

**LOGIN/SIGN UP TO SAVE**

Implementation Guides November 2023

How to enable temporary use to activate your city

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In many cities, complex and long-term planning processes can make it difficult to adapt the urban environment quickly enough to keep pace with changing needs. ‘Temporary urbanism’ refers to short- and medium-term interventions, usually in public spaces or underutilised/vacant buildings and land, that can help to address this problem. Projects often provide new amenities or community infrastructure, or aim to make sites more people friendly or economically active, and are well suited to supporting climate actions that promote walking and cycling, ‘complete’ neighbourhoods, urban greening and the adaptive reuse of buildings.¹ They can help to sidestep or accelerate bureaucratic planning processes, provide opportunities to test ideas and approaches, and provide solutions to a range of urban issues quickly and effectively, from streetscape improvements to temporary workspaces and even housing. If planned and evaluated effectively, a temporary or interim intervention can show cities what residents want and provide a forum for their participation in city planning and design processes.² They can enable cities to ‘plan while doing’, making the most of existing infrastructure while using short-term actions to kick start long-term change.

Temporary urbanism projects are usually implemented by, or in partnership with, a variety of external actors, including residents, community groups, non-profit organisations and/or private entities, often with a strong element of participation from the local community. City administrations have a crucial role to play in encouraging and enabling temporary use by offering incentives and creating a supportive policy framework. This article discusses how.

Understand what challenges temporary use can address in your city

Temporary use projects can help cities tackle a range of priorities that align with wider objectives. Projects can introduce services or infrastructure that may be lacking or outdated, and provide short-term solutions while more permanent ones are developed. Examples of challenges that temporary use can help to address include:

- **Dangerous or outdated streetscapes and a lack of appropriate street infrastructure.** Priority project locations can be identified by a high occurrence of traffic accidents, speeding offences, injuries and fatalities, as well as little public space, limited cycle infrastructure, high volumes of pedestrian and vehicle flow, wide-laned roads or concentrated vulnerable populations, such as schools surrounded by heavy traffic flow or limited pedestrian space. In Quito, 1.8 km of streets were identified for improvement trials in a vehicle crash-hotspot corridor with inconsistently sized sidewalks, excessively wide traffic lanes, informal parking and few crossings.
- **Areas lacking in service provision.** Temporary urbanism might help to address these issues through the provision of pop-up, mobile or temporary services, such as grocery stores and health centres. It can also be used to provide cheap, short-term housing until permanent solutions are found, as in Newark, New Jersey, where temporary modular accommodation for people experiencing homelessness is provided in modified shipping containers.
- **Areas lacking adequate outdoor space, play space for children or public infrastructure.** Temporary urbanism can be used to redesign streets or reclaim empty spaces and parking lots. Vienna's Supergrätzl (Super-neighbourhood) project, implemented in a densely populated area containing several schools but very little open public space, trialled a temporary rearrangement of traffic flow using street furnishing, planters and road markings to create new, pedestrianised open spaces.
- **Lack of economic activation, high levels of property vacancy and neglect, and the need for small business incubation.** Temporary- and meanwhile-use projects can bring vibrancy back to areas experiencing economic downturn or neglect. They can provide cheap venues for new and small local businesses and increase footfall to the project site and surrounding area. The Open Doors project in several small cities in the United Kingdom, for example, activated sites on declining high streets to offer free workspace and testing premises for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), generating greater high street footfall.

Support a range of temporary use opportunities

Temporary-use and interim interventions can take a wide range of forms. They might be in place for anything from a few days to several years, and involve small features on city-owned streets to major privately owned redevelopment sites. Key factors that unite these projects are design experimentation, affordability and relatively quick implementation.

In the diverse range of temporary-use actions, there are three general categories, described below. What separates the different approaches is *who* is driving the action – be it the city government, private or public partners, residents and the local community, or a combination of stakeholders – and *what* the planning intention behind it is – it might be the first iteration of a long-term change and form part a long-term planning strategy, a one-off event or an interim use until a new commercial purpose or occupant is found. Terms can sometimes be used interchangeably in different contexts and one project can fall into several categories.

- **Tactical urbanism** (also known as DIY [do-it-yourself] urbanism, urban acupuncture or urban prototyping) refers to the use of short-term, low-cost and scalable interventions to catalyse long-term change.³ These projects are usually led by the city, residents or non-profits and typically address outdated or unsuitable street design, land-use activities or vacancy. They are easily reversible, allowing for experimentation and flexibility in the short term, and use easily available and cost-effective materials.

Tactical urbanism projects include, but are not limited to: pop-up parks, traffic-calming measures, street closures, parklets, guerrilla gardening events, pop-up bike lanes, markets and shops, wayfinding signs, kerb extensions and on-street bike parking. Projects in Chennai, Santiago and Macon, Georgia are examples of successful streetscape improvements. Milan's ongoing Open Plazas (Piazze Aperte) programme has transformed over 40 public spaces in the city centre, and a culture of tactical urbanism has spread through many Italian cities.



'Piazzale Bacone' Open Plaza, Milan – Photo credit: RdA Suisse via Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

- **Meanwhile use** describes a diverse range of pop-up or temporary uses of empty property and land, taking advantage of a vacant or underused site before it is developed for a more permanent use.⁴ Sites may be vacant while the search for a permanent development opportunity is ongoing, while site improvements take place, if planning permission gets revoked, because of bankruptcy, or in a long interim period before a new commercial contract begins. Projects can be driven by the developer, a landlord or community groups, be facilitated by the city and require the owner or manager of the site to offer it on nominal terms to a community group/non-profit or business for their use. Project timeframes can vary greatly, often from a few months to a few years.

Examples include temporary conversion of vacant property or land for free or low-cost business incubation like that run by the [Camden Collective](#) in London, cultural events or community gardens like Budapest's [Blue Community Gardens](#), 'pop-up' shops or markets such as Toronto's [Stackt retail market](#), or temporary office space and housing as in Copenhagen's [CPH student housing village](#). This [map](#) from urban regeneration network [T-factor](#) shows a range of meanwhile-use projects in European cities and lists the supporting policy and actors involved in facilitating them.

- **Transitional urbanism** is better suited to larger sites, and often happens with the  English longer-term transformation of the site as part of a city's wider planning strategy. Typically, projects are initiated by the city in collaboration with private partners, but involve a high degree of consultation with local communities and city residents. They often act as a first iteration or trial for a site's future use, in a process sometimes labelled 'strategic experimentation'. This approach to city development makes land use more flexible and adaptive to changing needs. Generally, transitional projects are implemented through public-private partnerships and result in new public space that provides commercial outlets and/or community and social infrastructure.

For example, Les Grands Voisins in Paris is a former hospital site, which from 2015 to 2020 was transformed into 600 temporary accommodation units, a welcome centre for refugees, low-cost workspaces, event spaces, commercial space and eateries. Amsterdam's numerous Living Labs focus on engaging city residents in redesigning the city. Montréal's Place des Fleurs-de-Macadam is a former gas-station site, which after community consultation involving various design iterations became the city's first flood-resilient water square.



Place des Fleurs-de-Macadam, Montréal – Photo credit: pascal.bernardon via [Flickr \(CC BY-NC-ND 2.0\)](#)

Remove barriers and encourage temporary urbanism through planning

policy, regulations and incentives



To create space and conditions for external stakeholders to manage temporary projects, municipalities may need to amend existing regulations to explicitly legalise them. They can also be proactive in providing top-down leverage to ensure that temporary urbanism becomes a part of city planning, and provide the financial support and incentives to create a culture of temporary use in the city.

Review and adapt existing zoning and land-use regulations. Rigid zoning codes often designate single uses to buildings and don't allow for adaptive use or temporary use change. Explore how form-based zoning codes, zoning overlays or temporary/floating codes could be used to allow transitional and meanwhile use projects. [The Buffalo Green Building Code](#) is an example that includes modifications to better integrate temporary uses, such as open-air markets, into the zoning code. [*How to drive urban infill development in your city*](#) explains more on flexible zoning types and [*Reshaping the city: Zoning for a more equitable, resilient and sustainable future*](#) gives many examples of cities in the United States that are reforming zoning policy.

Review and adapt street design standards to allow people-friendly tactical urbanism interventions. This might mean changing lane-width guidance and the amount of space allocated to cars, bikes and pedestrians in city streets. The Global Design Cities Initiative's [*Global Street Design Guide*](#) and (United States) National Association of City Transportation Officials' [*Urban Street Design Guide*](#) contain lots of useful information for cities looking to update highway and street design guidance.

Integrate temporary urbanism into planning processes and major projects. Temporary urbanism can help to progress a range of city priorities. Integrating it into city strategies could secure wider buy-in and budget for activities. Relevant planning areas to consider would be placemaking, urban centres, circular economy, sustainable development, transport, and regeneration. Vancouver's [*Greenest City 2020 Action Plan*](#) integrated the temporary closure of certain commercial corridors for different community activities. Tactical urbanism is the second of four phases within Bogotá's [*Barrios Vitales* programme](#), which is permanently redesigning public space in the city centre.

Incentivise temporary use in private development projects. Preferential taxation can be used to provide relief on a percentage of property taxes in exchange for engagement in temporary urbanism. The taxation can be pro-rated to the length of time the partnership lasts. Local governments could also disincentivise leaving buildings vacant with a vacancy tax, as in Riga (see box).

Riga is using tax mechanisms to encourage the meanwhile use of vacant properties

In 2016, Riga City Council legislated that up to 90% tax relief could be applied to buildings recognised as having local educational, sports, cultural and social functions. This means that if private building owners



temporarily offer their premises to public benefit organisations, they are entitled to as much tax discount annually. In addition, a 3% tax has been added to neglected properties and vacant land. This regulation has helped the organisation Free Riga to facilitate temporary agreements with private property owners who would otherwise pay significant property taxes for their empty buildings.

Offer financial incentives for businesses involved in temporary-use projects. Short-term, flexible premises are beneficial to small and start-up businesses wishing to test out ideas, but can still face high entry costs.⁵ Cities can offer financial incentives, such as:

- **Tax exemptions or tax reductions:** Pop-up shops, food carts and small businesses taking advantage of short-term leases could all benefit from a favourable business rate for all or part of a project. The London Borough of Haringey offers discounts on business rates to businesses occupying and using a space that is to become part of a new development.
- **Provide seed funding or grant support for start-ups that will occupy a temporary site.** In 2014, Ghent launched a Temporary Use Fund which has evolved into a district budget (het Wijkbudget) of €150,000–350,000 for each city neighbourhood, aimed at encouraging participation in temporary planning and project execution. Read citizenlab's beginner's guide to participatory budgeting for more on budgeting for community participation.
- **Run public competitions for the temporary redesign of space.** For tactical urbanism initiatives, these might be aimed at schools or community groups, and the winners might receive support, funding and materials to carry out the idea. For meanwhile and transitional projects, competitions could offer publicly owned space for free or with very low rent to winners. TerraViva's Tactical Urbanism NOW! is an example of a global competition for tactical urbanism interventions, while in Barcelona the temporary projects of five competition winners were hosted in the city centre as part of the 2023 MODEL festival.
- **Offer reduced rent for community-focused meanwhile uses on city-owned sites.** As part of Glasgow's High Street Strategy, the city will be inviting applicants for meanwhile space projects with the rent held at £1 per annum. Camden Collective is a charity that received grant money from the London Mayor's Regeneration Fund to provide temporary low-cost or rent-free workspace for new businesses in vacant or underutilised spaces in the London borough of Camden.



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Enable and encourage ‘bottom-up’ temporary-use projects led by community groups, small businesses and non-profits

Residents and local non-profits may be keen to improve their neighbourhoods, SMEs may benefit from access to meanwhile-use spaces, while landlords may want to offer their property for interim use. However, a lack of resources, permissions, connections or information, administrative burdens, or other barriers to entry can prevent participation in temporary-use projects. Cities can provide mechanisms and incentives to encourage temporary-use uptake by a variety of interested groups.

Streamline application processes for temporary projects:

- Explore temporary permits, and/or an expedited application process for temporary projects.**

Costly permits, and requirements for temporary projects to complete detailed and time-consuming applications and lengthy consultation periods, will make them unattractive. Licensing is often a barrier to projects that need temporary evening, late-night or alcohol licences. Review ways to inject more flexibility into permitting and licensing processes and create a separate stream for short-term permits.

Portland administers temporary permits allowing resident groups to carry out intersection repair projects, altering street design. Memphis issues special event and temporary use permits for public

space activation projects of up to six months. Singapore rents out vacant land on  English basis by issuing temporary occupation licences.

- **Reduce or remove planning fees for temporary use.** This can help to spur innovation and create a culture of temporary use in a city. Cities often have blanket planning fees, regardless of project longevity, which deter smaller businesses and non-profits from engaging in innovative short-term use. An amended planning-fee system could offer staggered discounts to reflect projects with shorter timeframes and/or a community focus or waive the fee altogether. Amendments made in 2022 to the United Kingdom's Business and Planning Act provide a cheaper way for businesses such as cafes, restaurants and bars to secure a licence to temporarily place furniture on public streets, capped at a maximum of £100.

Connect interested parties to each other, information and resources:

- **Publish information about vacant properties to help organisations identify areas with temporary and meanwhile-use potential, including city-owned properties.** This may involve working with local authorities or city departments to secure the release of data on empty commercial units and to compile a citywide database or register.

Chicago's data portal includes a map of all registered vacant and abandoned buildings in the city, while Leerstandsmelder is a platform mapping vacant spaces and buildings in a number of European cities. Using New York City's Spatial Equity NYC tool and open source data page for city planning and streetscape design, the Building Designers Partnership identified and mapped the opportunity for a range of meanwhile uses in East New York, with a focus on increasing community health and wellbeing. The city of Tampere, Finland, lists meanwhile-use opportunities for arts and culture in city-owned buildings on its website to generate private interest, as does Glasgow in its planning strategy 'a vision + plan for the golden z'.

- **Create a register of actors and organisations in the city that can facilitate temporary urbanism projects.** These could be non-profits supporting communities on tactical urbanism, or SMEs, developers and non-profits with experience in meanwhile and temporary site conversions. They might work to bring vacant assets into use by finding and unlocking vacant space, reducing liability and financial risk to individual landlords, for example, or while others might specialise in tactical urbanism (such as City Dressing). Meanwhile Space and The Meanwhile Foundation are examples of facilitators active in London, while the non-profit Free Riga acts as an intermediary between owners and potential users of vacant and underused buildings in Riga, Latvia, and offers a custodian service for temporary use. Lists should be publicly available and easily accessible and could include information on access to finance and lenders willing to develop suitable loan terms for short-term use.



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- **Consider introducing a matchmaking process to link owners of vacant property with developers specialising in meanwhile use and tenants.** Cities can facilitate connections and transactions among landowners, developers and temporary users, such as retailers, housing providers and event planners. Online platforms, workshops or speed dating-style meet-ups have all proven successful in cities, such as the matchmaking opportunities organised by Ghent and the Cluj.
- **Make city-owned equipment, services, materials and tools available.** Cities can connect communities to cheap and cost-effective materials that they already own, such as street paint, large planters or street furniture. Tactical Urbanist's Guide has created a list of the most common materials required for tactical urbanism and street design projects. Consider the tools and equipment that could be loaned or rented for different projects, and create a repository or storage space for equipment. Montréal owns a workshop and warehouse from which city boroughs can buy or rent street furniture.
- **Pilot temporary projects with city property and resources to showcase the opportunity.** To foster a culture of interim and temporary use, cities can demonstrate the opportunities and benefits. In 2009, in response to the economic downturn, Washington, DC's temporary urbanism initiative funded and implemented several temporary projects around the city. A culture of tactical urbanism has since evolved, with a resident-led 'transformation movement' helping people initiate the street change they want.

Cities should encourage and implement measurement before, during and after projects to gauge their success, make necessary adjustments and make the case for longer-term implementation where necessary. Some cities and national governments have created guidance and toolkits for data collection. Vancouver's Tactical Urbanism Toolkit is one example. Meanwhile Use London, a research report commissioned by the Greater London Authority, recommends the development of a digital tool to log and monitor metrics for evaluation to assist individual projects and create a standardised database of projects for cities to analyse. The Global Designing Cities Initiative's How to implement street transformations: A focus on pop-up and interim road safety projects and How to evaluate street transformations: A focus on pop-up and interim road safety projects provide guidance on data collection and an appendix of templates that can be used and adapted for tactical urbanism and streetscape transformation projects.

Offer guidance to facilitate application and set-up processes:

- **Provide guidance to navigate financial, regulatory and bureaucratic processes related to meanwhile and transitional use.** This could include guidance for landlords, as published by the UK government, and for developers and SMEs clarifying permissible temporary use of vacant or underutilised land.



- **Identify or employ a city champion or team to support temporary use.** The English can act as the point of contact for city districts and community groups to assist with data collection and management, site allocation and navigating the city's legal framework, among other things. The Memphis Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team (now Innovate Memphis) was launched in 2011 and has facilitated tactical urbanism as a key component of its economic development strategy. Amsterdam created a full-time position to facilitate partnerships between private companies and NGOs on transforming vacant space.⁶ Ghent's Policy Participation Unit answers directly to the Mayor's Office and assigns a neighbourhood manager to each of the city's 25 districts to encourage and support participation in temporary projects. In Riga and Bremen, guidance and support are outsourced by the city to third-party organisations.
- **Develop training materials, application guidance and communication advice on tactical urbanism.** Liability concerns can deter stakeholders from implementing temporary structures and projects in public spaces. Clear guidance on acceptable interventions and safety procedures can alleviate these concerns and provide criteria assessments and approvals. Toolkits should be easy to understand, with appendices containing any relevant application forms to get started. Burlington, VT produced a community-led demonstration project policy and guide on the permitting process, project planning and evaluation. San Francisco produced a Parklet Manual and the Government of India has published a tactical urbanism guidebook, which includes mapping and survey templates, as well as instructions on how to count data.

Develop guidance on exit strategies for temporary projects. The short-term nature of the temporary urbanism projects, particularly public meanwhile-use projects that turn into private commercial ends, can cause a negative local reaction when eventually removed. The Meanwhile use for London report recommends creating a 'good practice code of exit' to mitigate this issue. This is particularly important for projects that will not turn into a permanent community asset, to strengthen trust between landlords and occupier and to advise project leads on how to communicate on the project timeline with the public throughout.

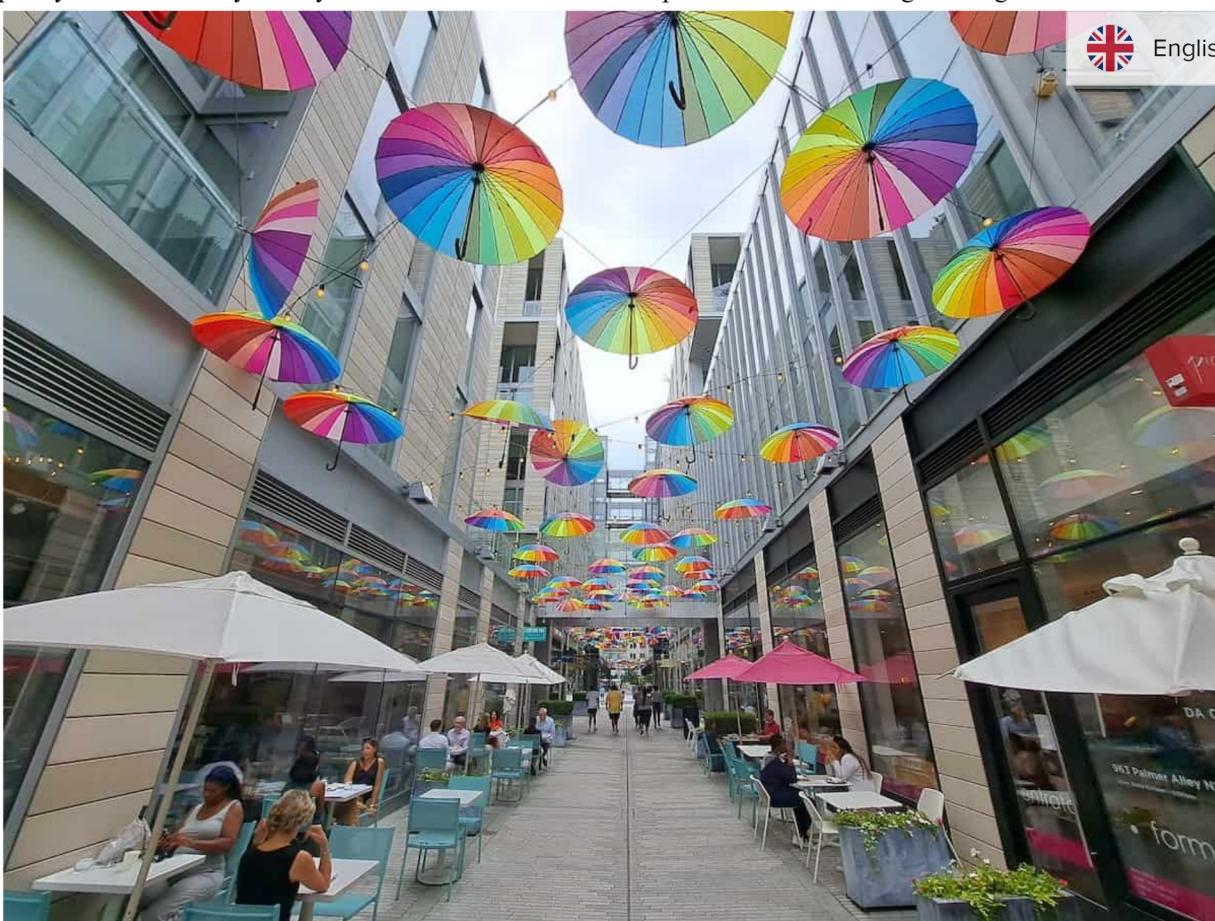


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Collaborate with internal and external partners across the city to create a culture of temporary urban planning and design

Create interdepartmental partnerships within city government for cross governmental buy-in and efficient implementation. Temporary projects will involve a range of public service providers. From street closure, diverting traffic and increasing infrastructure provision to issuing permits, many city departments and actors need to be involved. Create a forum or a committee, with members from relevant departments to secure understanding and buy in of temporary planning. Gather contributions and collaborate on ideas for temporary and interim planning strategies.

In Lima, a team including representatives from departments for social services, education, health, environmental management, sports and culture, urban mobility, economic development and security collaborate on public green-space redesign. Proposals from each department are integrated into plans to ensure each public space can offer the greatest value to the local community. In Boston, the Department of Neighborhood Development and the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics collaborate on the Housing Innovation Lab, which tests housing solutions through short-term trials, drawing on the strengths of each department.

Build strong, public-private, non-profit partnerships to facilitate temporary use. Often, non-profit and private stakeholders will have significant knowledge and expertise to facilitate effective tactical,



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meanwhile and transitional projects. Partnership agreements between the municipal government and other stakeholders can draw upon this expertise and relieve the pressure of implementation from the city. In Bremen, a committee with members from the Senate departments of Economic Affairs, Labour and Ports, Sustainability, City Development and Transportation, and Finance jointly provide a budget of €560,000 to support temporary-use projects, channelled through the ZwischenZeitZentrale (ZZZ) agency run by former architects with experience in urban planning.

Build partnerships with communities to test ideas and gather feedback. This can be done via workshops, an online portal or surveys and is crucial to building a shared sense of ownership. Ghent has developed a ‘Play a role in policy’ website, where residents can register ideas and vote on different projects. The city is also making extra effort to engage vulnerable social groups on planning by creating diverse community panels that are invited to assess temporary planning ideas.

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