

## Play ROCS: The Benefits of a Playable City

### A Playable City

#### Builds Healthy Places by:



- Increasing opportunities for physical activity<sup>1</sup>;
- Improving mental health<sup>2</sup>;
- Allowing play to happen anywhere<sup>3</sup>;
- Promoting the physical, social and emotional development of kids.<sup>4</sup>

#### Fosters Economic Development by:



- Increasing the value of surrounding properties<sup>5</sup>;
- Increasing foot traffic to local businesses<sup>6</sup>;
- Increasing tax revenue<sup>7</sup>;
- Improving business and job growth<sup>8</sup>;
- Lowering the crime rate<sup>9</sup>.

#### Builds Community by:



- Increasing the usability of public spaces<sup>10</sup>;
- Promoting inter-generational communication<sup>11</sup>;
- Encouraging multi-modal, inclusive and activated streetscapes<sup>12</sup>;
- Keeping young families in the city.<sup>13</sup>

### Play is Important

Play is important. Studies show that play supports the physical, social and emotional health of a child. Play promotes a healthy weight, prevents chronic diseases, creates positive lifelong healthy habits, and supports the development of healthy bones and muscles.<sup>14-15</sup> Daily play also promotes social emotional health by providing an outlet for kids to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, improve cognitive control and focus and to establish positive relationships.<sup>16</sup> Most importantly it's fun for kids of all ages!

### Why a Playable City?

A playable city can build healthy places, foster economic development and build community. Studies by Active Living Research (2015), KaBoom (2015) and the Urban Land Institute (2015) demonstrate that cities that are designed to move and play improve business and job growth, increase tax revenue, lower the crime rate, increase civic engagement and volunteerism, promote inclusivity and encourage physical activity.<sup>17-19</sup>

### What is the State of Play in Rochester?

Despite the benefits of play, not all children in the City of Rochester have the opportunity for 60 minutes of daily active play.

A study by the Greater Rochester Health Foundation shows that sixty percent of families living in the City of Rochester say that the lack of safe places to play in their neighborhood is a serious problem.<sup>20</sup>

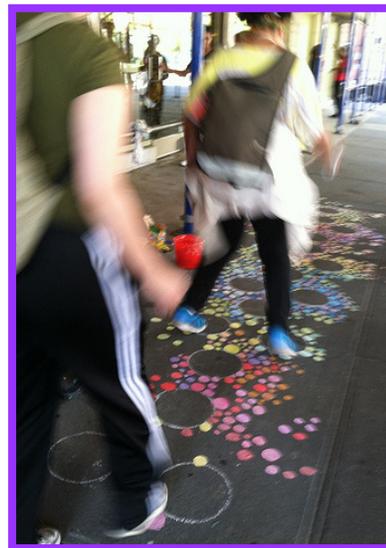
In 2009, Healthi Kids Play BEST team worked with five neighborhoods in Rochester to answer the question “where do our children play?” Our playability reports show that community members in the Beechwood, Bridges to Wellness, Dewey-Driving Park, Jefferson Avenue and Project HOPE communities want to see better facilities, safer areas, and more attractive places to allow their kids to play in the neighborhood.

During school hours, Healthi Kids recess reports show that kids receive only 7 to 12 minutes of active recess; and most schools do not provide recess daily to their students. Parents in the Rochester City School District have shared there is not a safe place in their neighborhood for their children to play outside of school.



*Locked playground in the Dewey-Driving Park neighborhood*

### What is a Playable City?



*Ken Ken Pa! Hopscotch mural in Harlem, New York*

A playable city allows for play to happen anywhere, turning every day moments like waiting for a bus, going to the store or walking to school into opportunities for active play. A playable city increases opportunities for play, physical activity and fun.

Imagine Rochester with playful sidewalks with hopscotch or mazes; bus shelters that host swings and climbing sculptures; vacant lots turned into playgrounds; pop up playgrounds that inspire creativity and create opportunities for unstructured play; and colorful crosswalks that promote traffic calming and make it safer for kids to play in neighborhoods.

## Leading National Examples



Playful sidewalk maze in York, PA

In **York, Pennsylvania**, the Eat, Breathe, Play Initiative is increasing opportunities for play for both children and adults by creating playful sidewalks that feature hopscotch, tic-tac-toe and connect the dots. The 23 street murals were created by local artists, high school students and community members.<sup>21</sup>

In **Baltimore, Maryland** the Office of Promotion and the Arts have created interactive artistic and playful infrastructure that reflects the values of each neighborhood: fun, interactive and family friendly. Their playful crosswalks featuring hopscotch and creative bus stations promote play everywhere.<sup>22</sup>



Playful bus shelter in Baltimore, MD



Imagination playground in New York City

In **New York City**, local schools, museums and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation have created pop up parks to promote unstructured play opportunities. Pop up playgrounds can be as simple as using repurposed items to create obstacle courses; or using empty boxes to create places of play; or be as complex as using imagination playground material.<sup>23</sup>

**Houston, Texas** has created play zones in their neighborhoods. The “Zona de Juego” is a collaborative community design initiative to promote healthier living habits. The sidewalk infrastructure in the zone highlights interactive games and community history and creates a walking trail between two local schools.<sup>24</sup>



Play zone walking trail in Houston, Texas

Finally, **Auburn, New York** has created colorful crosswalks to promote traffic calming in neighborhoods. Repainting crosswalks is a low-cost and effective



Colorful crosswalk in Auburn, New York

means to slow down traffic. In Auburn, 96 percent of motorists stopped at the new crosswalks, versus only 42 percent of motorists at traditional crosswalks.<sup>25</sup>

## Healthi Kids Recommends:

The City of Rochester become a playable city by:

- Creating a community conversation about the benefits of play and a playable city;
- Amending the City of Rochester’s Comprehensive Plan to include language that supports play and promotes playable city infrastructure;
- Connecting with playable cities across the country to collaborate and learn best practices;
- Creating opportunities for play in neighborhoods by engaging community organizations, local artists, business, design firms and neighborhood associations to create:
  - Playful sidewalks
  - Colorful crosswalks
  - Playful bus shelters
  - Pop up playgrounds

## Endnotes

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Tell us your vision for a playable Rochester #PlayROCs