture here that is open-minded to new ideas," says Hawley. This includes examining best practices for mobile retail, ways to re-purpose the public right-of-way, and promoting the use of under-utilized spaces: "We're taking a look at a lot of the trends that are popular around the country and are trying our best to integrate them into the framework of the Green Code".

A few years ago, food trucks emerged in Buffalo, but there was no licensing process in place. There was initially some resistance from local restaurants, however the idea gained support from the public. The City felt it was something they could accommodate and wanted to ensure there were no unreasonable regulatory barriers to potential vendors. In order to evaluate their impact and address potential concerns, the city ran a pilot project with a basic licensing process. After legitimizing their existence, interest in food trucks increased and there are now approximately two dozen operating in the city. Under the new zoning code, the permitting

process will be simplified to make it easier for vendors to understand and apply for permits. The ordinance will also be reworded to permit "mobile retail" so as to not limit the concept to food vendors.

There has also been increased support from citizens and officials for projects that repurpose the public right-of-way. Working with Go Bike Buffalo, a cycling and pedestrian advocacy group, the City hosted their first 'Play Street' in the summer of 2013 to provide more public space for pedestrians. The City has also looked to examples of creative reuse of the right of way such as pedestrian plazas and parklets in other cities to see how the new zoning code may incorporate some of these ideas. They hope that by simplifying and streamlining the permitting process for citizens and businesses wishing to do projects in the public right of way, there will be more flexibility to accommodate new types of uses that emerge.

While this mindset shift originally started with younger residents, members of the development community and government are also seeing potential in temporary projects. Larkin Square, a gathering space on a former parking lot in an industrial area of the city, was created to increase

the development potential of surrounding buildings. The developer attracted a restaurant to fill an abandoned gas station and brought food trucks, entertainment, and a temporary market to the space. Now, Larkin Square is to be a permanent feature in the neighbourhood that will continuously evolve. Planners recognize the project as a good example of how developers can lead temporary efforts and instantly activate under-utilized spaces. Learning from this experience, the City's Green Code will include modifications to better integrate temporary uses such as open-air markets into the zoning code. Hawley says all of these new ideas have been well-received by citizens: "We've tried all the other silver bullets before and they didn't work. The big convention centre, big stadiums... we're over [that] era and folks in the community are much more interested in these smaller, incremental, higher-impact projects than the large, government-funded official projects which, in the past, have not succeeded in delivering on their promises."

Credit: Larkin Development Group

"Our basic job is to help facilitate the revitalization of Buffalo... [We] like to call ourselves change managers... As these new concepts come on board, it's our responsibility to make sure that the practices and policies we have in city hall are ...responsive to both these trends and the health, safety, and welfare of the community."
- Chris Hawley

Parklet Program, Philadelphia PA
Year Started: 2010
Instigator: Non-profit; Officials

In 2010, the University City District in West Philadelphia approached the Mayor's Office of Transportation and Utilities with a desire to create parklets (small public spaces that extend from the sidewalk into the roadway, typically the size of 1-2 parking spaces) in their neighbourhood. The Mayor's Office had been examining these temporary uses and decided to work with community stakeholders to test how this new type of space could be implemented in Philadelphia.

In 2011, two parklets were created on a pilot basis in conjunction with the University City District. One, located across the street from a public park, was well-received. The other was not well used due to minimal foot traffic in the area and was not continued the following year. The initial pilot program provided the City with an opportunity to examine how people were using the parklets and what physical and neighbourhood characteristics made them successful. "You can't expect a parklet to build walkability or to build pedestrian traffic – they help pedestrian traffic," says Ariel Ben-Amos, a planner with the Mayor's Office. Through this pilot, the city also observed the impact parklets could have on community economic development. During the initial pilot, one business hosting a parklet saw revenue increase by 15-20%.

Building on the initial pilots, in 2012 the Mayor's Office partnered with the City's Commerce Department to provide six $5,000 mini-grants for community groups who wanted to build neighbourhood parklets. The City chose not to provide the grants directly to local businesses, instead wanting to focus on working with community groups, though the community groups were able to partner with a local business to build a parklet. Today all six funded parklets have been installed. In addition, the University City District has installed four new parklets using a standard design to strengthen the local neighbourhood identity and another has been installed in a low-income neighbourhood in North Philadelphia. Through the pilot program and mini-grants the City has been able to develop a program for creating parklets with community groups as opposed to private businesses, a model more common in cities like San Francisco. Such a model means that Parklets can be located in underserved communities and can be developed in conjunction with neighbourhood institutions such as schools and libraries. Here, they often function as spaces for creative community

Credit: Conrad Erb

programming (movie nights, farmers markets). "We've learned to recognize the [different local] market[s] for parklets," says Ben-Amos.

In developing their program, the City has created a set of criteria for applicants to follow. Parklet designs must be approved by the City's Streets Department to ensure the design meets safety standards and each partner must provide general liability and workers compensation insurance for their parklet. Applicants are also required to show local support for projects including letters of support from the adjacent property owners, the local councilor, and a petition of support indicating 51% of residents, business or property owners on the block support the project.

As part of their work, the City is conducting an impact study to gather comprehensive data including counting pedestrian traffic before and after parklet installation and surveying local businesses: "We know communities want [parklets], they are coming to us for them and we need to be able to make the case [in front of Council]," says Ben-Amos. "We think it's really important to be able to measure the impact of our more innovative work."

Responding to interest from community members, the City is looking at opportunities to simplify their process for creating parklets. Currently, each parklet requires a temporary lane closure license, but the Mayor's Office is considering a modification to the City code to allow the creation of parklets as an as-of-right use.

Credit: Dan Reed (creative commons)

Credit: Payton Chung (creative commons)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Critically evaluate innovative projects in other cities:
Consider if a project is relevant to your context and if it will address a local need or desire that has been identified

2) Think about the logistics:
Examine how similar projects have been incorporated within another city's bylaws and municipal programming

3) Consult citizens when creating and testing new programs:
Assess local interest in and support for projects; Determine if modifications are needed to make them meet local needs

4) Pilot projects with interested community groups:
Monitor how pilot projects function and make necessary adjustments

5) Measure the impact:
Collect data on different indicators to see if projects are meeting their intended purpose (e.g. street liveliness, impact on traffic and businesses)

USING EXISTING RESOURCES

Creating new municipal programs and policies often requires time and resources and is not always conducive to getting projects on the ground quickly. The slow pace of bureaucracy can discourage and disenfranchise both private and public actors who wish to innovate. Calgary's Pop-up Places initiative provides an example of how planners can use existing policies and land use designations to accommodate new temporary uses and events. Similarly, New York City's Public Plaza program showcases how a simple shift in how planners and officials manage the public right of way can provide new opportunities to meet the needs of residents.

Credit: Nina Munteanu

Pop-up Places, Calgary AB
Year Started: 2012
Instigator: Non-profit; Officials

The City of Calgary is currently experimenting with an idea called Pop-Up Places, a collection of temporary uses and activities to make use of vacant spaces throughout the city. The idea of Pop-up Places came about due to increasing interest from private actors and Business Revitalization Zones (similar to BIAs) looking for ways to enliven city streets and districts. The Victoria Park BRZ, located in an older area on the edge of downtown Calgary, started to examine ways to activate vacant lots in their district – over two dozen vacant lots were sitting in a holding pattern as surface parking and inactive construction sites.

The BRZ started working with property owners to get access to the vacant lots on a temporary basis with the intention to repurpose them for uses that could provide a local benefit. After being approached by the BRZ with the idea, City planners started to examine how they could support these projects. They found that existing bylaws already accommodated these new uses, allowing them to move projects forward quickly.

The first Pop-up Place was created on a lot sitting vacant as part of a stalled development. A two tower development had been approved; however, due to the downturn in the economy, the second

Credit: Victoria Park BRZ

tower has yet to be built. In the meantime, the developer has allowed the Victoria Park BRZ to sponsor a temporary private park on the unused site. To create the park, the City only required the BRZ to submit a Change Of Use Development Permit, a relatively simple process. Since the park is not public property, liability for and maintenance of the site remain the responsibility of the BRZ and the property owner.

Pop-up Places are meant to be temporary and occupy spaces that will not create a drastic impact on use or traffic. As such, the Planning Department has been comfortable with processing these types of applications through the change of use permit. Though the City notifies the local community association of the projects, a full consultation is not conducted. "We expect that [pop-up parks] are usually small in footprint

and nil in impact, so we are going to be able to process them very quickly," says Mark Sasges, Chief Development Planner with the City of Calgary. The first pop-up park application was received and processed within 21 days. The length of each permit will necessarily be project and site-dependant. The first Pop-up Park was issued a change of use permit for five years, though Sasges feels that is optimistic.

Building on the first successful project, the Victoria Park BRZ wants to host pop-up events that can take place when weather and time permit. Again, the City feels it has the tools in place to allow these projects to happen quickly. City planners reviewed potential uses proposed by the BRZ (movie screenings, markets) and found that the City's existing Special Function Use could accommodate most pop-up events.

The City hasn't had the opportunity to fully observe how the Special Function Use designation will accommodate pop-up events as the BRZ is still engaging with parcel owners to get access to the desired sites. However, the City wants to see if their current rules are robust enough to support these projects. "Right now, I don't see the need for [updating our bylaws]...I [am] as happy about that as anyone," says Sasges.

The City is excited by the opportunity for BRZs across the city to host pop-up places using the existing permitting framework: "This is their way to enliven the whole community, and they are targeting these mundane sites or blighted sites... so they can do something in those spaces for both the look but also for community activity," says Sasges. To help with the application process, the City has offered to pre-screen proposals for pop-up places city-wide before businesses and non-profits invest the time and money to submit a final application. In the last year, approximately 20 inquiries have been made.

On permitting a new project within 21 days:

"Everyone was surprised, in the community and in the political executive...that we didn't have to go away and re-write the bylaw to accommodate [these projects]... What we found ourselves doing was convincing people that we already had all of it listed, and this was how [they could] access...and navigate the system."

- Mark Sasges

Credit: Victoria Park BRZ

Public Plaza Program, New York City NY
Year Started: 2008
Instigator: Officials

In 2007 PlaNYC, a long-term plan for sustainability within the City of New York was developed. Each City department was given the overall goals of the plan and was asked to figure out ways in which they could achieve them. One goal of PlaNYC was to ensure all residents lived within a 10-minute walk of quality open space. In response, the City's Department of Transportation (DOT) developed an application-based program where community groups and non-profits in all five boroughs could apply to turn a piece of underused street into a public plaza.

"About 25% of the land in New York City is public right of way owned by the Department of Transportation," says Emily Weidenhof, NYC Plaza Program Director, whose mission is to rethink how the public realm can be used as spaces for people: "The reason the program found a structure and mechanism within DOT is because we do have all of this property that we own, manage, maintain, and a lot of it is overbuilt... we don't need it all to be roadbed."

Initially, the plaza program triggered a larger capital project for the creation of a permanent plaza; however the design and engineering process to create permanent plazas was long (> 2 yrs), and required significant resources (~$1.5-2 million). In response, the DOT created temporary plazas that would allow them to use expense funding (instead of capital funding) to provide a toolkit of materials to create the spaces.

Working with agency engineers and others at DOT, the Public Spaces Unit developed a set of design standards for the temporary plazas that engineers felt was safe. The temporary plazas are quick to design and build (5-6 months from application to completion), inexpensive (<$100,000), and since they are temporary and represent a minor physical change to the right of way, lengthy design and environmental review processes are avoided.

By changing the way they thought about their existing resources, the DOT was able to innovate and create a design and program that would be less expensive and quicker to implement. "We give [the street] a restricted use designation so that means that it is closed to [regular] vehicular traffic...limited vehicular access is permitted. For us, it is still a city street. It is still public right of way...we're just managing it for tables and chairs versus painting stripes for vehicle flow," says Weidenhof. "In a lot of ways, it was that [mindset] that enabled us to do what we do because we didn't actually have to create a brand new designation... we could just use things that were already in place."

Credit: Kate Hinds (New York Public Radio)

The Public Spaces Unit receives approximately 10 - 12 applications for plazas each year: 2 - 3 receive capital funding and 5 - 6 receive expense funding for the temporary materials. Applicants include Business Improvement Districts and Merchant's Associations, local school groups, non-profits, and developers. Applicants are expected to be active in the success of the plazas. They sign a plaza partner agreement to take responsibility for physical maintenance of the space (trash removal, watering planters, locking up street furniture) as well as programming.

Local community groups instigate the creation of the plazas, so there is inherently a certain level of local support and input. However, applicants are also required to provide letters of support from adjacent landowners, civic organizations, council members, as well as the local community board. The DOT notifies residents of the proposal and holds a series of workshops to discuss issues, opportunities, and design ideas that will reflect the character of the surrounding neighbourhood. After receiving citizen feedback, a final plan is created and presented to the community board. If approved, the project moves forward. After a temporary plaza is built, the DOT continues to monitor the area in order to learn how people use the space.

Since the plazas are temporary, there is less fear associated with trying new ideas and putting the projects on the ground to be tested. The focus instead is providing a mechanism for communities to actively discuss and build the kind of public space that they want. "Having these quick temporary plazas that we can call pilots – that we can say ...we can test it and we will learn from it and decide together how to move forward... – is the catalyst for making things happen," says Weidenhof.

"We see ourselves as a resource and a mechanism for community groups. We provide a certain set of expertise regarding the design of the public realm and the funding to build public space. But then we want to step out of the way and allow each community to take charge in making their plaza meet their local needs."

- Emily Weidenhof

Credit: New York City DOT
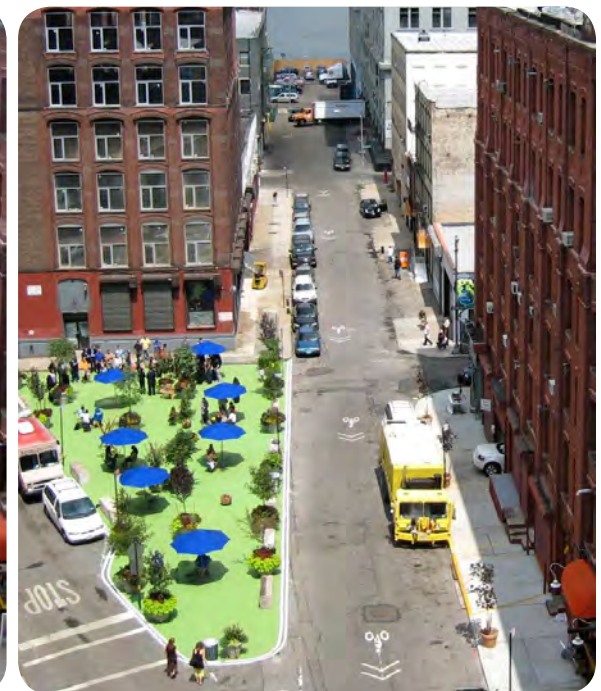
Credit: nycstreets (creative commons)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Assess existing under-utilized public resources:
Identify City-owned land and public facilities that can accommodate pilot projects

3) Find opportunity in existing regulations:
Examine whether current permits and bylaws can cover new uses and activities

5) Communicate opportunities:
Inform citizens and community organizations of new opportunities and how to access them

2) Look for opportunities to adapt the management of City-owned resources:
Determine if public land can be managed differently to meet the needs of the community

4) Lower the barriers:
Identify the minimum modifications or actions needed to allow a space to be used or a permit to be issued

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Working with citizen initiatives

1) Resist being reactionary to citizen-led actions
2) Educate citizens about existing bylaws
3) Harness the energy and creativity of citizens
4) Find ways to accommodate citizen initiatives
5) Create a standardized process
6) Designate a central contact or community liaison

Demonstrating what's possible

1) Foster communication and connections between actors
2) Offer to be the test case
3) Work through your official permitting process
4) Partner with relevant groups in the community
5) Share what you learn
6) Look for quick wins while planning

Getting internal buy-in

1) Do your homework
2) Approach other departments early and be inclusive
3) Communicate larger planning goals to other departments
4) Use failure as an opportunity to learn
5) Promote dialogue

Adapting ideas to your context

1) Critically evaluate innovative projects in other cities
2) Think about the logistics
3) Consult citizens when creating and testing new programs
4) Pilot projects with interested community groups
5) Measure the impact

Using existing resources

1) Assess existing under-utilized public resources
2) Look for opportunities to adapt the management of City-owned resources
3) Find opportunity in existing regulations
4) Lower the barriers
5) Communicate opportunities

CONCLUSIONS

Tactical and temporary urbanism appears to hold potential to be incorporated within professional urban planning practice. Small-scale, temporary projects allow planners to observe interventions on the ground and make adjustments before committing the time and resources needed to complete long-term projects. Planners can also use temporary projects as a mechanism to actively engage citizens in the process of city-building. Further, temporary and pilot projects can improve the responsiveness of planning departments, allowing projects to develop incrementally and to make use of local resources more effectively and creatively.

Successfully incorporating tactical and temporary projects into the practice of urban planning does require consideration of planners' professional responsibilities, and the underlying practices of good planning should always lead the way. As planners seek to improve local communities and support the well-being of citizens, temporary interventions should be adapted to address the local context and conditions of where they are being placed. Projects are also likely to have more support from community stakeholders, and politically, if they are grounded in the vision statement of a City or respond to an expressed policy goal or need. Planners also need to be conscious of the limitations of tactical and temporary urbanism as tool; however, an incremental and experimental approach to planning can be useful for improving public space design, fostering citizen leadership, and encouraging new forms of community and economic development.

Overall, tactical and temporary projects appear to offer planners an opportunity to respond to local needs by improving the resilience and adaptability of both planning processes as well as the policies they create. However, the role that planners play with respect to tactical and temporary urbanism is not one-size fits all. The degree to which planners are active in the implementation of projects and their comfort with leading projects involving some uncertainty can inform how they might perceive their role. Further, the expectations of local stakeholders, the structure of municipal bureaucracy, and the degree to which uncertainty and risk are accommodated within the planning culture of each municipality will likely impact how a planner engages with these projects.

Credit: John Locke

CASE STUDY RESOURCES

Better Block Project (Dallas TX)
http://betterblock.org/
http://teambetterblock.com/
http://www.livablecities.org/blog/city-city-block-block-building-better-blocks-project

Buffalo Green Code (Buffalo NY)
http://www.buffalogreencode.com/
http://larkinsquare.com/

Celebrate Yonge (Toronto ON)
http://www.celebrateyonge.com/
http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/te/bgrd/backgroundfile-59523.pdf
http://completestreetsforcanada.ca/examples/downtown-yonge-street-toronto

Intersection Repair (Portland OR)
http://cityrepair.org/about/how-to/place-making/intersectionrepair/
http://vbc.cityrepair.org/
http://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/450138?archive=yes

Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team (Memphis TN)
http://www.innovatememphis.com/
http://crosstownarts.org/memfix
http://www.memshop.org/

Parklet Program (Philadelphia PA)
http://phillymotu.wordpress.com/2012/03/30/motus-parklet-pilot-program/
http://phillymotu.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/parklet-guidelines-2013.pdf

Pavement to Parks (San Francisco CA)
http://sfpavementtoparks.sfplanning.org/
http://www.sfbetterstreets.org/find-project-types/activating-street-space/parklets/
http://rebargroup.org/

Pop-up Places (Calgary AB)
http://www.calgary.ca/PDA/DBA/Pages/Permits/Pop-Up-Places.aspx
http://www.victoriapark.org/sites/default/files/popup3_0.pdf

Public Plaza Program (New York City NY)
http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pedestrians/publicplaza.shtml
http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2013-nyc-plaza-program-guidelines.pdf

Temporary Urbanism Initiative (Washington DC)
http://dc.gov/DC/Planning/Across+the+City/Other+Citywide+Initiatives/Temporary+Urbanism+Initiative
http://planning.dc.gov/DC/Planning/Across+the+City/Other+Citywide+Initiatives/Temporary+Urbanism+Initiative/Temporium+Report

Viva Vancouver (Vancouver BC)
http://vancouver.ca/streets-transportation/reducing-cars-on-city-streets.aspx
https://www.facebook.com/VivaVancouver
https://vancouver.ca/streets-transportation/parklets.aspx

Walk Raleigh (Raleigh NC)
http://cityfabric.net/pages/walk-raleigh
http://walkyourcity.org/
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17107653

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TOOLKITS & GUIDES

Cleveland Pop-up Handbook
http://www.cudc.kent.edu/gallery/down-loads/pop_up_handbook.pdf

Interventionist Toolkit
http://places.designobserver.com/feature/the-interventionists-toolkit-part-3/29908/

Reclaiming the right of way – parklet toolkit
http://www.its.ucla.edu/research/parklet-toolkit.pdf

San Francisco Parklet Manual
http://sfpavementtoparks.sfplanning.org/docs/SF_P2P_Parklet_Manual_1.0_FULL.pdf

Tactical Urbanism vols 1 and 2
http://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/tactical_urbanism_vol.1

http://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/tactical_urbanism_vol_2_final

Urban Repair Squad Toolkit
http://web.net/~lukmar/UrbanRepairSquadManual.pdf

READINGS

Back to the city: Strategies for informal urban interventions: collaboration between artists and architects. Steffan Lehmann (ed). Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz. 2009.

Insurgent public space: Guerrilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities. Jeffrey Hou (ed). New York : Routledge. 2010.

Temporary urban spaces: Concepts for the use of city spaces. Florian Haydn and Robert Temel (eds). Basel: Birkhäuser. 2006.

The spontaneous city. Tess Broekmans, Sjoerd Feenstra, and Gert Urhahn (eds). Amsterdam: BIS Publishers. 2010.

The temporary city. Bishop and Williamson. Peter Bishop and Lesley Williams. New York: Routledge. 2012.

Urban catalyst: The power of temporary use. Philipp Oswalt, Klaus Overmeyer, and Philipp Misselwitz (eds). Berlin: DOM Publishers. 2013.

Urban interventions: Personal projects in public spaces. Robert Klanten and Matthias Hubner (eds). Berlin: Gestalten. 2010.

Urban pioneers: Temporary use and urban development in Berlin. Klaus Overmeyer (ed). Berlin: Jovis. 2007.

EXHIBITS

Actions: What you can do with the city, Canadian Centre for Architecture. http://www.cca-actions.org/

DIY Urbanism, San Francisco Planning and Urban Research. http://rebargroup.org/diy-urbanism-testing-the-grounds-for-social-change/

Spontaneous Interventions, Institute for Urban Design. http://www.spontaneousinterventions.org/

WEBSITES

Pop-up city
http://popupcity.net/

Tactical Urbanism Salon
http://tacticalurbanismsalon.com/

BMW Guggenheim Lab – 100 Urban Trends
http://www.bmwguggenheimlab.org/100urbantrends/#!/new-york-city/

Studio Urban Catalyst
www.studio-uc.de

Urban tactics. Killing Architects
http://www.killingarchitects.com/news/urban-tactics-final-repor

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES CONT'D

PEOPLE & PROJECTS

Candy Chang
   http://candychang.com/

Cleaveland Urban Design Collaborative
   http://www.cudc.kent.edu/pop_up_city/
   index.html

Do Tank
   http://do-tank.com/

Dublin City Beta Projects and DCC Studio
   http://dubcitybeta.wordpress.com/
   http://dccstudio.wordpress.com/

Halifax Intersection Repair
   http://www.halifax.ca/culture/Community-
   Arts/Placemaking.html

Ideas City Festival
   http://www.newmuseum.org/ideascity/
   about/#projects

IOBY
   http://ioby.org/

Montreal Ruelle Verte (french)
   http://www.ecoquartierduplateau.org/wp-
   content/uploads/2012/03/GUIDE-RUELLES-
   VERTES-2012.pdf

Neighborland
   https://neighborland.com/

Place Partners - Doing it differently
   http://www.placepartners.com.au/ps/doing-
   it-differently

Providence Art Windows
   http://providenceartwindows.blogspot.ca/

Public Interest Design
   http://www.publicinterestdesign.org/
   pid100/

Renew Newcastle
   http://renewnewcastle.org/

SF Art in Storefronts
   http://www.sfartscommission.org/CAE/
   category/art-in-storefronts/central-market-art-
   in-storefronts/

San Francisco Urban Prototyping Festival
   http://sf.urbanprototyping.org/

Street Seats
   http://www.streetseats.org/

The City 2.0
   http://www.thecity2.org/

Urban Repair Squad
   http://urbanrepairs.blogspot.ca/

Urban Omnibus
   http://urbanomnibus.net/ideas/

72 Hour Urban Action
   http://www.72hoururbanaction.com/

100 Interventions in 1 Day:
   http://www.100en1diabogota.com/