
BLOCK PARTY

HOW-TO MANUAL



First Edition

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WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

Throwing a block party can be a fun way to build community as neighbors, but it doesn't happen overnight. This guide will help you get it done.

YOU'LL NEED TO...

- Make a planning team
- Submit an application to the Police Department
- Get your neighbors to sign a waiver
- Plan for food, seating, and activities
- Close off the street
- Have fun!
- Clean up



THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK

This block party guide is specific to Burlington permitting but includes helpful tips for communities across Vermont. Block parties are great ways to get to know your neighbors and reclaim streets for public enjoyment and connection.

1. WHAT DO YOU WANT THE BLOCK PARTY TO BE?

There are many forms a block party can take. It can look like...

- a neighborhood potluck
- a pop-up sports arena, with soccer games, bike races, and volleyball
- a market with neighbors selling arts and crafts, used clothing, and home goods

There are no rules about what a block party can or should look like.

Make it into a shape that fits your community - but make sure you figure out your goals and vision before you start planning, so you can appropriately communicate to your neighbors. This includes a decision about whether the block party will be for just your street, multiple streets, or a whole neighborhood.

Block parties are a blank canvas for community connection. In your dream world, what does your block party look like?

CONNECTED
NEIGHBORHOOD



2. WHO IS YOUR PLANNING TEAM?

The best way to host a successful community event is to **plan it with the support of neighbors**. Not only will your event benefit from a diversity of ideas and helping hands, but the more people invested in this event, the more enthusiasm will spread through the community.

If you don't have a neighborhood email or messaging thread, this is a great time to start one! Reach out to your neighbors, let them know what you're thinking, and ask if anyone would be willing to participate in a few planning meetings.

If possible, involve people of different ages in the planning process. A group of 3-5 neighbors willing to attend planning meetings is ideal. If possible, a larger group of around 10 neighbors willing to help set up, canvass, flyer, and clean up will be useful - perhaps a good way to rope in spouses and kids of the planning team!

3. WHEN IS YOUR BLOCK PARTY?

Because of permits and applications, we recommend planning your block party at least **3-4 weeks in advance**.

Weekends are a good time to plan block parties to avoid conflicting work schedules, heavy traffic, and waste hauler routes. But there is nothing wrong with a week day block party if that works for your neighborhood!

HOW TO GET APPROVAL

STEP 1

Fill out the Burlington Police Department (BPD) [Block Party Application Form](#) **at least three weeks before your block party.**

STEP 2

Knock on doors (canvass) in your neighborhood and get the signature, home address, and contact information from 75% of the households on the proposed closed street using this BPD [Permit Waiver Form](#), which must be submitted to BPD **at least one week before your block party** (see ‘how to canvass’ on page 5 of this manual). If you prefer, you can also collect signatures virtually.

You are responsible for informing neighbors that their signature is an acknowledgement and agreement that festivities will be going on in the street and they have waived their right to access the closed street by car, except in emergency situations. See canvass “rap” template in Appendix B.

*Both forms can also be found on the BPD website, and you can **email the completed forms to strieb@bpdvt.org** or drop it off/mail to the police department: Sarah Trieb
Burlington Police Department 1 North Avenue Burlington, Vermont 05401.*

STEP 3

Once you hear back from the Police Department that your **Block Party Application Form** has been approved, you are good to go! Plan to wait two weeks for your application to be processed.

TALKING TO NEIGHBORS

HOW TO CANVASS

Depending on how large the street your block party will be hosted on is, you may want to enlist your planning team to help you canvass. If you and your team have not canvassed before, it can be helpful to go door-to-door in pairs.

If you are splitting the canvassing between multiple people, be clear about which houses you will be taking. Divide up houses by side of the street (*you do evens, I'll do odds*), or segment of road (*I'll do the intersection of Apple to Pear, you do Pear to Peach*).

Make sure canvassers take notes, so that if you end up needing to door-knock the same part of the street multiple times, you don't knock on the door of someone you've already spoken to, or you know when to come back if someone wasn't available. Notes can also be helpful for block party canvassing in future years. See examples below.

23 Tomato Street not interested in having conversations at the door, asked that we not knock again but we could call at 802-123-4567.

55 Tomato Street was putting baby down - asked us to come back again before 7 pm.

Talked to house-sitter at 11 Tomato Street - said residents are back Sunday night.

Make sure neighbors fill out their **name, address, and either their phone number or email**. If they aren't comfortable providing contact information—that's okay! Just note their preference on the waiver so the City knows why the information is missing.

WHO TO CANVASS

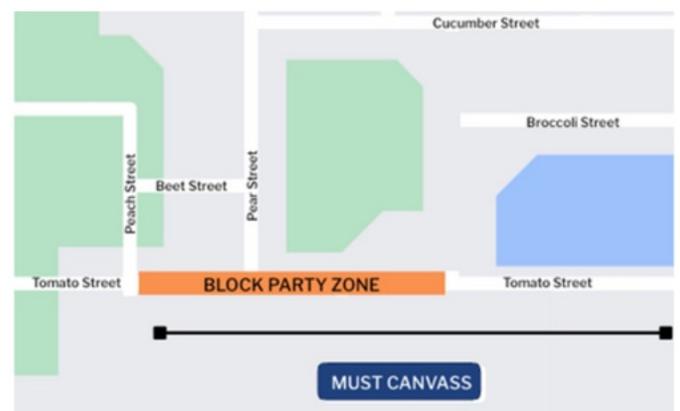
Remember: even if you are hosting a block party that neighbors from multiple streets will be invited to, ***you only have to get signatures from residents that will be impacted by the closure of the street.***

This includes neighbors that live on the closed portion of the street, but it could also include other neighbors whose driving may be significantly impacted by the street closure.

In Example A, **only the block party zone** on Tomato Street needs to be canvassed, because all other residences have convenient detours to avoid the street closure. In Example B, Apple Street doesn't exist and we assume there is not another north/south street that connects to Cucumber Street. Therefore, **the entire East side** of Tomato Street must be canvassed.



Example
A



Example
B

OUTREACH

Do as much as you can to let *all of your* neighbors know about this event. The kind of outreach you do will also depend on how big you want your block party to be. If you live on a small street and are hosting the party just for the neighbors of that street who already have a strong communication network, you likely won't have to take many of these steps.

WHERE TO ADVERTISE YOUR BLOCK PARTY

- **Front Porch Forum Post** 2 weeks, 1 week, and 1 day before the event (draft front porch forum post in Appendix D)
- **Announcement in the NPA meeting** in your neighborhood closest to the date of the block party.
 - If you can't attend the NPA, send them an email so they can share the information.
- **Flyer-ing in community spaces** and at each residence (template flyers in Appendixes B&C)
 - We recommend quarter size flyers (4.25x5.5) to maximize outreach with minimal paper usage for flyer-ing. For community spaces, we recommend 8.5x11 or larger posters.
- **Door hangers** on each of the residences whose parking and driving will be limited by street closure (template door-hanger in Appendix A)

Because **it is illegal to put flyers in your neighbors mailboxes or through mail slots in doors**, get creative with where you can put flyers - in doorknobs, under welcome mats, or in the door jamb.

SET-UP AND MATERIALS

When planning set-up, block party planners should think about:

FOOD

Will there be food or beverages?
What kind?
Where will the food come from and
where will it be stored?
Where will people eat?
Will you need plates, utensils, cups?

ACCESSIBILITY

What will your most vulnerable
neighbors need to feel comfortable?
Is there shade on the street?
Where can someone go if they're
feeling tired of standing or need a
break from the sun and heat?

SEATING

Will most people be sitting
or standing?
Where will you get chairs?

SAFETY

How will you prevent cars from
entering the street?
How will you facilitate emergency
vehicles or neighbors that must
access their homes?

ENTERTAINMENT

Are you planning to play music
on a speaker?
Have live musicians?
Host a group activity?
What materials do you need to
make that happen?

CLEANUP

How will garbage and recycling be
collected and disposed of?
Who will be responsible for cleanup?

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

You may not have everything you want or need for your block party. That's okay! Here are some helpful resources:

- The **Fletcher Free Library** rents out lawn games
- Email **your NPA** and ask if they have resources for events - like tables and chairs, or even money for food
- If there are UVM students in your neighborhood, reach out to **UVM Office of Community Relations (OSCR)** to see what support they might be willing to extend.
- For temporary barriers for cars, reach out to Marcie and Jack at **info@localmotion.org**
- Don't forget to ask your neighbors on **Front Porch Forum!**



Q&A WITH THE ORGANIZERS OF DECATURFEST

A conversation with Ben Rodgers and Ada Dunkley about Burlington's most well-loved block party

How did Decaturfest start?

In 2010, it began with one big potluck—just a long table down the street and neighbors bringing food. The goal was simple: reclaim the street and create a community space for everyone.



*First year of Decaturfest.
Credit Ben Rodgers from online Decatur archives.*

What are the key elements of a successful block party?

- Public space (no cars)
- Free food
- Live music (even just porch jams)
- Kids
- Neighbors mingling

How do you invite and involve neighbors?

Canvassing is key. Knock on doors with a flyer weeks in advance. Get signatures for the permit and contact info. Use a group chat, email list, or flyer to share updates. Remind neighbors the day before to move their cars.

What makes it work year after year?

A few core organizers handle logistics, but others take ownership of what excites them. It's always a bit last-minute, but because it's an annual event, everyone knows it's happening. We try to get as many neighbors as possible involved in planning - there's never an expectation, and always an invitation.



Decaturfest 2025. Credit Ben Rodgers.

Q&A WITH THE ORGANIZERS OF DECATURFEST

Why use the street instead of yards or parks?

We're very lucky to have parks for things like farmers markets and little league games, but streets are the ultimate visible public space. People go to the streets when something big is happening - that's where neighbors meet. Holding it in the street lowers barriers, makes it more inclusive, and ensures shared ownership.

Why do you need to close the street to cars?

The whole point of a block party is to recognize how much public space roads take up and to think about how to use them for things other than cars. It's pretty incredible, once you get cars off the street, how much space there actually is. The street becomes a space for celebration, connection, even protest. Just standing or dancing in the street feels radical and joyful. Closing the street to cars also makes it safe for kids and bikers.

Final thoughts?

You don't know what your block party will look like until you know your neighbors. It's all about showing up, sharing food, and reclaiming the street—together. Also - Bring way more folding tables and tents than you think!



Decaturfest 2025.

How can towns and cities support this?

Burlington should continue to reimagine the way streets are used. Continuing to invest in other forms of transportation and finding ways where it's easier for neighbors to put on block parties. Housing is a big piece as well. One thing that's so great about Decatur is that there's affordable housing on the street: there's artists and musicians that live on the street and can afford to use their time.



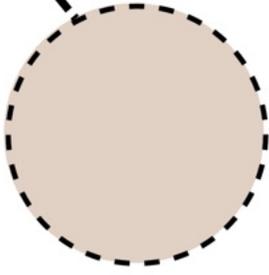
Decaturfest 2025. Credit Ben Rodgers.

APPENDIX A

Template door-hanger

- Use standard 8.5" x 11" paper. Regular printer paper will work, but for best results, use thicker paper (e.g., cardstock).
- Print Double-Sided:
 - Print Side 1 as page 8 and Side 2 as page 9, back-to-back on the same sheet.
- After printing, manually cut along the dotted lines to shape the door hangers so they can properly hang on a door handle.
- Best distributed 1-2 days before the event.





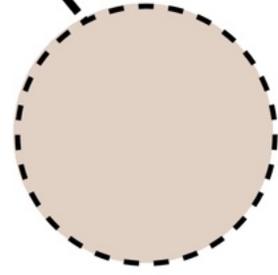
DEAR NEIGHBOR,

**WE ARE HAVING A
NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK
PARTY ON OUR STREET
THIS DAY, DATE, AND TIME -
AND YOU'RE INVITED!**

**OUR STREET WILL BE
CLOSED TO CARS DURING
THE CELEBRATION, SO
PLEASE PLAN
ACCORDINGLY!**

*Put a picture, graphic, or more
information here*

See reverse!!



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See reverse!!

**WE'LL HAVE MUSIC, FOOD,
GAMES, AND OPPORTUNITIES
TO CELEBRATE OUR
NEIGHBORHOOD!**

**IF POSSIBLE, PLEASE
CONSIDER PARKING YOUR CAR
OFF OF THE STREET BEFORE
THE EVENT BEGINS TO
CREATE MORE ROOM FOR THE
CELEBRATION.**

**PLEASE PLAN AHEAD AND
PARK ON:**

- OPTION A**
- OPTION B**
- OPTION C**

*Put contact info for planning
team*

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- OPTION C**

*Put contact info for planning
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APPENDIX B

Template flyer for drivers

- This flyer is best formatted as quarter-sized – 4.25" x 5.5" (four per standard 8.5" x 11" sheet)
- Use eye-catching colors to make the flyer stand out.
- You can create or customize this flyer using tools like Canva, Adobe Illustrator, or Adobe InDesign.
- Best distributed 1-2 days before the event.

NOTICE TO DRIVERS

**A Block Party is happening on our street!
Please note the following important information:**

**From TIME on DAY AND DATE, OUR STREET will be
closed to vehicle traffic.**

**You will not be able to drive to or leave your
house in your car during this time
(except in case of emergencies).**

**If possible, please consider parking your car off of
the street before the event begins to create more
room for the celebration.**

**Parking Options:
Please plan ahead and park on:**

- **OPTION A**
- **OPTION B**
- **OPTION C**

Let's keep the block safe and fun for everyone!

APPENDIX C

Template flyer

We suggest distributing flyers 1-2 weeks before the event. Be sure to include the following information on your flyer:

- Date and time of the block party
- Location (specific address or area of the block)
- Any special activities planned (e.g., games, live music, potluck, etc.)
- What to bring (e.g., food, chairs, games)
- Contact info for questions

**JOIN US FOR OUR STREET'S
BLOCK PARTY!**

HAPPENING ON DATE/TIME

AT STREET NAME

**INSERT FUN ACTIVITIES, FOOD, OR
EXPERIENCES TO EXPECT HERE!**

**PLEASE BRING (FOOD, CHAIRS,
GAMES, ETC.) IF YOU ARE ABLE!**

**CONTACT (PLANNER'S NAME) WITH QUESTIONS
OR IF YOU WANT TO HELP OUT!
(INSERT EMAIL OR PHONE # OF CONTACT)**

If someone in your neighborhood has access to graphic design software like Canva, it's easy to find a colorful and eye-catching "Block Party" template to customize. If design software isn't available, no problem!

You could also use [**this editable PDF template**](#) from the City of Boston.

APPENDIX D

Template Front Porch Forum post

Add your block party to your neighborhood's FPF calendar. We suggest posting about it few times: 2 weeks, 1 week, and 1 day before the event by block party planners and/or your local NPA.

Block Party on OUR STREET!

Your name • Your street, town

 Event

When: **Sometember Xth, 202?**

Where: **Your street, your town, VT**

Hey neighbors!

We're throwing a Block Party on OUR STREET and everyone is welcome (we'll be closing the street to traffic during the event)! Come join us for an afternoon of music, food, games, and connection with our community.

What can you bring?

Food – we'll be grilling hot dogs, but please share a dish or treat if you're able!

Games – bring lawn games, board games, or anything fun

Yourself! – most importantly, just come meet your neighbors!

Questions or want to help out? Contact me at (your email or phone #)

See you on OUR STREET!

[Reply to Forum](#)



SUPPORT OUR WORK!

Our mission is to make it safe, accessible, and fun for everyone to bike, walk, and roll in Vermont.

You can support our statewide programs and events through individual giving and volunteering, or financial and in-kind support from businesses.



Learn more about our work and how you can support as at

www.localmotion.org

Contact us:

(802) 861-2700

info@localmotion.org

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Tax ID 03-0361422.

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