

PLACEMAKING TOOLKIT

Public Art and Placemaking
Tourism and Culture, City of Hamilton
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Placemaking Toolkit

This toolkit provides general information about placemaking and suggests ways to develop your own creative placemaking project. It is a living document that will be updated to reflect the evolution of placemaking in Hamilton and any regulatory changes. We welcome community updates and comments to help improve this resource.

Funding is currently available to support community run creative placemaking projects in Downtown Hamilton. **If you are interested in applying to the City of Hamilton's Downtown Hamilton Creative Placemaking Grant, visit www.hamilton.ca/PlacemakingGrant to review the funding guidelines including eligibility requirements, eligible downtown area, and application details.**

Applications must be submitted by **Tuesday, February 24, 2026 by 4:00pm.**

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the City of Kitchener's [Love My Hood](#) program for sharing their placemaking guide and allowing us to adapt so much of their great information and the CityLab student team from McMaster who created a toolkit for community art.

Questions?

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What is Placemaking?

In short, placemaking brings a neighbourhood to life by turning everyday spaces into destinations and gathering places. Placemaking is a collaborative process that deepens our connection to place and strengthens our relationships to the people who share these spaces. You don't need to worry if you're new to placemaking. It's something that happens regularly, whether you go about it intentionally or not. Chatting with neighbours, setting up a free library, and hanging out at a park all contribute to placemaking.

Project for Public Spaces, a world-leader in placemaking, describes the qualities of successful places in its thought-provoking placemaking resource section at <https://www.pps.org/category/placemaking>. They offer principles like “lighter, quicker, cheaper” and giving people at least ten reasons to visit a place. Placemaking is a community-driven process that builds “on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people’s health, happiness, and well-being.” (Project for Public Places, 2009. Learn more at <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>).

The ideas and inspiration you and your neighbours bring to a place can help that space become more inclusive, safe, accessible, and welcoming.

Placemaking projects can help you evolve the way you feel about the places in your neighbourhood. You’re encouraged to think of ideas that reimagine every day public spaces and propose temporary activities that are creative and innovative. Ideas may be whimsical and fun or address larger, more serious issues. Need some ideas to get you started? See [Tool A – List of Placemaking Resources & Ideas](#).

How is Placemaking different than hosting a community event?

Placemaking interacts with the unique geography, people, culture, physical features, and / or heritage of a specific place. An event might be a type of placemaking if it encourages attendees to notice the place around them, to engage with the space and the people in it in new ways, and to think about its potential for more public use in the future.

Why Placemaking?

Through placemaking, you may experience:

- Increased knowledge of your community
- Places that respond to the needs of you and your neighbours
- Opportunities to connect with others and get to know people in your community
- Feeling welcomed and comfortable
- A sense of ownership and pride
- A new perspective
- How your actions make a difference in your city
- A sense of fun, play and joy!

Who can participate in Placemaking?

Anyone can get involved in a placemaking project in the area where they live, work, learn, or play. Placemaking work is stronger when you create it in cooperation with others. When projects are created by people with different viewpoints, those projects can reflect and serve a greater number of people in the community.

Everyone is encouraged to seek support and participation from the broader neighbourhood and the community currently using the area and design projects that respond to the cultural setting, natural history, and all of the unique identifiers in the place. Community partners may also provide valuable ideas, experience, support, and resources.

The City of Hamilton might have a role in your placemaking project. If you are using City owned land (parks, laneways, boulevards, etc) you will need to get permission to do

your placemaking project. Email Claire.Calnan@hamilton.ca with your placemaking questions.

Where can Placemaking occur?

Placemaking can happen in any space that is accessible or visible to the public including:

- City-Owned – Any space accessible to the general public that is owned or managed by the City of Hamilton including but not limited to parks, sidewalks, parking lots, alleyways, courtyards, etc.
- Privately Owned and Publicly Accessible – Any outdoor space accessible to the general public that is private property such as courtyards, entrance plazas, lanes, etc.
- Privately Owned and Visible to the Public – Private property and features such as building facades, retaining walls and fences that are visible from a public place and contribute to the character of the adjacent public space.

It's up to you to propose a site and obtain appropriate approvals from the owner whether publicly or privately owned.

Six principles for Placemaking

Recognizing that each placemaking project is unique, these 6 principles are provided to help establish some common ground for all placemaking projects to incorporate and work towards. Placemaking can help you build a stronger neighbourhood that is more accessible, connected, inclusive, diverse, and engaged. Placemaking is:

Asset-Based: This means you focus on the assets that are already found in your community and you mobilize your neighbours and community partners to come together and build on those strengths. Assets are both things (material objects) and people (skills, knowledge, experience). Examples may include physical elements such as buildings, parks, social connections such as personal relationships with your

neighbours, or people's skills such as leadership. Strengths and successes in your neighbourhood can be used as a starting point for change.

Place-Based: This means you will get to know your neighbourhood spaces. You'll create a destination or a gathering place that is specific and incorporates unique traits (the physical features of the space, the culture, the people who live / work near by, the history, etc.). Projects may include a combination of temporary physical interventions (e.g. murals or seating), and social interactions (e.g. gatherings or events).

Resident Lead: You're the expert in your neighbourhood. You'll help to identify the collective needs, aspirations, and visions for the spaces in your community. You or a group of your neighbours may take the lead, but you're strongly encouraged to provide opportunities for all users of the space to participate. Community partners may be able to help with ideas, planning or financial support.

About Creating a 'Place' with Simple, Short-Term Actions: Creating a great place doesn't need to be complex. Spaces should welcome all people and provide a range of reasons for you to spend time in your neighbourhood place. Think about different uses, activities, events, and programs. You'll also want to think about creating a place that is accessible and inclusive. Start with some simple, short-term actions to test what attracts your neighbours to a space like seating or murals.

Layered: Neighbourhood places can have different layers. The spaces themselves may be big or small or provide a few or many things to do. The key is to ensure there are multiple things to attract you and provide a reason for you to stay and interact with your neighbours. Experience in other cities suggests that groupings of three, also known as triangulating, can help create a great place. For example, placing a bench and garbage bin beneath a tree and beside a community garden may encourage gardeners and those passing by to take a break from the beating sun to chat.

An Ongoing Journey: One good idea often leads to another! Amenities wear out. Needs, aspirations, and visions may change. Be open and flexible to this change. This is essential if you are going to receive a creative placemaking grant from the City of Hamilton as all projects are temporary!

Four steps to Placemaking

There are many ways to make a space a great “place”. The following steps are provided as general guidance to do just that. They are broad and flexible in an effort to provide guidance for any type of idea. The steps do not necessarily have to be completed in order.

1) IDENTIFY A SPACE

- If you don't have a space in mind already, become familiar with the spaces in your community.
- Be curious. Spend time in the space, observe it passively, engage people there, and get a sense of its rhythms over the course of a day, a week. Does the way the space is used change in the evening? On the weekends? Observation needs to happen before idea generation!
- Find out who uses the space. Connect with the neighbourhood association, BIA or community groups that are active in that space.
- Find out who owns the property. If it's not clear, check with City staff. Please note: Where lands are held under private ownership, the City may not be able to release personal information about the owner.
- Seek permission from the land owner to use the space for placemaking.

Remember: Additional approvals from the land owner or the City may be required once the specific details of the placemaking initiative are known.

2) GENERATE IDEAS FOR THE SPACE

- Consider the current and desired function of the space.
 - What is it currently used for? What do residents want it to be used for?

- o What's there now? What's happening now?
 - o What works well? And what doesn't?
 - o Who uses it? And who doesn't?
 - o What could it look like in 5 years? What do you and your community want it to look like?
- Placemaking projects are better when more people are involved. Find out what people in your neighbourhood think.
 - o Think about the diversity of your neighbourhood and make sure everyone's voice is heard. Check out [**Tool C – Valuing Inclusion and Diversity in the Neighbourhood**](#) for tips on how to involve everyone in your neighbourhood.
 - o Ask your neighbours for their input and how they want to be involved.
 - o Talk to children, youth, adults and older adults who use the space.
 - o Seek input from your neighbours who may have disabilities.
 - o Reach out to people who are new to your neighbourhood and those who are long-time residents.
 - o Include people who you have not met or don't normally get a chance to connect with.
 - o Encourage your neighbours and partners to help spread the word about your placemaking idea.
 - o Don't forget to ask the property owner what they think too!
- Identify your neighbourhood's needs, aspirations, and visions for the space.
 - o Be open to different peoples' needs in your neighbourhood.
 - o Acknowledge that there may be multiple ideas for the same space.
 - o Communicate clearly and often with all parties connected or involved.
- Check in with City staff before moving on to the next steps, so they can:
 - Flag any by-laws or safety concerns, restrictions, or planned construction that may impact your ability to make your idea happen.
 - Let you know if any approvals are required.

- Share other ideas that are being implemented by other neighbours in the area or by the City.
- Identify people who can help – neighbourhood associations, community partners, or other City staff.
- Research interesting ideas from Hamilton and other cities.
 - Need some help? See [**Tool A – List of Placemaking Resources & Ideas.**](#)
- Choose the idea(s). Prioritize each idea. What should happen first? When should it happen?

3) MAKE IT HAPPEN

- Create a description of your placemaking idea to share with others.
 - This could include a simple sketch, drawing or picture to show what is planned.
- Identify the steps required to make the idea(s) happen. See [**Tool D – Planning and Maintaining your Placemaking Project**](#)
- Determine how much it will cost. Expenses may include park rental fees, insurance, project materials, artist fees, etc.
- Seek funding sources.
 - Check out the City's Downtown Hamilton Creative Placemaking Grant Program at www.hamilton.ca/PlacemakingGrant.
 - Identify other partners or businesses that might be able to contribute financially or with in-kind services.
 - [If in Ward 2, look into the Ward 2 Community Grants Program](#)
 - [If in Ward 3, look into the Ward 3 Community Resilience Grant Program](#).
 - [Look into TD Park People's Grant](#)
- Obtain approvals from the land owner and / or the City.
 - For park rental and events on City property information, visit: <https://www.hamilton.ca/things-do/venues-facilities-bookings/event-planning-information>

- o Consider the sign bylaw as it applies to public and private property when you are attaching a sign, mural, or banner to a wall or other surface.
- Make a list of things to do to complete your idea.
- Bring your idea to life!

4) USE THE NEIGHBOURHOOD SPACE

- Find ways to activate the site beyond the initial phase so it can stay vital for years to come!
- Tell your neighbours about the place.
- Visit it often.
- Keep it maintained and looking good.
 - o If you are applying to the Downtown Hamilton Creative Placemaking Grant Program, include maintenance costs in your budget proposal.
- Host gatherings and events.
- Share stories.
- Keep it animated.
- Think about the future of the place.

Tools to help you

Sometimes it helps to see what other people have come up with to get the creative juices flowing. We've collected a number of resources and tools to help you brainstorm ideas and involve your neighbours.

[Tool A – List of Placemaking Resources & Ideas](#)

[Tool B – List of Potential Community Partners](#)

[Tool C – Valuing Inclusion and Diversity in the Neighbourhood](#)

[Tool D – Planning and Maintaining your Placemaking project](#)

[Tool E – Working with the City of Hamilton](#)

[Tool F – Placemaking Project Examples](#)

Tool A – List of Placemaking Resources & Ideas

Local Placemaking Examples:

- Portraits in Hamilton Amateur Athletic Association Park
- [Spring Coffee Outside](#)
- [Outdoor Karaoke](#)
- [North End Neighbourhood Block Party](#)
- Powell Park sidewalk games
- [James Street North Art Crawl](#)
- Hamilton Wayfinding by Hamilton Spin (directional signs at SoBi stations)
- Decorative crosswalks
- [Business Out of the Box on Barton Street by the YWCA](#)
- [Woodland Park legal graffiti wall](#)
- Pipeline Trail - Pipeline Trail Parade
- [Solstice event in Corktown Park](#)
- Little Libraries/Little Seed Libraries/Little Art Galleries

More Ideas

We're open to your creative ideas! You know your neighbourhood best and how people would like to interact with the places within it. We've come up with a starting list of ideas just to get you thinking:

- Community-made identifying or wayfinding signs along trails or on street light poles
- A series of small libraries (for books, seeds, art, etc) set up in a series of front yards on a single block
- [Muskoka chairs set out throughout a neighbourhood to encourage socialization and offer additional resting places](#)
- Turn a parking lot into a beach
- Outdoor reading room, complete with a little library, seating, carpet
- Lifesize games

- Add poems or stories written by people in your neighbourhood to picnic tables, benches or posts
- Physical art or sculptures
- Murals
- Benches, hammocks, umbrellas, etc.
- Host improv acting classes in public space
- “Yarn-bombing” or costuming benches, fences, posts, etc.
- Historic interpretation panels or re-enactments of what the site may have looked like in the past
- A weekly coffee meet up for neighbours in a public space
- Weekly instructional knitting sessions in a park
- A dance party, complete with a dance floor, jukebox and maybe even some instructors
- Love letter writing stations – addressed to all the great places in your neighbourhood!

More Reading

[Project for Public Spaces](#)

[Love My Hood: City of Kitchener](#)

[The National Endowment for the Arts: “How to do Creative Placemaking”](#)

[Design for Reconciliation: The Indigenous Placemaking Council reclaims public space for First Nations](#)

[Evergreen Civic Indigenous Placekeeping and Partnership Building Toolkit](#)

[Placemaking When Black Lives Matter](#)

[Creative Placemaking](#)

Tool B – List of Potential Community Partners

- Cultural groups
- Neighbourhood associations
- Not-for-profit organizations
- Co-operatives – housing, grocery, agriculture, artists, etc.
- BIAs
- Libraries
- Local businesses
- School boards & local schools
- Service clubs
- Faith-based groups
- Foundations (e.g. charitable foundations)
- Social media networks
- Social service agencies
- Arts or arts service organizations
- And many more!

Tool C – Valuing Inclusion and Diversity in the Neighbourhood

The following tool provides tips and suggestions for being inclusive in your neighbourhood. The tips encourage you to think about the different types of people who live in your neighbourhood – youth, people with disabilities, seniors and people of diverse cultural backgrounds. It's important to consider that safety, belonging, and accessibility can be experienced differently by people, depending on their identity and experiences, one of the reasons why it is essential to include multiple voices when planning a project.

The tips were excerpted and adapted from the Neighbourhood Activity Guide produced by Kitchener's Festival of Neighbourhoods and from the Community Engaged Education Toolkit from McMaster University's Office of Community Engagement.

Respectful Relationships

There is no community without relationships - these are the connections that build community. Any successful partnership must be built on trusting and respectful relationships guided by integrity. It takes time to build these relationships.

Reciprocity

From design to participation, to the outcomes of a project, strive to work together for mutual benefit. Striving for reciprocity within your partnerships entails respecting that all partners bring valuable knowledge, skills, experiences, and resources to any partnership. Inviting everyone in your neighbourhood helps to ensure that everyone feels truly welcome and involved and builds a stronger community.

Equity

Be conscious of the historical and structural inequities that exist in society and strive to provide access and opportunities to all residents and members of our communities. Equity entails striving to reduce barriers of participation as much as possible.

Continuity

Acknowledging that different communities work on different timelines and schedules, strive to consider both the short and long-term implications of our work.

Reaching Out to People with Disabilities

Consider accessibility to make it easier for people with disabilities to participate. For example, is the information about the event being distributed in large font or alternative formats, upon request, for people with visual disabilities or for people with different reading skills? Is the location of your gathering barrier free? If the event is outdoors, is the ground level enough for people with physical disabilities to access?

Reaching Out to Seniors

Consider ways to include seniors and support senior participation in neighbourhood events. Seniors might have mobility or other barriers to participating. Be attentive to their needs, plan for extra seating, schedule activities that will engage different ages, or simply ask if there is anything required or desired from the seniors in your region.

Reaching Out to People of Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Be sure to include neighbours who may not share your language or cultural background. Can you reach out to someone in the neighbourhood to help you with translations? You might want to encourage your neighbours to share their culture through the neighbourhood activity being organized. Recognize that building trust within these relationships can take time.

Openness to Learning

Change takes time. Commit to continually learning from and evaluating the work, reflecting on and sharing both the successes and failures to grow as individuals, partners, and communities.

Commitment to Act

Aspire to make a positive difference in your community by sharing and acting on your knowledge to contribute to the greater social good.

More Reading

Read the [Equity Guidance Checklist](#) developed by Jay Pitter Placemaking for the Healthy Communities Initiative.

Tool D – Planning and Maintaining your Placemaking Project

Since the final product is in a public place, installations will begin to deteriorate after installation. Depending on the timeline of your project, you may need to develop a maintenance plan. If you are applying for funding from the Downtown Hamilton Creative Placemaking Grant, make sure to include these expenses in your budget.

Project organizers should decide:

- Does our project have elements that will need constant maintenance or replacing? Are there pieces that could be removed and go missing?
- Is our project made from material that can survive the elements? Will rain wash it away? Is it attached securely to endure high winds?
- Who will be maintaining the work (including graffiti removal and any other vandalism)?
- Is the project built for being in a public space without being watched? Can people climb on it? Will it break? Are there sharp edges that would hurt a child?
- Is someone prepared to set up and tear down the project on a regular basis if it can't be safely installed for long periods of time?
- Who from your team will check in on the project? How often?
- What condition will trigger maintenance?
- Who is responsible for removing the work at the end of your project period?
- Have you budgeted enough money for maintenance materials and services?

Once these questions have been answered, it can be helpful to have a form to record its condition. Sourced from Mural Routes' [Mural Production: A Resource Handbook](#).

Tool E – Working with the City of Hamilton

Applicants should keep in mind some of these key considerations (and tips!) when working with the City of Hamilton:

- When reviewing applications, the top concerns for City staff will be:
 - Public Safety
 - If the proposed project works with current operation and use of the site
 - Approvals required for the project
 - A plan for items installed in public space to remain in good condition over time
- The City takes time to process payments. **Applications approved in April should anticipate payment by June at the earliest.** Leave yourself lots of wiggle room!
- When deciding who is listed as the payee in your agreement, keep in mind that T4As will be issued for all contracts over \$500. Tax implications should be taken into consideration in advance.
- For any events taking place in public space, take a look at the Event Planning Information page on the City website: <https://www.hamilton.ca/things-do/venues-facilities-bookings/event-planning-information>
- A SEAT (Special Events Advisory Team) application may be required. The application can be accessed through the web page above and is requested 60 days prior to your event date.
- Keep in mind that permits to use City parks and other amenities do come with fees. Fees vary, depending on the location and amenities and can range from \$130 – \$400 per day. If your event requires City staff or services like garbage cans and/or waste management, additional fees may also apply. Do your research and work these costs into your budget!
- Other permits may also be applicable, ex: sign permits, sidewalk closure permits
- Activities on City property require insurance. If your organization has insurance, you can provide a certificate of insurance with \$2-5 million Commercial General

Liability coverage (dollar amount depends on activity type). If you do not have insurance, Game Day Insurance can be purchased through the SEAT process if you are hosting an event or coordinated with placemaking staff for active days of work on City property (installation days, etc). Contact Claire Calnan for more details: Claire.Calnan@hamilton.ca

- When booking City parks, sometimes consultation is needed with different departments and committees. Ex: a portion of Gore Park requires consultation with the Veteran's committee.
- Projects that are new or unusual can take time to approve. Remaining flexible with your planning and timing is highly recommended!
- Please see [**Tool F - Placemaking Project Examples**](#) for some illustrations of projects with specific considerations. We hope this helps to paint a picture!

Tool F - Placemaking Project Examples

Project Example: Little Seed Library

Planning considerations:

- Who owns the property?
- How will you securely attach the library? Are you allowed to dig a hole for footings? If yes, you may need to have locates completed before digging can happen.
- Can you attach the post another way if footings are not possible?
- Do you have a design for the little library that could be shared with the property owner for review?
- Have you considered if your design is safe to be in public space? For example, there are no pointy corners and there is no glass that could shatter?



Dundas Little Seed Library

Maintenance considerations:

- How easily can the library be fixed if it gets damaged?
- If the library is tagged, can you easily remove the tag or paint over it?
- Is someone from your team going to check on the library to keep it well stocked and in good condition?

Project removal considerations:

- Can you remove the library and easily repair the installation site?
- Has your team decided what will happen to the library and the end of the project term?

Project Example: Mural

Planning considerations:

- Who owns the wall you want to paint?
- Who owns the property you will be standing on to paint the mural?
- Will you paint directly on the wall or attach a mural to the wall? If you are attaching a mural to a surface you may need a sign permit from the City.
- Do you need a lift for installation? If yes, you may need to provide proof of certification to use it and insurance.
- Will you be blocking a sidewalk or street for installation? If yes, you may need a sidewalk or road permit.
- Do you need to plan for access to shade, washroom, water, etc for the installation period?
- Consider distributing a letter to neighbours letting them know when the mural is being installed and what it will be about.

Maintenance considerations:

- If the mural is tagged, how will it be repaired? Will you use anti-graffiti coating or plan to repaint it?
- Is someone from your team going to check on the mural regularly to keep track of its condition?

Project removal considerations:

- Will the mural be painted over or removed at the end of its installation period?



Powell Park Mural, photo credit: BarclayE Photography

Project Example: Event in a parking lot

Planning considerations:

- Who owns the property?
- If you are using a City owned park or parking lot, you will need to submit an event application for approval. Applications should be submitted 60 days before your event starts. There may be fees for renting the space.
- If you are holding your event in a parking lot, you will need to plan to close the parking lot prior to the event to prevent cars from parking in your event site.
- Consider your power needs for the event and if there is enough available on site.
- If your event is planned after dark, consider additional lighting.
- Consider if you will serve food at your event. If yes, you may need a food vendor permit and arrange for more garbage cans for waste.
- Consider distributing a letter or posters to neighbours and nearby businesses to promote your event.

