

part c

taking action – steps to reclaiming your street

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Kim Hendess

This section was written with help from *Street Reclaiming: Creating Livable Streets and Vibrant Communities* by David Engwicht, New Society Publishers, 1999 and from *The Citizen's Handbook: A Guide to Building Community in Vancouver* by Charles Dobson, Vancouver Citizen's Committee, 1995. <http://vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook>. Thanks also to David Fushtey for his ideas.



The steps outlined in this section are meant as a guide for how to organize your neighbourhood to reclaim your streets. While they are presented in a particular order, they are in fact all interconnected in a circular, rather than linear, fashion. You will likely not follow the order of the steps as they are described here; you may ignore some of them altogether, or find you need to return to a step you're already done to revise a strategy, adapt to changing circumstances, or simply reinforce your message. Whatever you do, remember that long-term change rarely happens overnight - so make sure you have fun. And keep at it!

getting started

get yourself started

Get in the habit of finding out more about street reclaiming concepts and thinking about how you want to go about reclaiming your street. Developing a good understanding of the goals and principles of street reclaiming at the outset will help you be more effective and keep your activities focused.

Then take action!

Some easy things you do right away to start reclaiming your street:

- draw on the street or sidewalk with chalk
- make a colourful sign saying "slow zone"
- read a book out on the street
- have a sidewalk sale and spill out onto the street

Your neighbours will start to see that something unusual is going on, and chances are, they'll come out and join you!

get others started - build a team of neighbourhood leaders

If you want to get others involved in reclaiming your street, it's a good idea to find other neighbours who share your concern with traffic problems, and are motivated to do something about it.

Some things you might consider:

join an existing neighbourhood group

- Is there already a group working on neighbourhood issues that you can join?
- Is this group working on traffic issues? Or would they be willing to?
- Are they interested in undertaking street reclaiming activities?

form your own group

If there is no such group, or if joining an existing group seems difficult, do you need to start your own group?

- Who are some people you would like to work with and have on your Street Reclaiming Team, to help get a street reclaiming project started?
- Identify your Purpose – What are you trying to do?
- Define your Scope –What size of area will you try to organize?
- Can you limit your reclaiming to just one street, or do you need to consider the cause and effect of neighbouring streets? Should you include people from these areas?
- Is there a group of streets that have similar problems, that you should include in your area?
- Who will support your efforts? How can you form or strengthen relationships with these people or organizations?



See the Tools Section for some tips about how to create participatory groups.

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Experience tells us that the process will be slow and that our success depends upon a united community voice.

”

-Neighbourhood Traffic Group newsletter, Sept 2001

“
Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

“
-Margaret Mead, anthropologist

form a street reclaiming steering committee

It is fairly essential that a core group of 4-6 people take a lead role in planning and coordinating your Street Reclaiming Project. It can be very helpful if these leaders form a “Steering Committee” and commit to taking a leadership role in planning and carrying out strategies, promoting them to neighbours, evaluating and recording, and addressing any conflicts that may arise.

Some ideas for building your team:

- Think of ways to reach out to other neighbours to inform them of your group’s issues and activities and get more people involved.
- Find people who have a diversity of skills, especially skills that aren’t your strong points. A good team will have a balance of skills – e.g. a creative thinker, a devil’s advocate, an organizer, and a worker.
- Start with a meeting.
- A meeting with a small group of 3-5 committed people can help get the ball rolling.
- Start with a fun community building activity, such as a block party. This will attract more people than a “meeting” and will encourage more children and youth, people who speak different languages, and in general, a broader mix of people. Everyone loves a party!
- Put up a sign telling people what your concern with traffic is, and why you think your streets should be reclaimed.
- Give a few inspiring and easy examples of what street reclaiming activities your neighbours could do – for example, holding a street hockey game, gardening, or hanging art along the street. Display a poster (such as the one included with this guidebook!) to tell people what street reclaiming is all about.
- Put out a sign-up sheet asking people to leave their names & contact info if they want to help, or if they want you to keep them up to date with your activities.



TIP: Why not have your meeting on the street – this will probably slow traffic down, raise a few eyebrows, and maybe encourage people to stop and find out what you're up to. Ask them to join you!

... but don't get caught in the trap of having lots and lots of meetings and not taking any action!



See the Tools Section for more tips about how to get people involved, and how to set an agenda and run an effective meeting.



network with other street reclaimers!

The Street Reclaiming Network is an electronic forum for exchanging ideas about strategies such as neighbourhood organizing, celebration, art, community-designed streetscapes, direct action strategies, and reducing personal car use to address neighbourhood traffic problems.

The Street Reclaiming Network was created by BEST in Greater Vancouver to facilitate the sharing of information and to promote neighbourhood events and educational opportunities, but anyone can join the listserve. For more info, check out www.best.bc.ca/projects, or contact the Neighbourhood Streets Project Coordinator at streets@best.bc.ca or 604.669.2860.



Kim Hendess

keep track of all your activities

Make sure you record all the activities you do, so you can learn from your experiences and share responsibility with new people who get involved. Good records can also help out if you ever want to apply for funding for a neighbourhood project, or give news reporters some background information about your group. And it's always inspiring to look back on all the great things you and your neighbours have done.



Some tips:

- Make sure to keep any news clippings.
- Have someone create a scrapbook with all the photos and highlights of neighbourhood street reclaiming events. Bring the scrapbook to all meetings and events so newcomers can see what has been done.
- Have a Street Reclaiming Steering Committee member keep all the Planning & Evaluation guides or notes from each action.

learn more - identify & research

One of the most important and fun aspects of street reclaiming is learning – learning about everything from how city hall works to how water drains, from how a child crosses a street to how plants grow along a boulevard, from what is good engineering design to what is good community design, and maybe even how beauty and people tie it all together.

If there is a specific traffic problem in your area, or the City has been involved in transportation planning in your neighbourhood in the past, you may want to learn more before beginning to carry out your street reclaiming strategies.

For example, you may want to identify and research the history of the problem and your group's potential to implement solutions. A few ways you can do this are:

- hosting a small meeting of neighbours along your street;
- putting up a giant chalkboard on the sidewalk for passersby to add their thoughts;
- putting out a drop-box for people to drop ideas into (perhaps include a brief questionnaire in a community newsletter); or,
- having an email listserve or on-line bulletin board that people can add ideas to (but remember not everybody has access to a computer or the internet).

You may also find that you need to balance a lot of interests. You likely share core values with your neighbours and with City staff who can help enhance your neighbourhood. But you'll also have to be willing to balance the differing priorities of a lot of different perspectives: people, weather, people, transportation, people, utilities, people, services, people.... Give some thought to what these various interests may be, and how to balance them in a way that benefits the community as a whole, while taking special considerations into account.

researching your situation

Before you start coming up with solutions, have you determined what the problems are?

- What are the traffic problems or issues you are concerned about? What are some causes of these problems? What are the underlying causes of these causes?
- What issues are other people concerned about?
- What have people tried to do about this situation? What is the history of this problem?
- What involvement has the City had with transportation issues in your neighbourhood? Contact City staff in transportation or planning departments and ask them about the history of transportation planning in your neighbourhood. Are there plans to address the problem already underway? Are there any other plans for the area that may affect the volume and speed of traffic on your streets (e.g. developments, traffic pattern changes, etc.)?

collecting “baseline” data for future evaluation

In order to evaluate how successful your street reclaiming strategies have been, it is important to collect “baseline” data before you begin your actions.

The data or information you collect should relate to your group’s overall goals, since your evaluation will measure your effectiveness in reaching those goals. For example, BEST’s pilot neighbourhood groups identified three goals:

- Reduce driving speeds in neighbourhood streets;
- Reduce car use in neighbourhood streets; and
- Make neighbourhood streets safe and fun places for people to play, interact, and build community.

“

How is the problem the solution?

”

–Starhawk

Given these goals, it would be helpful to collect information that measures driving speeds, volume of traffic, and sense of safety and enjoyment that people have in their streets, as well as the sense of community being created or strengthened by reclaiming the streets.

Then you can collect this data again at a later date and see what changes have occurred.

- How many cars travel along your street every day? How many during am/pm peak hours?
- How many pedestrians? How many cyclists? How many using other modes (e.g. skateboard, in-line skates, etc.)
- Where are people travelling to and from?
- Has the City done a traffic count or tracked speed along your street, or recorded where cars travel to and from when they drive along your street?
 - If not, you can ask your City staff to do this research for you. Contact the Transportation Planning department and tell them your concerns. Ask them to check speed, volume, and origin-destination patterns along your streets.
 - Or, you can do some of this research yourself, using simple tally sheets during certain high volume periods of time. You can also be more thorough and use the Walking Security Index to determine the safety, comfort, and convenience of key intersections for pedestrians.



See the Tools Section for how you can use a Walking Security Index in your neighbourhood.

researching solutions

It can be very helpful to find out what skills and resources you have in your neighbourhood to help you undertake any street reclaiming activities. Some things to consider are:

- What capacity does your group have? Who can help? What other organizations or public institutions can you partner with, or ask for help from?
- How, why, and where do people get together in your community?
- Ask City staff what resources they can provide for you.



- Find out if the City is planning any local improvements, greenways, traffic calming, or community development projects – these could be a source of funding or assistance.
- Research what other neighbourhoods have done and learn from their experience.

finding allies at city hall

Streets are part of our public realm, which means that they are part of that wonderful maze of local government responsibilities, from civil servants who engineer, manage and administer street operations, to Councillors who make strategic decisions and policies.

City engineering and planning departments have many regulations and restrictions about how a street can be used, but they also likely have programs and incentives that you can tap into to build a more pleasant streetscape and neighbourhood. You might find it helpful to learn about certain City bylaws or community development programs as you explore how to carry out your street reclaiming ideas.

For example, the City of Vancouver has a “Block Party Kit”, a Green Streets Program, and a Safe Routes to School program. The City of Surrey has an Adopt-a-Street program to keep streets clean and green, and the City of Victoria has a Special Projects Grant that it offers to community groups for a wide range of activities. The City of Toronto has adopted a Pedestrian Charter, which provides guidelines to ensure that walking is a safe, comfortable, and convenient mode of travel.



See the Tools section for the City of Toronto’s Pedestrian Charter

Find out how you can make programs such as these work for you. This manual provides snippets of information, and part of your challenge – if you choose to take it up - is to seek the information and establish the relationships you need to make your ideas into reality. If your municipality doesn’t seem to offer any neighbourhood enhancement programs that you can tap into, find someone on City Council or staff who is sympathetic to your cause and ask them how they can help.



Once we connected with one or two people at the City of Vancouver who were impressed by our enthusiasm to make changes in our neighbourhood, they introduced us to a whole network of people who wanted to help us.



*-Sharole Taylor,
Mountain View
Neighbourhood Group*

“

Planning is necessary if you want to avoid wasted activity, and make your collective efforts count.

”

-Charles Dobson, The Citizen's Handbook

One of the most important steps in effective street reclaiming is to go early and often to see the people who work at the City. Get informed:

- Who are friends of street reclaiming? who are not? who don't care?
- What systems (programs, bylaws, incentives, disincentives) are in place? good? bad?
- What needs to be changed? bylaws? policies?

The intent is not to let nay-sayers get you down, but to start to build an awareness as early as possible in the process of where the smooth sailing or storm fronts may be. Those of us on the coast are used to hearing that you cannot control the wind, but you can adjust the sails.

All of that takes information. Don't let it overwhelm you or dampen your enthusiasm, but be aware of the importance of City Hall. You may need to think about a long-term approach to changing attitudes, to avoid unexpected frustrations and to really leave a legacy of safe street reclaiming fun. We also expect that you will be pleasantly surprised at the number of great people who do work on your behalf in municipal government.

planning & getting your neighbours involved

educate your neighbours - stir curiosity and provide info

You want your neighbours to join you in your street reclaiming activities, and maybe even to become involved in the organizing team. A good way to interest people in getting involved is to pique their curiosity. Put up posters or write chalk messages that are somewhat vague, and keep people watching for more info. e.g. *Do you want less traffic in this street? Stay tuned...* What are some other ideas that will make people wonder what this is all about?

Providing information about street reclaiming will also get people interested. Create a flyer with a few points about what street reclaiming is and where they can find out more info (feel free to photocopy parts of this guidebook for that purpose). Knock on peoples' doors to deliver the flyers, and chat

about your ideas to reduce traffic through street reclaiming. Invite them to come out to a meeting or block party to find out more. Or put up a poster about street reclaiming (such as the one included with this guidebook) at a central meeting place or on a community bulletin board.



Going door-to-door with kids is a non-threatening way to meet new neighbours – and it also helps to build understanding that street reclaiming is about safety.

You can also host a neighbourhood (or block) gathering at your house to view the video, *Street Reclaiming: How to get your street back*, by David Engwicht. Or pass around this guidebook or David Engwicht's Street Reclaiming book to interested neighbours.



The video, *Street Reclaiming: How to get your street back* by David Engwicht is a great inspiration for brainstorming your own street reclaiming strategies. Have a neighbourhood showing, or pass the video around. Ask your library to get a copy. To get a copy yourself, contact: BEST (on loan) or www.lesstraffic.com (for sale).



See the Tools Section for tips on how to get – and keep – people involved, and for outlines of neighbourhood planning activities you can use or adapt.



Kim Hendess

plan your actions - brainstorm & prioritize

The next step is to do some planning.... Of course, you don't want to take the spontaneity out of street reclaiming by over-planning every activity, but it is a good idea to have an overall strategy that allows for planned and spontaneous street activities.

If you want to increase the level of neighbourhood support for your street reclaiming activities, it is a good idea to invite all your neighbours to

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Rough-draft thinking is just like rough-draft writing - it needs encouragement, not evaluation.... When ideas are criticized before they are fully formed, many people feel discouraged and stop trying....A group is then deprived of access to its most valuable natural resource: the creative thinking of its members

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-Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making by Sam Kaner, 1996 p.98

participate in the planning process. This way they feel welcome to get involved and can suggest their own ideas if they are unhappy with someone else's.

The Resources Section of this guidebook has ideas and sample agendas for planning activities you can do at meetings, workshops, or in the street. These activities will help you to brainstorm and prioritize your street reclaiming ideas, and identify details for your Action Plan.

brainstorm

What are all the fun and creative ideas you and your neighbours can come up with to make the street a more friendly place for people? What everyday activities can you do in the street? What would give your street a unique feeling? What would you enjoy doing together? What inspires you? What is the neighbourhood known for? What are some activities and strategies that could highlight the things your community is proud of?

Give people a few ideas to get their imaginations warmed up (e.g. show the *Street Reclaiming video*), and then let the ideas flow!

Remember – this is the brainstorming stage where every idea is a great idea! Ensure that nobody is analyzing or “shooting down” anybody's idea, even if it seems like it would never work.

Also, identify some traffic reduction strategies to reduce car-use among neighbours within your neighbourhood. These should be carried out at the same time as you begin your psychological street reclaiming, so that your goal of reducing traffic stays at the forefront of peoples' minds.

When you think you are finished, allow a bit more time for last minute ideas - these are often the most creative. When you are finished brainstorming, debrief the activity by sharing reflections on the list as a whole.

See the Tools Section for tips on brainstorming, facilitating, and dealing with difficult group dynamics.



categorize your ideas ¹

If you have long lists of brainstormed ideas, it can be helpful to sort them into categories so people can make sense of them. Here are two possible

ways to for your group to create categories:

1. Create categories from your list - each person, in turn, proposes a set of categories and the group agrees on which categories to use.
2. Sort your ideas into predefined categories.

Examples of categories are:

- Type of Street Reclaiming strategy - physical, design, activity, not a street reclaiming strategy
- Urgency - high, medium, low, unknown
- Time/Effort needed - a lot, some, not much, unknown
- Cost - expensive, mid-range, cheap, unknown
- Desirability - highly desirable, worth a try, undesirable, unknown

Sorting into categories such as these can help your group avoid latching onto one idea and pushing the discussion to focus on only that. It can also help you choose a variety of strategies to achieve your goal.



See the Tools Section for tips on group decision-making.

prioritize & identify details

Once you've brainstormed lots of ideas, you'll want to identify the ones you and your neighbours actually want to carry out.

This is when you'll decide which ideas you want to pursue.

Key steps to help you and your group prioritize your ideas are:

- Identify your goals
- Identify your resources
- Choose your favourite ideas which are likely to meet your goals

Then you can start to work out the details of who will do what, where, when, and how. Make sure you choose ideas that you and your neighbours are excited about! Each idea should have at least one champion who will make sure that it happens.



Kim Hendess



Tip: Start with “feel-good”, non-controversial ideas that will build community, beautify your neighbourhood and inform neighbours about your goals. This will build positive relations and warm up those people who might be hesitant about the more unusual strategies.



A brochure summarizing the Neighbourhood Traffic Group's Action Plan was distributed to neighbours.

create an action plan

Once you've chosen which actions you'll carry out, map out your actions on a calendar. Make sure you give the group enough time to plan each action well and to evaluate its success. Keep track of this timeline along with all the brainstormed and prioritized ideas, goals, and resources your group has identified.

A written plan can be a helpful reference for everyone in the group, for people who move into the neighbourhood in the future, or for neighbours who decide to take on some street reclaiming activities of their own. An Action Plan can outline principles that your street reclaiming activities should follow, and it can list all the great ideas that were brainstormed in the planning stage, so you can be re-inspired when you need to change things up a bit.

Your plan can be a brief and simple summary, or a detailed account of your group's planning and activities. It can be a document, brochure, flyer, or collection of papers filed in a binder.

The key questions that your plan should answer are:

- What are your goals?
- What kinds of resources do you have for achieving these goals?
- What are the specific actions that will achieve these goals, given your resources?
- When and how will these actions be done?



See the Tools Section for a sample outline of a Street Reclaiming Action Plan.

communicate your plans & get noticed

tell your neighbours & other community organizations

Communication is key. Tell your neighbours about the plan. Ask them for feedback. Tell them how they can get involved. Remind them why you have come up with this plan, and how these actions will benefit them.

Some ways you can do this are:

- Include highlights of the plan in your community newsletter and tell people where they can find more information.
- Create a brochure summarizing the main elements of the plan.
- Create a display of your plan (maybe include details of the planning process) that you can put out on the street at neighbourhood events, or along the street, or on your community bulletin board.
- Have a block party and display the plan.
- Send an email with some main highlights and tell people where they can find more information.
- Always include a sign-up sheet for people to write their name and contact info if they want to get involved or receive more info.

tell the City

Street Reclaiming can be an important strategy in getting the attention of City Council for a particular traffic concern you may have – so make sure you tell them about your street reclaiming activities. Invite them to attend events and then tour them around to point out your concerns.

Liaison with City staff is key. City staff don't necessarily want to know about all the details of all of your neighbourhood activities, but they certainly would appreciate knowing generally what your group is up to. One of the City's main concerns is liability, so they have to know that safety is not compromised in any way. There may be many bylaws that prohibit some kinds of street reclaiming activities, so it would be a good idea to research these and identify the primary concerns underlying these bylaws. It can help alleviate fears they may have (e.g. that you are engaging in

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The lawn sign campaign announced the Blenheim Neighbourhood Group's presence in the neighbourhood and we believe it was instrumental in getting us a meeting with the Head of Engineering and the City's subsequent decision to designate Blenheim Street the pilot project for the City's neighbourhood collector initiative.

”

-Ellen Hockin, Blenheim Neighbourhood Group

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Our big media event – a street hockey game - which was heard on all the local radio stations and T.V channels, brought us to the attention of City councillors. Then when we went to Council with our 'issues' they paid attention to us because they knew we were serious, organized and not going away. It was a major case of the 'squeaky wheel' getting the grease.

”

*-Pauline Kendall,
Neighbourhood Traffic
Group*

some radical street re-design) if you outline your goals and intentions. Then it is likely that they will leave you alone to decorate and enliven your street. And they'll probably be happy to see residents taking responsibility themselves for making the City a better place to live.

tell the media

Getting media coverage can be a key strategy to achieving success. Media reports can communicate your efforts to commuters who drive through your neighbourhood. They can put pressure on local politicians to put resources into neighbourhood traffic reduction plans, public transit, cycling infrastructure, and other region-wide vehicle trip reduction measures.

See the Tools section for a guide on Working with the Media.



reclaim your streets!

carry out your actions

Now it's time to take action! Follow the timeline and any guidelines you identified in your Action Plan. The core organizing group should play a lead role in coordinating volunteers and evaluating actions, as well as keeping records of all actions. Any volunteers who organize an action should submit their action planning and evaluation records to the organizing group for future reference.

See the Tools Section for a sample Planning Guide for your street reclaiming actions.



coordinating volunteers

It can be very helpful if a member of the core organizing group keeps track

of all volunteers interested in helping out. On your group's contact list, keep track of peoples' names, contact info, interests, resources they can contribute, things they'd like to do (and don't want to do), and any additional comments that may help you to coordinate people.



Have a sign-up sheet at every neighbourhood street reclaiming event you organize so you can gather contact information and build your list of people who want to stay informed or help out.

beg, borrow...

Street Reclaiming is a home-grown approach – so you should use as many materials that you already have instead of buying fancy new things. For expenses such as printing leaflets and newsletters, you should be able to collect small donations at your events. The Neighbourhood Traffic Group has collected significant funds through donations at its annual Sidewalk Sale. See the Case Studies – sample actions section for details.



See the Tools Section for a few fundraising ideas.

celebrate!

Always remember to pat yourself and your team members on the back after every street reclaiming action. And thank all the volunteers that helped make your actions happen. Make a thank you card for people who put in extra efforts to pull off a great event, or to thank a local business for their donation.

And keep at it! Remember, you won't achieve all your goals at once. But over time, your actions *will* make a difference.



Kim Hendess

how did you do?



evaluate and adapt future plans ²

Practice makes perfect – but only if you take the time to learn from your experience and incorporate your lessons in future actions. Evaluate your outcomes against the goals identified at the outset of the planning stage.

To help you build upon your successes and lessons in your future actions, conduct a brief evaluation after every street reclaiming action. You may want to consider evaluating your planning, teamwork, actions taken, media coverage, people involved, and the results.

Some questions you may ask are:

Was it easy to carry out? Did it achieve as many of our goals as possible? If not, what can we improve next time? What other actions might be more successful? What were the positive aspects of the project? What were major obstacles and how did we overcome them? Did we have enough volunteers and resources? How well did we work as a team?

Be sure that event organizers report back to the group about key successes, challenges, and lessons learned. This way, organizers of future activities can benefit from their experience, and won't have to reinvent the wheel.



See the Tools Section for tips on evaluating and for a sample Evaluation Guide.

Measure changes against your baseline data

From time to time, measure the same conditions that you measured before you began your street reclaiming activities. Has there been any change? If yes, how much of the change can you attribute to your activities? What factors other than your activities could this change be attributed to?

If you haven't achieved any results, consider why this may be. Which strategies were successful and which weren't? What can you do differently to be more successful? Adjust your Action Plan according to what you have learned.

share your experiences

Be sure to communicate what you've done and learned to your neighbours, the media, and municipal staff or Councillors. Share your experiences (and expertise) with other local groups working on transportation and neighbourhood issues so they can learn from your activities.

For example, consider sending activity updates to BEST's Street Reclaiming email listserve or register your group's activities on the Sustainability Tools and Resources website at www.sustainabilitytools.ca (see part e – resources). And let BEST know so we can keep track of successful projects!

Most importantly, celebrate your achievements! Remember not to expect drastic results right away, and to recognize the importance of small victories. And incase we haven't mentioned it enough, remember to have fun as you dance and play in your streets!

Resources used in this section:

1. from: *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* by Sam Kaner, 1996 p.104-109
2. help from Kielburger & Kielburger: *Take Action! A Guide to Active Citizenship*, Gage Learning Corporation, 2002, p.13



“
a journey of a thousand
miles begins with a
single step.

“
-Lao Tzu

