

City of Syracuse's Community Streets 2024 Pilot Year Summary



October 2024



DRAFT

Community Streets

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Introduction

As part of the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council's (SMTC) 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 Unified Planning Work Programs (UPWP), the SMTC worked alongside the City of Syracuse and Adapt CNY to develop and implement the City's Community Streets Program. Community Streets is intended as an ongoing process to engage community members, encourage more bike and pedestrian activity, and implement demonstration projects aimed at improving safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

Community Streets allows community organizations within the City of Syracuse to propose and implement temporary demonstration projects on neighborhood streets. Volunteers from the participating community organizations utilized paint, moveable barriers, and other materials to change the shape of their streets to improve access and safety for individuals outside of motor vehicles.

2023-2024 served as the pilot year for the Community Streets Program. As a pilot year, the involved agencies and organizations undertook their roles as part of a learning process aimed at better understanding what projects are viable, what materials are needed, and how best to structure the selection and design process for future years. This memorandum will review the process that was utilized during the pilot year, summarize the selected projects that were implemented, and identify potential changes to improve the program for future years.

2019 / 2020 White Paper and Guidebook

In 2019, the SMTC, at the request of the City of Syracuse, prepared the Community Streets White Paper, detailing how small scale, temporary projects, often referred to as tactical urbanism, can be used to demonstrate potential changes to the built environment. The paper highlighted several benefits of temporary demonstration projects including their low costs, faster turnarounds, and the increased ability of engaging members of the public in the planning process.

The white paper went on to identify several factors that must be considered as the City developed its own program to approve temporary projects. These factors included:

- Building a brand for the projects to help members of the public identify them,
- The importance of notifying and involving neighbors,
- Specific resources and partnerships that may be available to fund future projects,
- The context of the project sites (public right-of-way, traffic volumes, land use, traffic control, etc.),
- The duration of the project, and
- The ultimate design of the project, which must adhere to guidelines laid out within the MUTCD.

The white paper included a variety of project types seen in other cities across the country, such as temporary curb extensions, murals, bike lanes, and parklets, which each have their own unique challenges for project sponsors to address. To assist sponsors and the City, the white paper recommended developing a level of intensity rating which would allow smaller projects, such as pedestrian wayfinding signage, to move through the review process faster than more complicated projects, such as installing a protected bike lane.

As the white paper was completed, SMTC staff developed a draft guidebook that would be available to members of the public as they created plans for their own Community Streets Project. In early 2020, the guidebook was shelved as the Covid-19 pandemic led to widespread shutdowns and closures worldwide and other initiatives took priority.

Photos on the Left: Volunteer painting the street mural for Hopeprint (top), volunteers painting curb extensions for Alchemical Nursery (middle), and Lodi Triangle branding for summer events at the Hopeprint project site (bottom).

2023 / 2024 Updated Guidebook and Selection Process

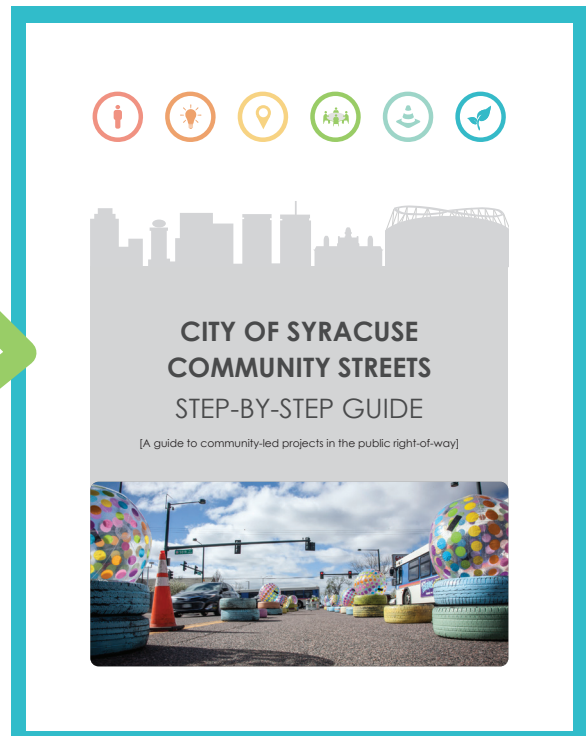
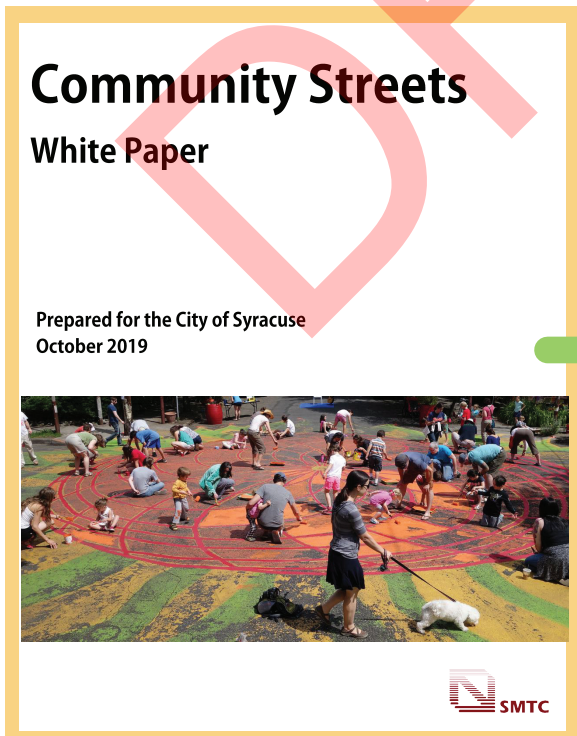
In 2023, the City of Syracuse requested the SMTC to review the draft guidebook and help spearhead a pilot year for the program alongside Adapt CNY.

Through discussions with City of Syracuse staff and Adapt CNY volunteers, the guidebook was reconfigured to create a process where a handful of projects may be selected to be installed each year after a multi-step review. The aim of this new process was to delegate review responsibilities to multiple parties, allowing more fully formed projects to reach City of Syracuse staff for their final review and approval. These reviews included a feasibility review by SMTC staff and a funding selection review by Adapt CNY volunteers. Once selected for funding, project sponsors would meet with SMTC staff to refine the submitted designs to better adhere to MUTCD guidelines and address concerns identified by City of Syracuse staff.

SMTC staff announced the new Community Streets Program at the November 2023 Forum on Active Transportation (FOAT), which was followed up by a virtual Q&A session in December 2023. A dedicated website was developed to provide community organizations access to the guidebook, application form, and important reference materials.

As projects were submitted, SMTC staff conducted a feasibility screening, focused on project site location and safety concerns during the installation process. Ultimately one project was notified that their submission would not move forward due to feasibility concerns. Once reviewed, all project submission materials were provided to Adapt CNY.

To inform the selection of projects for funding, Adapt CNY volunteers developed a grading rubric to compare all project submissions, with the ultimate goal of selecting up to three projects for installation. The rubric considered the impact the project would have on its location, how easy the project would be to install, the level of community support demonstrated, and its estimated cost. Five volunteers voted on the submitted projects, ultimately awarding funding to Alchemical Nursery, Ed Smith PTO, and Hopeprint.



Project Refinements and Liability Waiver Process

After projects were selected, SMTC staff met with project sponsors to discuss potential conflicts and concerns that were raised during the review process. Some concerns included obstructing private driveways, placement of temporary flex posts, and the use of semi-permanent barriers. All projects went through a series of design updates and modifications throughout the spring.

Once a design was completed, project sponsors attended their local TNT sector meeting to present the project proposal and listen to feedback from attendees. Two projects, Hopeprint and Alchemical Nursery, also submitted requests for additional funds through TNT's special projects budgets, to help cover costs of food, t-shirts, and other materials that would not be covered by the initial grant provided by Adapt CNY.

Prior to the submission of the City's liability waiver, the key check point with City of Syracuse staff, SMTC staff drafted traffic control plans for each project. As two projects involved multiple intersections, traffic control plans for each intersection were drafted, with the intention of each intersection being closed at separate times. In future years, project sponsors will be expected to develop their own traffic control plans by following the examples set by this year's.

Once the project sponsors completed each of the previous steps, they were instructed to submit the liability waiver, informing the City's permit desk that their project was part of the Community Streets Program through DPW and that their liability waiver fee would be waived as part of this program.



Temporary traffic control signs utilized during the installation of the Alchemical Nursery project.

2024 Community Streets Project Summaries

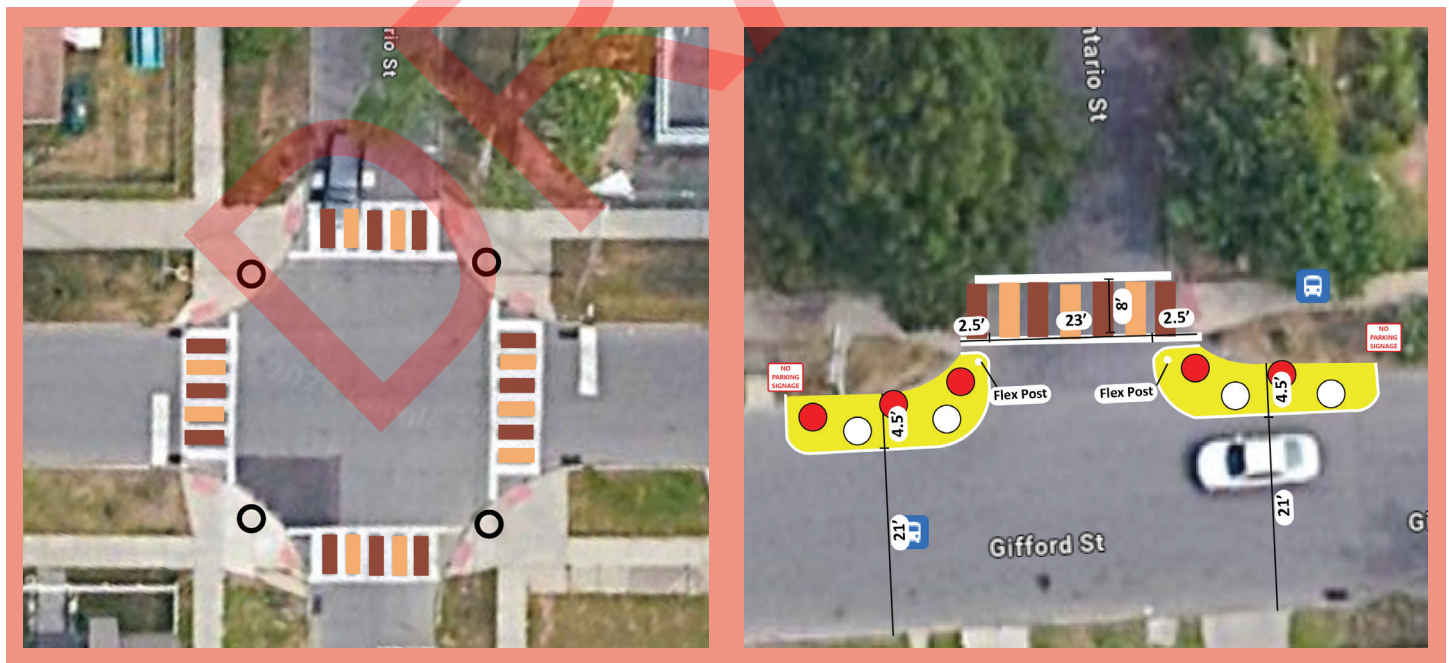
Each of the selected projects were unique in design, context, and challenges. While each sponsor followed the same general steps to reach the point of installation, each was met with their own obstacles.

Alchemical Nursery (Near Westside)

Located on the Near Westside, the Alchemical Nursery project enhanced two intersections along Ontario St, Gifford St and Otisco St. The long blocks that characterize portions of the Near Westside provide few designated places to cross, reducing accessibility for pedestrians. As part of the Community Streets project, painted curb extensions on Gifford St, reinforced by temporary flex posts at each corner, visually narrow the roadway, intended to slow vehicles near the Alchemical Nursery community garden, while a temporary crosswalk improved access for neighbors. At the Otisco St / Ontario St intersection, enhanced crosswalks, with blocked in brown and tan colors, act as a reminder to drivers to come to a complete stop as they enter the only 4-way stop along Ontario St. Recycled tires became planters at each corner of the Otisco St / Ontario St intersection as a way to extend the community garden’s reach deeper into the neighborhood.

Initially, the project consisted of a third intersection at Marcellus St. Due to construction delays on a City paving project, and concerns expressed by neighbors regarding the upkeep of the tire planters, the intersection was ultimately dropped to ensure there would be no delays on the other two project locations.

Prior to installation, traffic volume and speed data were collected along Gifford St near the Ontario St intersection. Over the course of three days, average daily traffic volume was approximately 750 vehicles per day, with 85th percentile speeds of 33 mph (eastbound) and 34 mph (westbound) on a posted speed limit of 30 mph. Some neighbors have complained about high speeds along the street, which may stem from a handful of drivers who reached 10+ mph over the speed limit. A second round of traffic volume and speed data is scheduled to be collected in mid October 2024 to evaluate the effectiveness of the temporary treatments.



Above: Initial design concepts for the Alchemical Nursery project. **Right:** Photos from the installation day including the enhanced crosswalk (top), painted curb extensions (bottom left), and the temporary crosswalk (bottom right)



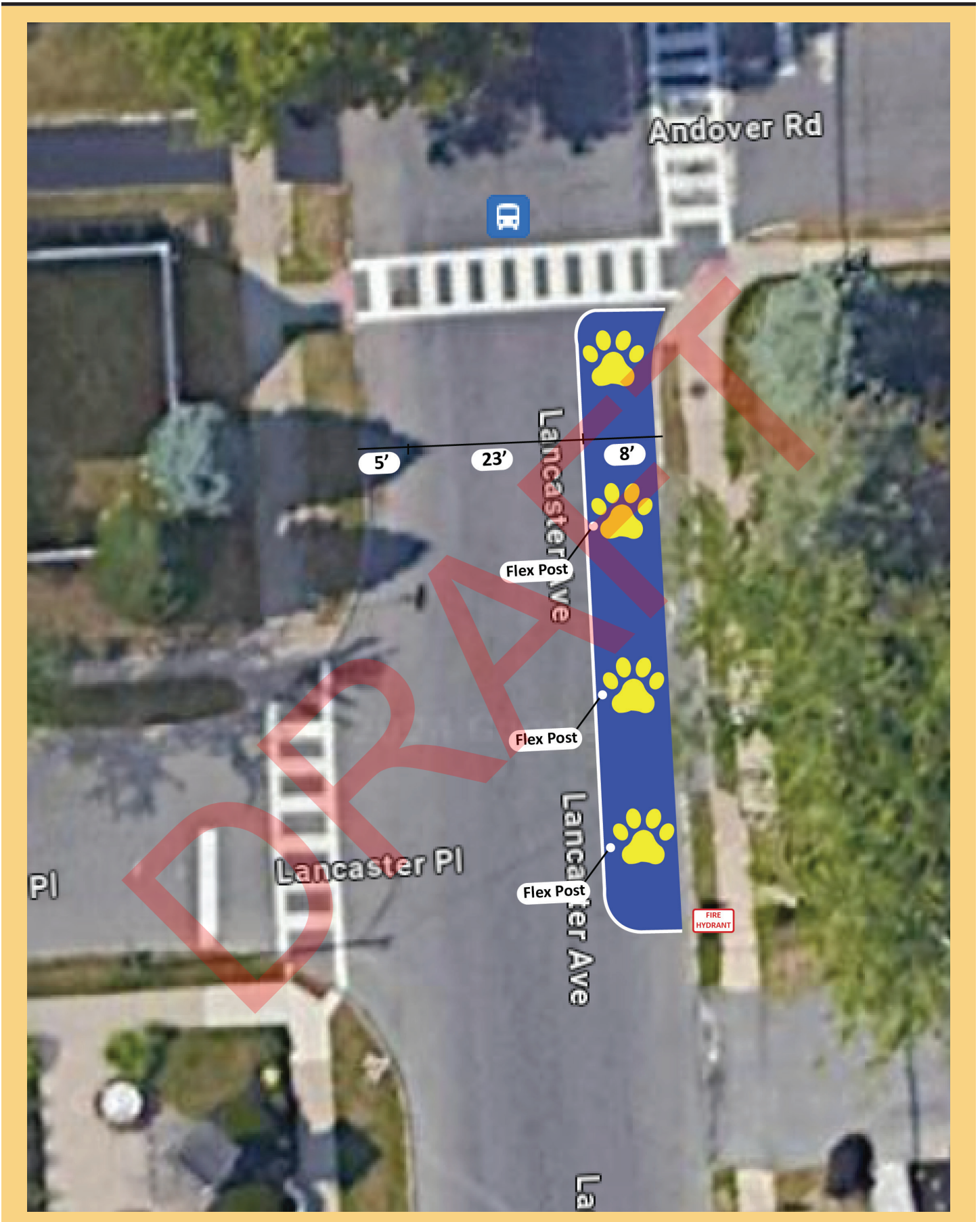
Ed Smith PTO (Eastside)

Inspired by painted curb extensions in front of Huntington K-8 School first completed in 2021, the Ed Smith PTO aimed to utilize similar techniques at two intersections near the school. The project included the Broad St / Kensington Pl and the Lancaster Ave / Andover Rd intersections. Both intersections were identified by the PTO as critical locations for lowering speeds for drivers as they enter the school zone. Painted curb extensions were designed for each intersection, utilizing coyote paw prints as a design motif to closely tie the project to Ed Smith school by referencing their school mascot. The curb extensions, reinforced by temporary flex posts at each corner, were intended to visually narrow the street to not only encourage slower speeds through the intersections but also improve visibility for pedestrians.

Prior to the installation, extensive utility work performed by National Grid occurred, delaying the project installation timeline. While the SMTC was made aware of some utility permits in the area during the review process, the extent of the work was not known at the time. SMTC staff and Adapt CNY volunteers continued communication with the Ed Smith PTO representatives throughout the construction process to determine when installation would be feasible. Ultimately, ED Smith PTO elected to postpone the project until spring 2025.

Traffic volume and speed data were collected in August 2024, prior to the planned project installation date, along Broad St near the Kensington Pl intersection. Over the course of three days, average daily traffic volume was approximately 1,800 vehicles per day, with 85th percentile speeds of 30 mph (eastbound) and 29 mph (westbound), within a posted 20 mph school zone. Traffic data was not collected while school was in session therefore school zone speeds would not be enforced at that time.





Left: Initial design concepts for the Ed Smith PTO project at the Broad St / Kensington Pl intersection. **Above:** Initial design concepts for the Lancaster Ave / Andover Rd intersection.



Potential Updates for Future Program Years

As a pilot year, the 2024 Community Streets projects offered a hands-on learning experience for all involved. While two projects were successfully installed, with a third to be completed in spring 2025, the process can be improved upon as it aims to be a sustainable program that occurs on a yearly basis.

Review Allowable Project List

The City of Syracuse Community Streets Step-By-Step Guide includes a list of several project ideas that have been installed in other cities across the country. The Guide details a general level of difficulty, an estimated number of volunteers needed, and an estimated cost. While several of these ideas were proposed during the pilot year, ultimately some may prove to be more ambitious and challenging than most volunteer groups will be able to accomplish. Additionally, City of Syracuse and SMTC staff have indicated concerns about installing any temporary projects on higher volume streets / main arterials in the City due to the complexity of temporary traffic control.

While the current Guide does not specify any restrictions on the number of locations a single project may include, the pilot year demonstrated that two intersections is likely the limit of what can be accomplished in a single day by a small group of volunteers.

Before applications open for another year of project submissions, SMTC staff recommend reviewing the list of potential projects to narrow it and revise some of the guidance, including lowering the traffic volume levels that are deemed appropriate for different project types . While a modified version of the pedestrian plaza was ultimately implemented, a discussion with the Syracuse Fire Department may be valuable in identifying ways to allow for extended (though ultimately, still temporary) road closures.



Large painted stripes were intended as a transition zone between vehicle traffic and the temporary pedestrian plaza on the Northside.

Update Design Process

During the pilot year, project sponsors were encouraged to submit designs, regardless of quality, that convey their ideas without requiring any specific details. Due to this policy, some designs were easier to interpret than others, resulting in additional SMTC staff time and resources being spent on clarifying designs and bringing them closer to MUTCD guidance.

To improve this process, SMTC staff believe the ultimate designs from the pilot year can be used as examples for future projects along with outlining more specific guidance. For example, painted curb extensions, which is likely to be one of the more popular project types, should follow the following specifications in their designs:

- 4-inch white outlines
- Minimum street width remaining – 10 ft travel lanes
- Crosswalks go through the curb extensions
- White delineator posts in corners
- Where possible, limit curb extensions to areas already designated no parking

Other project specifications may include limiting temporary crosswalks to locations that already have ADA compliant curb ramps in place, as well as providing the MUTCD approved color palette for crosswalk enhancements (painting between white transverse lines of a crosswalk).

Update Review Timeline and Increase Coordination with Other City Agencies

Beyond updating the design guidance for submitted projects, the timeline for changes to the design must be updated as well. During the pilot year, designs were continually updated and altered up until the liability waiver was submitted. This removed the possibility of City staff reviewing the final design prior to submission. As mentioned previously, safety concerns were raised by the Fire Department regarding the Hopeprint pedestrian plaza, only after the liability waiver was submitted. Ultimately, a compromise was reached that allowed the pedestrian plaza to be activated during a specific window of time several days each week, but the project demonstrated a need to coordinate with all involved City agencies earlier in the process.

To avoid this, a deadline must be set for finalized designs, to provide City staff an opportunity to review prior to the liability waiver being submitted. While the Department of Public Works (DPW) remains the primary contact point for Community Streets projects, all public safety agencies should be notified during the design review process to gain insight into any concerns they may have. Although an extended road closure was off the table for the pilot year, better coordination may help identify ways to make extended closures feasible in future years. This, in some ways, is a return to the original intent of the 2019 Guide which required the City to provide a design approval certificate prior to the submission of the liability waiver. Adding in this additional check point will help ensure that projects meet the City's standards and any questionable aspects of the project can be remedied before it goes to other departments for approval.



Temporary flex posts are used at the corners of the painted curb extensions to reinforce the visual narrowing of the roadway.

Shift Communications to Adapt CNY

As the community partner of the Community Streets program, Adapt CNY developed a rubric by which to select the three projects to be funded for the pilot year, as well as coordinated with project sponsors on obtaining the necessary materials for their individual projects. Moving forward, Adapt CNY has indicated a desire to be more heavily involved throughout the process, including becoming the primary point of contact for all project communications.

Throughout the pilot year, project sponsors could potentially receive emails from several sources regarding their project. Streamlining this process and having sponsors meet directly with Adapt CNY may help alleviate confusion about who to discuss specific project questions with. This would allow SMTC staff to shift more towards an advisory role, reviewing projects for feasibility concerns and coordinating with City agencies, while Adapt CNY takes on the day-to-day responsibilities of the program.

Continue Building a Lending Library

To help manage the pilot year of the program, only three projects were selected for funding by Adapt CNY. Ultimately, the long-term vision for the Community Streets project is to allow for many more projects to occur each year as long as the project sponsors are able to provide their own funding source. To help cut down on project costs, Adapt CNY should continue building what is known as a “lending library” of materials. All of the reusable pieces of the pilot year projects, including temporary flex posts, water-filled jersey barriers, and road work signage, will continue to be owned by Adapt CNY and lent out to project sponsors in future years to supplement the other, more project specific materials, such as paint and construction materials, that sponsors will be responsible for purchasing. As the program continues, funding to update and replenish the lending library should continue as a way to lower the barrier of entry for project sponsors and maintain consistency in the quality of materials used.

Project Installation

At least one week prior to the installation date, project sponsors should meet with Adapt CNY and SMTC staff to review the any last minute details. This includes reviewing the traffic control plans that were approved by the City and ensuring all needed materials are either acquired or in the process of being acquired. At this meeting, it will be stressed that the volunteers must follow the traffic control plans exactly as they are, including where signage should be placed.

During installation, it is recommended to have one person in charge of drawing the design to ensure it adheres to the design approved by the City. During the pilot year, some small changes were made the day of installation, some purposefully so and others due to an oversight on the design. Empowering one individual to oversee the design will help ensure oversights are avoided and the only changes made day-of are essential to making the project work.

