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# BLOCK PARTY

## HOW-TO MANUAL

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First Edition

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Local Motion

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>What Does it Take?</u>	2
<u>Three Questions to Get you Started</u>	3
<u>Set Up and Materials</u>	5
<u>Outreach</u>	6
<u>Permit Approval</u>	7
<u>Decaturfest Highlight</u>	9
<u>Appendix A: Template door hanger</u>	11
<u>Appendix B: Template flyer for drivers</u>	14
<u>Appendix C: Template flyer general</u>	15
<u>Appendix D: Template FPF post</u>	16
<u>Appendix E: Burlington Materials</u>	17

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# INTRODUCTION

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Throwing a block party is a great way to get to know your neighbors and reclaim streets for public enjoyment and connection, but it doesn't happen overnight.

We created this manual to help you navigate the logistics - from street closures to community outreach - while acknowledging that every host starts from a different place. Some of you already know every neighbor on your street; others are looking to make that first introduction.

No two gatherings are alike, and no two streets are the same. This manual serves all of Vermont, from Chittenden County suburbs to Northeast Kingdom villages, offering guidance that adapts to your community. Use the tools and templates that make sense for your neck of the woods, skip the ones that don't, and most importantly, have fun!



# WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

## YOU'LL NEED TO...

- Make a planning team
- Check what process your town requires for permits or permission
- Talk to your neighbors
- Plan for food, seating, and activities
- Close off the street
- Have fun!
- Clean up



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# THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK

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## 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 or BBQ
- a pop-up sports arena, with soccer games, bike races, and volleyball
- a market with neighbors sharing arts and crafts, used clothing, and home goods
- A venue for your neighborhood musicians to perform

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

Every block party should reflect your community. Before planning, take a moment to define your goals and vision so you can clearly communicate with neighbors. Then decide if your party will be on just your street, multiple streets, or a larger neighborhood area.

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

## 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 a couple planning meetings is ideal. If possible, a larger group of around 10 neighbors willing to help set up and break down - and knock doors and hand out flyers if needed - 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 potential 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, traffic, and waste hauler routes. But there is nothing wrong with a week day block party if that works for your neighborhood!

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# SET-UP AND MATERIALS

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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?  
Will there be activities for kids?

## CLEANUP

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

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# OUTREACH

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Let all your neighbors know about your block party! How you reach them will depend on the size of your gathering. If your neighborhood is already close-knit, you probably won't need to do much to get the word out.

## WHERE TO ADVERTISE YOUR BLOCK PARTY

- Door hangers on each of the residences whose parking and driving will be limited by street closure (template door-hanger in [Appendix A](#))
- Post flyers in community spaces and at each residence (template flyers in [Appendix B](#) & [Appendix C](#))
- Front Porch Forum Post 2 weeks, 1 week, and 1 day before the event (draft front porch forum post in [Appendix D](#))
- 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.
- Announcement in a community meeting in your neighborhood

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

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# HOW TO GET PERMIT APPROVAL

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In some communities you will need a permit, application, or both from your town or local police department to be approved to host a block party. If you're not sure whether your town requires approval, contact your town clerk. See [Appendix E](#) for an example permit and application from Burlington.

## STEP 1

Identify necessary town permits or applications **at least three weeks before your block party.**

## STEP 2

Knock on doors in your neighborhood to let your neighbors know about the event and get their contact information. Some towns will require this information in order to get a permit, but we recommend doing it regardless!

You may be 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 portion of the street by car, except in emergency situations.

## STEP 3

Once you hear back from your town or police department that your application and permit has been approved, you are good to go!

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## ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

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If you don't already own something you want or need for your block party, you may not need to purchase it. Check out these resources first!

- Your local library may rent out lawn games or other materials
- If there is a community organization in your town, email and ask if they have resources for events - like tables and chairs, or even money for food
- If you live in a neighborhood of Burlington with many UVM students 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 Local Motion staff at [info@localmotion.org](mailto:info@localmotion.org)
- Don't forget to ask your neighbors while going door-to-door, or on **Front Porch Forum!**



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# Q&A WITH THE ORGANIZERS OF DECATURFEST

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*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?

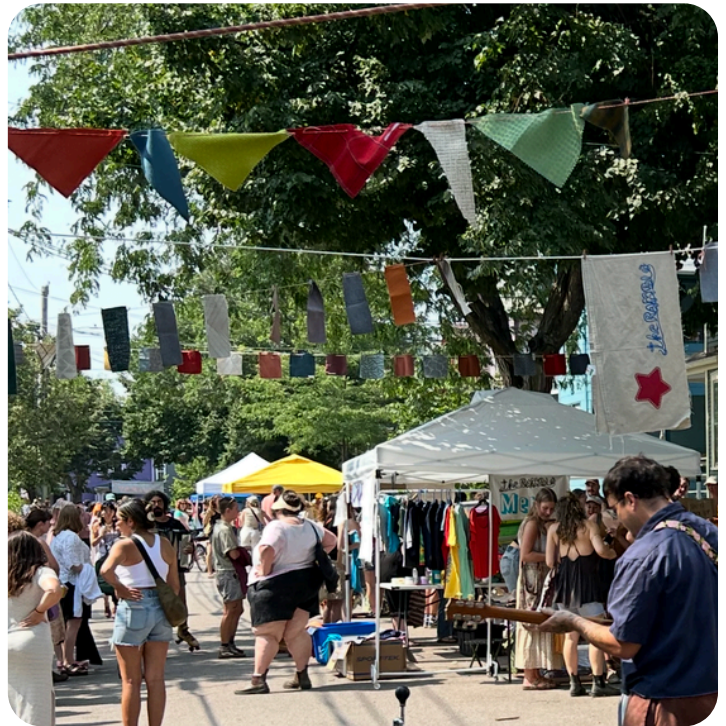
- Public space (no cars)
- Free food
- Live music (even just porch jams)
- Kids
- Neighbors mingling

## 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.*

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# Q&A WITH THE ORGANIZERS OF DECATURFEST

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## 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.



Decaturfest 2025.



Decaturfest 2025. Credit Ben Rodgers.

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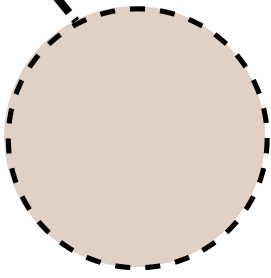
# APPENDIX A

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## Template door-hanger

- [Editable template available here on Canva](#) (you must create a free account to access), or copy our example in the following pages
- Use standard 8.5" x 11" paper. Regular printer paper will work, but for best results, use thicker paper (e.g., cardstock).
- See the next two pages for how to format your door-hanger:
  - Print Double-Sided back-to-back on the same sheet, once you have updated the text with information about your block party!
- After printing, manually cut along the dotted lines to shape the door hangers so they can properly hang on a door handle.
- Best distributed a few days before the event.





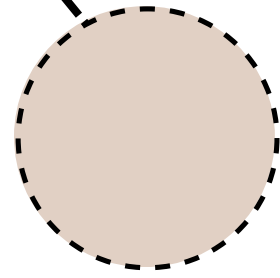
**DEAR NEIGHBOR,**

**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!!***



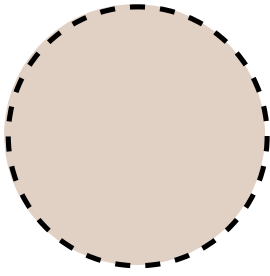
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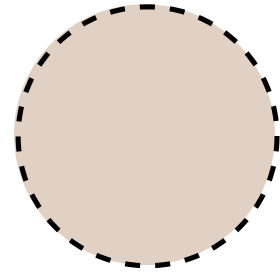
**WE'LL HAVE MUSIC, FOOD,  
GAMES, AND OPPORTUNITIES  
TO CELEBRATE OUR  
NEIGHBORHOOD!**

**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*



**WE'LL HAVE MUSIC, FOOD,  
GAMES, AND OPPORTUNITIES  
TO CELEBRATE OUR  
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**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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# APPENDIX B

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## Template flyer for drivers who park on the street

- [Editable template available here on Canva](#) (you must create a free account to access), or copy our example below to create your own
- This flyer is intended for drivers who park on the street
- 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!**

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# APPENDIX C

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## Template flyer

- [Editable template available here on Canva](#) (you must create a free account to access), or copy our example below to create your own
- 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



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.

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# APPENDIX D


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## Template Front Porch Forum post

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

### 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](#)

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# APPENDIX E

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## Burlington Application

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

**Burlington Police Department  
Request for Special Events Permit**

1. Name of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_  
Applicant Telephone Number: Home: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date and time event will begin? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Date and time event will end? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Exact location of event (Detailed Road Closure Request):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Are there any **bus stops** within the requested closure area? \_\_\_\_\_

*PLEASE NOTE BURLINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT DOES NOT SUPPLY ANY ROAD CLOSURE BARRICADES OR SIGNAGE – THAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REQUESTOR.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Applicant (or Authorized Agent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Note: Please mail or drop off this completed and signed application to:

**Sarah Trieb**  
**Burlington Police Department**  
**1 North Avenue**  
**Burlington, Vermont 05401**  
**802-540-2246**  
**strieb@bpdvt.org**

# Burlington Permit

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.

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.



POLICE DEPARTMENT  
CITY OF BURLINGTON

## BURLINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT - Waiver Form

I understand that by signing this document I waive my household's rights to normal access to \_\_\_\_\_ Street on the following date: \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM until \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM for the purpose of a Block Party.

For this permit to be approved, ¾ of the residents on the above mentioned street must waive their right to normal access.

This will be filed with a permit request at the Burlington Police Department.  
If you have any questions, please call Sarah Trieb with BPD at (802) 540-2246.

Total # of Residences on Street \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Signature		Phone Number

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



# 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](http://www.localmotion.org)**

Contact us:

(802) 861-2700

[info@localmotion.org](mailto:info@localmotion.org)

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We are a [1% for the Planet](#) Environmental Partner.



# **LOCAL MOTION**



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