



## Play Streets: Opportunities for the City of Rochester

### **Background:**

Play is critical to the physical, social and emotional development of all children.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> Kids and teens that play every day are healthier, do better at school, have stronger social-emotional skills, and are provided with the opportunity to learn critical skills like team building and problem solving.<sup>iv,v,vi</sup> Ultimately, play is an important building block that helps create a foundation for healthy kids that are career and college ready.

Communities across the country are shutting down streets in neighborhoods to allow for unstructured play. A play street is when a city street is closed to traffic by a community or neighborhood group to provide a space for children to participate in unstructured recreational activities. Studies demonstrate that play streets increase recreation opportunities for children, contribute to their physical and social-emotional development and support community building.<sup>vii</sup> In fact, a recent study by the University of Bristol shows 84 percent of play streets participants feel they belong more to their neighborhood.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Best Practices:**

Communities that have implemented successful play streets programs have allowed for residential street closures, similar to block parties, throughout the summer. Seattle, New York City and Philadelphia all have programs and a permit process open to community groups, schools, and neighborhoods to host play days.

Similarities are apparent in all three communities where play streets are allowed, and in what processes must be followed. Communities have limited the operation of play streets by restricting residential street closures on emergency routes, bus routes, or other high traffic corridors, and requiring that play streets do not occur during rush hour or at high traffic times. All permitting processes require residents who wish to submit an application for a play street to include a petition of residents on the participating streets.

- **Seattle:** In Seattle their play street permit process is **free** and requires residents to submit an application at least 30 days before the first event. They highlight specific requirements for their play streets including what types of streets can be used, and set up requirements.<sup>ix</sup>

**NYC:** In New York City, they have two types of play streets permits, one for the summer months, and one that allows schools to close streets throughout the school year. The total cost for the permit is **\$25.62 per application**. NYC requires summer play streets requests to be placed with the Permitting Office before May 1<sup>st</sup> and also highlights requirements for eligible streets.<sup>x</sup>

- **Philadelphia:** In Philadelphia, their play streets program is run out of their Department of Recreation and funding through the federal Summer Meals Program. Each play street site across the city also serves as a summer meals location for kids. Their play streets happen consistently throughout the summer months to ensure kids have access to healthy food and play

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opportunities. **The permit is free** for residents. A street petition is required, and they have similar requirements to NYC/Philly on eligible streets.<sup>xi</sup>

### **What's happening in Rochester?**

Last year the Healthi Kids Coalition partnered with the Beechwood Neighborhood Coalition and the FLRT Block Club to pilot play streets in Rochester. The play streets pilot shut down two city streets (Greeley St. and Treyer St.) for six days during the week throughout the last two weeks of August. The pilot sought to identify successes of what would work in Rochester, and what barriers we would have to overcome to ensure residents across the city could replicate play streets in their neighborhoods.

The Healthi Kids Coalition provided funding for structured and unstructured play, materials, technical assistance, and communications support to the initiative. Summer meals were provided at each site by Foodlink's mobile summer meals truck and by 441 Ministries, and Finger Lakes Eat Smart New York Educators provided healthy food demonstrations. The City of Rochester's Rec on the Move also attended the play streets events to help activate the space.

### ***Successes:***

The pilot program resulted in a number of successes. On average **100 children daily** visited each site. The program allowed for neighbors to meet neighbors, an opportunity for children to engage in regular physical activity, provided a safe place to play, and the creation of five playful sidewalks. Most importantly, play streets contributed to community building in each of the neighborhoods and residents at both locations are looking for additional opportunities to host play streets events for many summers to come.

### ***Lessons learned:***

The success of the play streets pilot is attributed to the resident leaders of the FLRT Block Club and Beechwood Neighborhood Coalition. Play streets were unique in each neighborhood and reflected what the residents and community wanted. Both locations utilized youth, Rec on the Move and community partners to help activate the space for play, and design/implement the playful sidewalks.

### ***Current barriers:***

Several barriers emerged throughout the pilot process including issues with the permit process and the metal barricades.

- ***Unclear permit process:*** The permit process was unclear to residents as there was no "box" or permit specific to play streets. While one neighborhood, working alongside the Neighborhood Service Center, was able to submit one special events permit and street closure permit with petition with multiple days listed, the other submitted 6 separate permits to Special Events.
- ***Unclear process for RPD:*** After permits were submitted, the Rochester Police Department staff denied the application stating "you cannot close the street for so many days." After the Healthi Kids Coalition and Ibero-American Development Corporation reached out to our contacts at the Rochester Police Department to share more about what play streets are, and what the residents were hoping to accomplish, the applications were then approved.
- ***Metal barricades:*** Residents in one neighborhood had the metal barricades stolen from their property in the middle of the night. While the city was able to replace the barricades and the Healthi Kids Coalition covered the cost, providing guidance to residents in the future to lock the barricades on their property would deter any future loss of city property.

### Healthi Kids Coalition Recommendations for the City of Rochester:

1. Establish a play streets permit, modelling best practices in New York City and Seattle, which will make it easier for residents to apply to host play streets in their neighborhood.
2. If a new permit is not an option, amend the current special events permit to include a box where residents can list multiple dates of their events, and a box to indicate they would like to host a play streets event(s).
3. Provide a play streets permit at a reduced cost (or free) to residents.
4. Educate the Rochester Police Department on the benefits of play streets and how the new permit will allow for community building activities.
5. Educate residents of the new permit process by highlighting the new opportunity and establishing guidelines for use.
6. When residents apply for multiple dates, provide guidance on how they can secure the metal barricades to their property.

The Healthi Kids Coalition strongly encourages the City of Rochester to adopt the above recommendations to ensure that every child, in every neighborhood, has the opportunity to access the benefits of play streets.

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<sup>i</sup> Clements, R. (2004). An investigation of the status of outdoor play. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 5(1). Online Access.

<sup>ii</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines>. October 17, 2008.

<sup>iii</sup> Homel R, Burns A. (1989). Environmental quality and the well-being of children. *Soc Indicators Res*. 21:133–158.

<sup>iv</sup> Ganley T, Sherman C. Exercise and children's health. *The Physician and Sports Medicine Journal*. February 2000.

<sup>v</sup> Sattelmair, J. & Raley, J. (2009). Physically active play and cognition: An academic matter? *Journal of Play*. Winter Ed. p. 365-374.

<sup>vi</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines>. October 17, 2008.

<sup>vii</sup> Playing Out (2017). Survey of 'playing out' play streets: Summary and Report. Playing Out. Retrieved online 5/11/2018: <http://playingout.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Playing-Out-Survey-Report-2017.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Play England (2016). Street play initiatives in disadvantaged areas: experiences and emerging issues. Play England. Retrieved online 5/11/2018: <http://www.playengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/StreetPlayReport2web.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> Seattle Department of Transportation (2018). Play Streets. Seattle Department of Transportation Public Space Management Programs. Retrieved online 5/11/2018: <http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/public-space-management-programs/play-streets>

<sup>x</sup> New York City Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination and Management (2018). Summer play streets. NYC Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination and Management. Retrieved online 5/11/2018: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/cecm/permitting/summer-play-streets.page>

<sup>xi</sup> Plan Philly (2017, July). Play streets, the Parks and Rec program that tells Philly kids: "go out and run around in the middle of the road". Plan Philly. Retrieved online 5/11/2018: <http://planphilly.com/articles/2017/07/31/play-streets-the-parks-and-rec-program-that-tells-philly-kids-go-run-around-in-the-middle-of-the-road>