PLAY STREET PROGRAM
HANDBOOK

SDOT
Seattle Department of Transportation

SEATTLE PLAY STREETS!

Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) launched a pilot Play Streets Program in May 2014, which has since rapidly expanded across the city. Since that time, 240+ interested neighbors applied for and held a play street event to enliven their neighborhood streets with safe, active play.

Due to the rapid growth and sustained interest in the program, SDOT is making the program permanent. This document provides background on the history of the program and is a useful resource for those who'd like to host a play street near where they live.

PHOTO: KUOW/PAUL KIEFER

Program Goals

The Play Street Program is guided by the following objectives:
1/ Encourage use of neighborhood streets for safe, active play
2/ Promote social interaction between neighbors of all ages
3/ Provide additional public space in areas where parks or private yards are limited
4/ Ensure local access into and out of homes during play street events

Public Space Management

Play streets were developed as part of SDOT's Public Space Management Program. The public right-of-way, which includes streets, sidewalks, and street trees, makes up 27% of Seattle's land, providing many opportunities to expand and activate public spaces. The Public Space Management Program supports creative improvements in our streets and sidewalks and makes it easier for community groups and businesses to enliven the city's public spaces.

The program is driven by four goals that help us promote and regulate a vibrant, safe, accessible, and attractive shared right-of-way:

ENCOURAGE: Promote the activation of public space

IMPLEMENT: Ensure that opportunities to activate the right-of-way are not missed due to perceived obstacles or implementation hurdles

INNOVATE: Identify opportunities for activation

REGULATE: Manage our public spaces in a transparent and predictable way

Program Basics

Here's a quick list of questions you might have getting started. If you want to host your own play street, all the information you need can be found later in this handbook.

What is a play street?
Play streets are a way neighbors can go out and play together in the street. With a free permit, you can temporarily close your street (except to folks living on the block) which provides more space for kids (and adults) to play and be physically active.

Who can host a play street?
Play streets can be hosted by neighbors, schools, or community groups. Neighborhood/community play streets help neighbors create more space for play. School-organized play streets provide additional space for recess or other after-school play.

Where do play streets work well?
Play streets work on a wide variety of streets in all neighborhoods, with these four main characteristics:
1/ Residential-oriented streets with low volumes of traffic
2/ Not an arterial or bus route
3/ Where there's significant neighbor support
4/ Where access to parks/open space is difficult

How often can I have a play street?
The frequency of your play street should be determined by your willingness to host and the interest of your close neighbors. Play streets can happen anywhere from a one-time event during the year to a maximum of three times per week.

Is there a season for play streets?
Play streets are allowed and encouraged year round. We have separated the year into two application seasons, so you can adjust your play street to the changing amount of light and warmth during the year, school schedules, and your ability/interest in hosting the play streets.

Do I need to buy anything for my play street?
While many play street hosts have planned activities, play equipment, or food during their events, all you really need for a play street are some barricades and people who want to play. Barricades can be rented from local providers, but you can also use household furniture or trash bins to block off the ends of your streets. More detail on barricade requirements are provided on page 7.

We've had a block party before, is a play street like that?
Yes, play streets are very similar to the neighborhood block parties that happen across the city, but play streets tend to be smaller in scale and focused on active play. Both permits are simple and easy to get and allow neighbors to activate the streets near their homes.

What are the benefits of having a play street?
During the pilot program, we heard a lot of positive things about having a play street from both hosts and their neighbors. Play street allow us to better use our shared public street for a wide range of activities that can benefit our health and expand available open space. Hosts have told us that they made friends with their neighbors and kids were able to get more quality, active play in a safe setting.

Program Background

For many neighborhood streets in Seattle, only a handful of vehicles use the street per hour. On these low-volume streets, there is the potential for more active uses of that public space.

Seattle has a long history of encouraging neighbors to make use of their streets. Three other programs that shaped the Play Streets Program are shown below.

Given this collective experience with temporarily closing neighborhood streets for social interaction and play, it's little surprise that the Play Streets Pilot was quickly embraced by neighbors across the city.

To develop the pilot program, we looked closely at the performance of our own Neighborhood Block Party program and also the best practices of play street programs in contemporary cities. For this research, we looked at similar efforts being made in New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, and London.

BLOCK PARTIES

Every year for decades, neighbors have been using neighborhood block party permits to temporarily block off their streets to hold community-oriented parties. In 2015 alone, we issued over 250 of these permits.

NIGHT OUT

In coordination with the Seattle Police Department, Night Out provides an annual event every August aimed at increasing neighborhood support for anti-crime efforts while also celebrating community and spending time with neighbors. Over 1,200 Night Out applications were registered in 2015.

SUMMER PARKWAYS

From 2008-2014, the Summer Streets Program closed 3-4 streets in different neighborhoods during summer weekends. These events create a festival-like atmosphere for residents to interact in normally busy streets. In 2015, the program changed to Summer Parkways which closes a loop of streets in specific neighborhoods with the focus on active transportation.

Play Street Checklist

From the beginning, we wanted to make play streets accessible for everyone, so we've kept the program simple and free to apply.

Below is a checklist of steps you'll need to complete in order to have a successful play street. More details on each of these steps are provided later in this handbook.

PRE-APPLICATION

- ☐ Talk with neighbors about their interest in participating
- ☐ Decide on your date/time schedule
- ☐ Fill out application package
- ☐ Create a program of what activities you'll be hosting

APPLICATION

- ☐ Submit application package to SDOT (annualpermits@seattle.gov or 700 5th Ave, 41st Floor, Seattle, WA 98104)
- ☐ Receive a copy of your permit (this will be emailed directly to you)

AFTER APPROVAL

- ☐ Notify your neighbors that your permit has been approved
  Pick up closure signs from SDOT office (23rd Floor, 700 5th Ave)

BEFORE FIRST EVENT

- ☐ Publicize the event to your neighbors (fliers, social media, in person)
- ☐ Select or rent barricade objects
- ☐ Print out a copy of your permit

DAY OF EVENT

- ☐ Place barricades at both ends of your block with the proper spacing
- ☐ Attach signs to the barricades
- ☐ Keep copy of your permit on you in case anyone asks to see it
- ☐ Make sure that someone is near each end of the block to answer questions or move barricades for local and emergency access
- ☐ Have fun!

AFTER EVENT

- ☐ Remove all play equipment from the street, then remove barricades
- ☐ Talk with neighbors about how things went and what you would like to do next time

Application Process

To apply for a play street permit, you'll need to submit an application package. These quick and easy forms help us understand where you'd like the play street to be, what you want to do with your play street, and how much neighbor support you have.

Copies of these documents can be found at:
http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/playstreets.htm

1/ APPLICATION FORM: This is the main application form which asks for some basic information about who you are, where you live, and when you'd like to have your play street.

2/ SITE MAP: This map shows which block you want to temporarily close and where you will be placing barricades. You can get an aerial of your street from many online mapping websites or request that one be provided to you by SDOT.

3/ OUTREACH METHOD: To make sure that your neighbors know about your play street plans, we'd like to see a copy of whatever method you used to contact your neighbors. This could take a variety of forms from fliers, emails, posts on neighborhood message boards, or personal conversations. Whatever type you think is most effective is up to you, but it's crucial that the people who live around you have the info they need to plan for and/or participate in your play street.

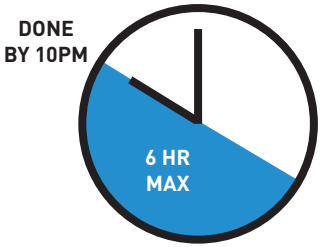
4/ SIGNATURE SHEET (optional): If you plan on having your play street more than once a month, we recommend that you submit a roster of support from the neighbors on your block in addition to the copy of your outreach method. While there's no requirement to how many signatures you need on the roster, the more the better.

Timing

How often you hold your play street is mostly up to the interest on your block, but we have some rules developed from the pilot process.

Frequency: At most, you can have a play street three times per week

Time: Play streets are limited to 6 hours/day and need to be completed by 10pm or dusk, whichever is earlier



Seasons: You can apply at anytime in the year, but permits will be issued for a maximum of six months at a time. When applying, please consider the change in light and weather when selecting dates/times.

Barricades

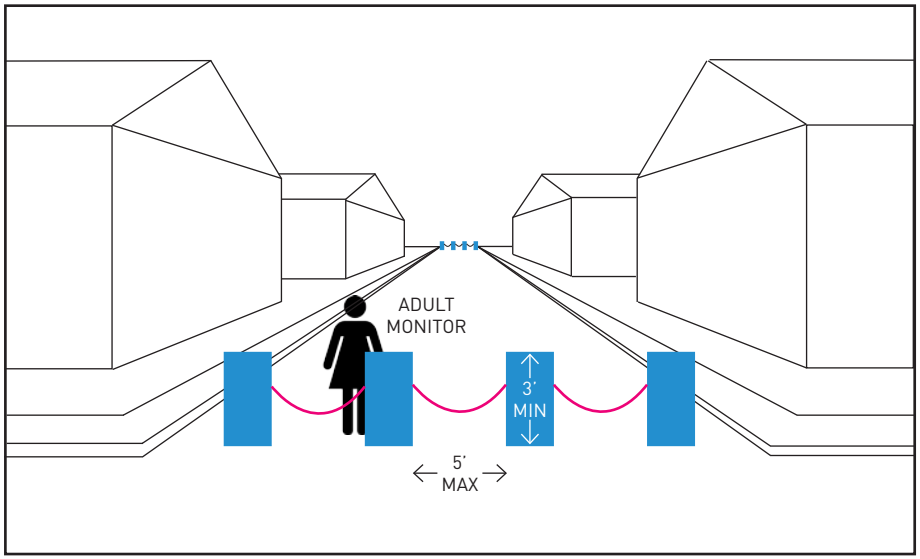
Properly barricading your street during the play street event is crucial to ensuring safety for those playing and neighbors who may need local access on the block.

For barricading you have two options:
1/ Use personal trash bins or furniture
2/ Rent barricades from local providers. These can be rented at relatively low costs and we recommend getting 'Type 3' barricades if you go this route

For either barricade type, they should be placed with these requirements:

- 5 feet spacing or less in between each of the objects
- Elements need to be at least 3 feet tall
- Link objects together with banners, rope, streamers, etc
- At both ends of the block

During the play street event, it's crucial that at least one adult remains near each of the barricades so that they can answer any questions people may have or move barricades if people need local access to their homes.



Signage

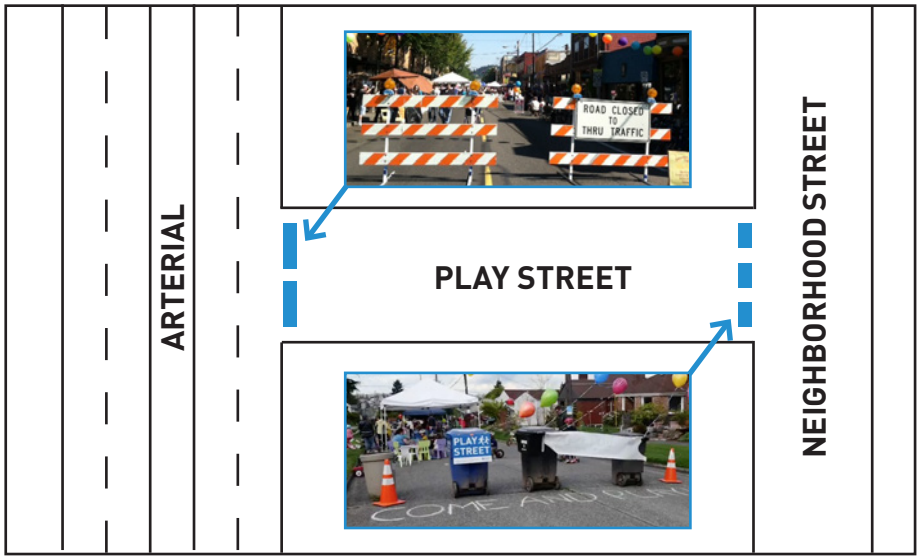
When you receive your play street permit, we will provide you with two sets of signs that need to be placed at the ends of your play street. These can be picked up at the SDOT Street Use counter (700 5th Ave, 23rd Floor).

Play street sign: This sign lets passers-by know that a play street is happening that they can come participate in. It also provides contact information for SDOT in case they want more information about the program.

Street closed sign: This sign lets drivers know that the street is closed except to local access. This will quickly let drivers know not to drive down your block during the play street while people are in the roadway.

Adjacent to Arterials

If your street abuts an arterial, you will need to use 'Type 3' barricades at the arterial intersection. There is generally more and faster-moving traffic on arterials, so it's important that more visible barricades are used at those intersections.



Play Street Ideas

Now that you know about play streets and how to apply, you should think about what to do with your play street. We're interested in what activities you're planning, and you should include them on your application form.

Luckily, the possibilities are endless for you and your neighbors to play, create, and interact.

Here are some quick examples we saw during the pilot, but you're free to use your imagination! More information on these and other ideas can be found at:
http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/playstreets.htm

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

WATER BATTLE

BIKE RIDE

CHALK ART

GAMES

MEET NEIGHBORS

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