

Frequently Asked Questions regarding the 2021-2022 Play Street Pilot Initiative on Cheryl Place

QUESTIONS ABOUT PLAY STREET BENEFITS, GOALS, AND PRECEDENTS

What are Play Streets?

A Play Street is a residential street temporarily opened for play by reducing and calming vehicular traffic. They offer children safe outdoor spaces in their own neighbourhoods, by closing streets to through traffic and calming any local traffic for a few hours a week. The main goal is to create a space that people of all ages and abilities can use creatively.

Why Play Streets?

Play Street initiatives are growing in popularity around the world to address declining levels of independent mobility, free play and active transportation in elementary school-aged children. By closing residential streets to through traffic, Play Streets offer a multitude of benefits for children, parents and local residents. Specifically, Play Streets:

- Foster opportunities for children to become independently mobile and use active transportation;
- Promote social cohesion among children and among residents, by creating space for children and neighbours to informally interact;
- Provide informal opportunities for children to engage in physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviours;
- Promote creative thinking and cognitive development, by creating opportunities for free play; and
- Improve road safety on the Play Street and surrounding streets by increasing driver awareness and creating more opportunities for education and conversations on road safety.

Do these initiatives only benefit children?

By offering an environment with reduced vehicle traffic, and by creating opportunities for neighbours to increase their socialisation, Play Streets also offer benefits to adult residents. Other Play Street projects have observed an increase in neighbourhood cohesion and adult physical activity levels, generating benefits for residents beyond only children in the community.

Where else is this being done in Canada?

Play Streets have been tested in Toronto and Kingston. There are also Play Streets being piloted in two Montreal neighbourhoods (launching September 2021) and a neighbourhood in Vancouver (launching Summer 2021). The initiative in Toronto, called StreetPLAY, was positively received by parents and non-parents in the community and demonstrated their potential success in other neighbourhoods. The Play Streets in Kingston were run by Kingston Gets Active, a partner in this project, in the Kingscourt neighbourhood. The Play Streets in Kingscourt were only one-day events, however, they were well received by residents and demonstrated there is interest and support for the creation of more Play Street initiatives in Kingston.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF A PLAY STREET ON CHERYL PLACE

Will this initiative create noise disturbances for residents?

Noise is expected to be generated from children playing out in the street. However, the Play Street initiative is expected to only run for about 3 hours per week (likely one evening and one weekend for roughly two hours each session).

Additionally, it is important to recognize that children deal with the noise and dangers of vehicles every day, and at unpredictable times, even though they do not drive. Living in a city and living alongside others does mean we must all tolerate a reasonable amount of noise from other people's activities. Streets are public spaces and belong to children as much as they belong to adults. As such, we feel that the benefits of opening the street to children to play for 3 hours per week outweigh the potential noise disturbances for residents. Nevertheless, the team will be evaluating this initiative throughout, and if major issues arise, they will make adjustments to the Play Street as needed.

Should I be concerned about property damage? What happens if my car is damaged?

A report from the UK found that there were very few incidents of property damage in hundreds of Play Street sessions. As well, in the UK context, there are many more cars parked on the street than you'd find in Kingston and still, there were very few incidents of damage. Residents will be informed of Play Street hours and can move their vehicles into their driveways or to a nearby street if they are anxious about damage to vehicles.

Additionally, volunteers will work closely with participating children and parents to educate them about what kinds of behaviours are appropriate and not appropriate for the Play Street. Volunteers will encourage participants to play in the centre of the street to avoid playing near vehicles and residents' property. Volunteers will also float around the Play Street to ensure that children are being respectful of private property, and in the unlikely event that it occurs, to report and manage any property damage instances that take place during a Play Street session.

How will this initiative impact children's understanding of road safety?

We feel confident that this type of initiative will not have a negative impact on children's understanding of road safety, but we can understand why parents may be concerned that this will be confusing for children. A study from the University of Bristol found that children as young as 6 are able to recognize the difference between when a street is closed to traffic and when there is normal vehicular traffic. They found that children can clearly describe the visual and auidial cues that signal the road is open to cars and not safe for play or walking in the street. They also found that these types of initiatives do not impair children's knowledge of road safety and parents were still teaching their children about road safety. Finally, the team plans to use this initiative to encourage more conversations and education on road safety.

Will the Play Street bring lots of children from elsewhere?

As the street is public space, we cannot exclude any child or adult who does not live directly on Cheryl Place from using the Play Street. Based on findings from other iterations of Play Streets, we do not anticipate a large number of children travelling across neighbourhood to use the Play Street. One of the main benefits of Play Streets are that children have the chance to play close to home and therefore the initiative will naturally attract mostly local children. Additionally, we have also been informed that children from other streets are currently coming to Cheryl Place to play with their friends who do live on the street. Therefore, this will likely continue to happen and children not living directly on Cheryl will mostly likely use the Play Street, however, this may not be much different than how the street is used now.

Why does this area need a play street when children can play at the park or in their yards?

Even in neighbourhoods where there are many places to play, the advantage of a Play Street is that children can engage in play and physical activity without having an organized 'play date' or being accompanied by an adult, which is generally at the whim of an adult's interest and availability. It has been found that 71% of adults played in the street or neighbourhood as children, compared to only 21% of children today. As you can imagine, this greatly reduces children's opportunities to engage in physical activity if their only opportunities are in structured activities and pre-planned trips to the park. As well, research on Play Streets in the UK found that outdoor free-play on Play Streets was more likely to replace sedentary and screen-based activities than organized physical activity.

Play Streets also offer important social benefits to children that they cannot get from playing in their own yard. Play Streets give children the opportunity to meet and form new friendships with other children in the neighbourhood whom they might not otherwise meet. It also provides more space for more freedom and creativity in outdoor play. As children are experiencing high rates of social isolation and increased reports of loneliness due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we think providing opportunities for children to socialize is critically important.

What about COVID-19?

We are following the direction of the region's school boards, which are planning to have students back in person in September. Of course, we will be closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation as it progresses and following all procedures set out by KFL&A and the provincial government. Based on the current pace of the vaccine rollout in Ontario, we are confident that the Play Street initiative will be able to proceed for launch in September 2021.

Additionally, we believe that there is a great need for initiatives like this as children are facing increased rates of loneliness due to lockdowns and school closures. When it is safe to do so, we believe it is critically important to encourage children to build social connections after extensive time in isolation.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LOGISTICS FOR A PLAY STREET ON CHERYL PLACE

Where and when would Cheryl be closed?

The barricades will be placed at the entrance to Cheryl Place at McCallum on Tuesday evenings from 6-7pm and Saturdays from 1-3pm. The Play Street hours were determined based on feedback from residents at the community meetings and include two hours on a Saturday afternoon and one hour on Tuesdays, after rush hour, to minimize the burden on residents commuting home from work.

Will I be able to access my home during Play Street hours?

When the Cheryl Place Play Street is in operation, local residents will still be able to come and go from their homes as they please. Barriers at the entrance to Cheryl Place will allow vehicles to enter but we ask that all vehicles drive at a walking pace once they have entered the Play Street. We will not be requiring residents to prove their address to enter the Play Street, however, we hope that signage will discourage any through traffic or vehicles using the street to turn around. We will also be warning local residents of upcoming Play Street hours well in advance so if residents would like, they can plan their trips around those hours.

Will visitors and deliveries still be able to access the homes on the Play Street?

Deliveries and visitors will be permitted to enter the street during Play Street hours. To attempt to limit traffic during Play Street hours, we will be informing local delivery companies of the hours of operation in hopes that they can schedule deliveries to avoid entering the zone. Conflicts with delivery vehicles should be minimal though, since the Play Street will likely not operate during traditional business hours when children are attending school. Visitors will not need to explain their reason for entering the street to a volunteer, but will be asked to drive at a walking pace.

Who will be in charge of closing the road and organizing the Play Street?

A local team of resident volunteers will store the barriers for the Play Street and will be responsible for placing and removing the barriers during Play Street hours. The hours of the Play Street are still being determined and may change seasonally. This is a community-led project and therefore we hope to select times that will maximize benefit and minimize burden by reducing any conflicts. If there are times in residents' weekly schedules that would conflict significantly with the Play Street, we will do our best to coordinate the hours of the Play Street to avoid these times.

Would this initiative run in the winter? What about snow clearing and waste removal?

This initiative will run from September 2021-August 2022 and therefore will run throughout the winter months. Play Street hours may change seasonally, to adjust to changes in daylight. The implementation team will coordinate with the City's Public Works department to ensure the schedules for snow clearing and waste removal do not conflict with the Play Street closure times.