

City of Raleigh

Tactical Urbanism Proposal

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We encourage the City of Raleigh to adopt a formal tactical urbanism policy — an approach that makes citizens and staff partners in the effort to improve the city. Tactical urbanism is when community members implement low-cost, quick-build improvements to public spaces and infrastructure in a city. Precedent for tactical urbanism policy already exists in other cities such as Atlanta and Charlotte that Raleigh can look to for guidance and inspiration.

Motivation

Currently, there is no formal process for citizen-initiated public space and infrastructure improvements. When a citizen wants to volunteer their time and resources to improve the city, they must navigate seemingly complex structures and regulatory processes to fully develop their proposal and share it with a city staff member for review and approval. Projects can only be built by the city or through contractors the city hires. Any approved proposal by a citizen will fall into a long backlog of the many deserving and important projects the city wants to tackle.

For citizens who want to make a difference in their community today, this process is confusing, slow, and usually does not lead to results. There are too many opportunities for proposals to be denied or forgotten and no standard workflow to develop an idea into an approved project that can be executed in a reasonable timeframe.

If the City of Raleigh were to adopt a tactical urbanism policy, volunteers would have a framework to follow to improve the built environment for community use and satisfaction. Policy materials would outline eligible project types and the specific requirements needed to adhere to city policy. The result would be simplified decision-making using a menu of options, reduced administrative workload because of a single application form, and transparency on how an idea can turn into visible public impact.

Tactical Urbanism Results in Other Cities

In 2020, the city of Atlanta created a [Tactical Urbanism Program](#). The program has a detailed [guide](#) and [application form](#) for design guidelines of various infrastructure improvements, community engagement, required materials, and example documents for projects (ATLDOT 2020).

Atlanta's Tactical Urbanism Program was able to accelerate implementation of a crosswalk at the intersection of Monroe Drive and Greenwood Avenue. The city of Atlanta has been working on improvements for this intersection since 2016 as part of a larger project, but the project isn't

set to finish design until March 2027 and construction not until November 2029 (ATLDOT 2025). Through Atlanta's Tactical Urbanism Program, the Midtown Neighbors' Association spent five months iterating on the design with ATLDOT and raised \$1K for materials. They implemented the project in one day during 2024 with paint and flexible delineators. The completed project increases pedestrian visibility and communicates to drivers where to stop when pedestrians are present. This project is scheduled to last for one year before renewal (Malkin 2024) (Midtown Atlanta 2024).



Other cities have similar community-driven programs such as Charlotte's Place Making Program. This program launched in 2018 and promotes the transformation of existing public spaces that lack urban design into vibrant hubs that are now a destination for the community. Charlotte's example provides a precedent for successful tactical urbanism policy in North Carolina. In Charlotte's website, you can explore the [Placemaking Hub](#) to see how to get involved in existing projects, a guidebook on what is permitted, and an interactive map to explore both completed and in-progress projects through the program (Charlotte Urban Design Center, Linville, and Naab 2018).

Another city, Indianapolis, has a similar tactical urbanism program called [Community Powered Infrastructure](#). In addition to empowering the community to propose and implement their own projects, the program features a city-run lending library that provides organizations with free access to materials like bollards, cones, and paint to implement the street safety projects. Notably, in the Community Heights neighborhood, such initiatives led to a 73% reduction in crashes in the area (Robertson 2024).

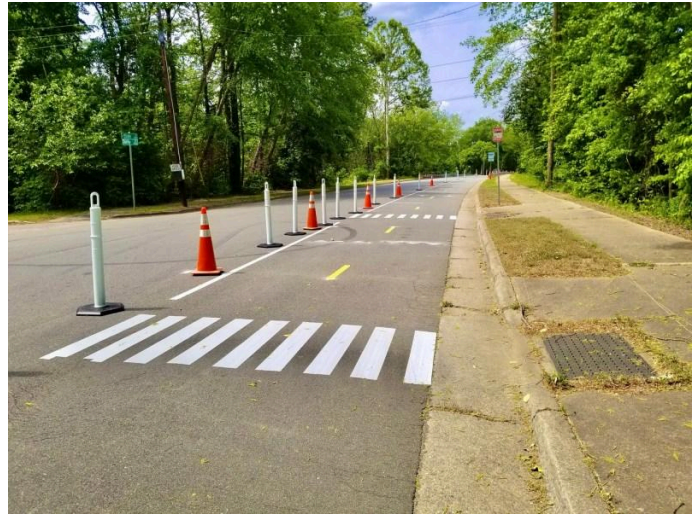
These examples show how a similar program in Raleigh could empower communities to address traffic safety challenges effectively and affordably, and try out and iterate on improvements before the city has bandwidth and funding to permanently implement these ideas.

Tactical Urbanism In Raleigh

Tactical urbanism is not new for Raleigh. Throughout the years, a number of projects, sanctioned or not, have taken root in the city. These projects demonstrate that there is already a strong community of advocates ready to mobilize to support the city's goals of safe transportation for all, increasing public amenities, and beautifying the city.

Transportation

Bike facilities. Oaks and Spokes, in partnership with the city, has constructed several demonstration bike lanes. Recent locations include Lenoir Street, South State Street, West Street, and Harrington Street (Oaks & Spokes). Some tactical projects have been converted into city-maintained facilities.

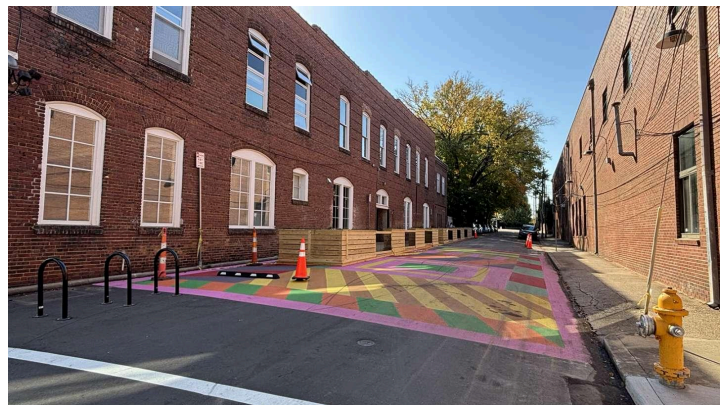


Curb extension. The downtown intersection of Hargett Street and Salisbury Street is notable for the street art and bollards that have a dual function as beautification and curb extension. Unsanctioned tactical curb extensions often appear by chance as a stray traffic cone, scooter, trash can, or other debris, which has the effect of increasing driver caution around crosswalks.

Enhanced crosswalks. The city has led demonstration projects for a variety of crosswalk enhancements, including raised crosswalks at locations such as Broughton High School and Commerce Place. Other crosswalks have been improved through additional paint, such as the rainbow crosswalk at the intersection of Clark Avenue and Daisy Street.

Amenities

Parklets. Converting parking spaces into outdoor dining or leisure space is typically part of a comprehensive tactical urbanism policy. The City of Raleigh has already enacted a policy for outdoor seating that allows for these elements within downtown (City of Raleigh 2022). As a result of this existing policy, there are numerous parklets contributing to an improved streetscape throughout downtown. The structure of this successful policy will be invaluable in crafting the appropriate language for a general tactical urbanism policy.



Little free libraries. Little free libraries, pantries, toy boxes are popular neighborhood amenities throughout the city. Typically, they are placed on private property to avoid navigating an approval process. Occasionally, little free libraries will take up residence in disused utility boxes or other sidewalk fixtures with empty space.

Wayfinding. In 2012, walk your city signs appeared across Raleigh as an unsanctioned tactical urbanism project that encouraged walking to nearby destinations (Tomasulo 2013). The signs were popular and the city council eventually endorsed the signs and sanctioned the installation of semi-permanent versions (Gergen and Martin 2015). Since 2015, however, most of the signs have been weathered, damaged, or lost. This shows the importance of empowering community maintenance of tactical urbanism projects.



Public Art

Beautifying the city and empowering organizations to make statements publicly is typically part of a comprehensive tactical urbanism policy. The City of Raleigh already has a citizen-initiated program for public art projects for walls, fences, bus shelters, sewer risers, signal boxes, sidewalks, and more (Raleigh Arts 2024). The structure and lessons learned from this program will be helpful in drafting a comprehensive tactical urbanism policy.

Conclusion

Raleigh is ready for a formal tactical urbanism policy that empowers community members to improve their neighborhoods and advance the city's goals. Raleigh has already adopted programs for public seating and public art but is lacking a similar program for transportation. Many individual projects show the appetite is there for transportation projects as well. Now is the time to formalize this process to improve street safety, simplify staff workloads, and build community capacity for working together to accomplish shared goals. We look forward to working with city leaders to bring this vision into adopted policy.

Appendix. Tactical Urbanism Policy for Raleigh

Below, we outline in broad strokes what elements are important for Raleigh to consider in its tactical urbanism policy. Specific examples are included for illustrative purposes. We expect that the final policy language will differ significantly from what we present here in order to meet the City of Raleigh's standards.

Process

There are two phases to a tactical urbanism project: design and implementation. The following outlines the steps involved in each phase.

Design

1. Identify project need and location
2. Design improvements from list of pre-approved options
3. Community engagement and involvement
4. Submit design to city for review
5. Revise and resubmit to address comments until receiving approval

Implementation

1. City provides construction date options when approving design
2. Notify city and community of chosen construction date
3. Coordinate volunteers and gather materials
4. Build project
5. Maintain project
6. Remove project

Eligibility

Who can apply to install a tactical urbanism project?

- Local businesses or organized business associations
- Organized neighborhood / community associations
- Grassroots or community-based organizations
- Non-profits, 501c3s, or advocacy organizations

Design Resources

The following materials are needed for the application:

- Site photos
- Site plan with cover sheet
- Materials list
- Maintenance agreement
- Removal plan
- At least 3 community support letters

- Community engagement plan

Implementation Resources

Once the design is approved, the group will receive the following:

- Permits
- Installation schedule - options received with design approval
- Volunteer release forms
- Project information signage
- Access to a lending library of tools to aid in project installation

Project Types

This section proposes the types of projects that the City of Raleigh should consider eligible for its tactical urbanism process. A list of pre-approved project types means that citizens have a framework for what ideas are possible and the city has clear requirements for what can be quickly approved.

Duration

Tactical urbanism projects are temporary changes to the built environment. There should be limits on the duration of the projects as follows:

- **Demonstration:** A project that lasts at most 30 days.
- **Pilot:** A project lasting longer than a Demonstration project, up to a year. Materials and maintenance must last for the duration of the project by the group.

Projects of both durations can be eligible for renewal through the application form.

Categories

There are three categories for eligible project types:

- **Transportation:** Improvements and demonstrations that affect how the community moves through a public space, such as:
 - Curb extension
 - Convert wide lane into narrow lane and bike lane
 - Convert parallel parking into bike lane
 - Convert car lane into bike lane
 - Lane narrowing
 - Slow shared street
 - Slip lane closure
 - Walk lane
 - Clear underbrush in right of way
 - Add a mulch sidewalk

- **Amenities:** Enhancements to public spaces and infrastructure to improve community use and satisfaction, such as:
 - Sidewalk bike parking
 - Street bike parking
 - Bus stop bench/enhancement
 - Parklet
 - Consolidated waste/recycling service area
- **Public Art:** Beautification and statements on existing public spaces and infrastructure, such as:
 - Street mural
 - Crosswalk art
 - Sidewalk art
 - Signal cabinet wrap

Further Reading

1. The Tactical Urbanist's Guide, available at tacticalurbanismguide.com
2. The Urban Street Design Guide from the National Association of City Transportation Officials, available at nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/
3. Community-Led Demonstration Project Policy + Guide from the City of Burlington, VT, available at burlingtonvt.gov/DPW/Tactical-Urbanism-and-Demonstration-Projects
4. Healthy Community Design Toolkit from the Centers for Disease Control, available at cdc.gov/healthyplaces/toolkit/

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