



June 2016

## Useful Community Development... quick notes

7 Questions to Ask about Summer Fairs, Parades, Fireworks, and... Projects  
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## Summer Fairs, Parades, Fireworks, Projects

It's summer in the Northern Hemisphere. All over the world, this means an extra helping of outdoor festivals, parties, and rituals. Celebrations and gatherings bind us together in community--and challenge us to make these momentary experiences of togetherness stick.

But what about work days? Are these as strategic in helping us come together as the fun stuff? Which should you choose--a play day or a work day? Here are 7 questions to ask yourselves before you invest money, time, and effort in a familiar or new activity:

**1**

**What is our tradition?** We were tempted to write that parades and fireworks are too trivial for most of your neighborhoods, towns, and villages. But by all means, if these are traditional happenings that are

still popular, just continue them! Organizers may be bored, but the people will vote with their feet when the repeated fair or party is past its prime. Till then, just keep it creative with relatively few minor new touches each year. The one exception occurs when people in your community are too polite to boycott something no longer to their taste. Think about it; you will know if people are just putting up with a tired event or whether they really enjoy it.

## 2

**How can we create new interest in our neighborhood?** When you want or need to invent a new identity or diversify an old one, begin by taking a thoughtful inventory of your venues, community assets, and available volunteer base. What are your unique strengths, and how could you do something brand new with a place, celebrity contact, surplus material or produce, existing strong business, or natural beauty that sets you apart from surrounding areas? Goofy festivals abound, and while you wouldn't think that a red cabbage festival would work, many similar silly gimmicks succeed year after year. By the way, successful commercial district and neighborhood managers tell you that you need to create new interest about every month.

## 3

**Would a work project bring us more lasting value than simply a recreational event?** With imaginative marketing, you can have a quality turnout and a far greater sense of accomplishment if you finish some work together before you play. Keep the play element intact, of course, promising games, food, drink, dancing, or whatever will work afterward. If the project is conducive to live music during the work party, line it up. Appeal to competition if the work lends itself to dividing into teams. The work needs to be as visual as possible. Will participants readily be able to see the difference a morning of work has made? Avoid projects that are too overwhelming, unless you can measure and display how much has been accomplished and dramatize how the work will be completed later.

What could be done in a morning or an early evening? Depending on your crew size, maybe you could paint or stain the flower boxes, fire hydrants, playground equipment, an asphalt or concrete intersection, elderly folks' porches, someone's barn, the picnic tables...anything, as long as it is public-spirited. Many paint projects for public facilities could become annual events.

If there's no painting to be done, try planning a fall planting of flower boxes, or cut down invasive species of scrubby trees, nuisance weeds, or understory vegetation that could spread wildfires. Clean up a vacant lot. Round up all the stray cats and toss them into a special cat pen that the kids have decorated. Take down posters that have been tacked up on trees or public spaces, and create something out of papier mache from them. Find a couple of artists to help turn trash you pick up along streets or in parks into folk art. Build or expand a playground, plant trees along a creek bank to help stabilize it, build birdhouses, or build and install a new entrance marker for your town or neighborhood.

## 4

**How could this project or party enrich our inclusiveness?** Expanding the types of people who participate in your fair or project will help build new relationships and better understanding. Yes, human beings in groups establish a pecking order and then guard it closely. But we find that the people who participate in a community event also are altruistic people who can embrace the idea of difference if given a chance. Think about making sure that your event caters to as many social classes, ages, ethnicities, physical abilities, and interests as possible. Especially for a new venture, don't spread yourselves too thin by over-programming, but do challenge yourselves to think of easy ways to widen the appeal without multiplying the amount of work involved for the organizers.

## 5

**How can you multiply the impact of your celebration?** If you are able to purchase any necessary supplies and refreshments from local merchants, so much the better. If you organize the day so that children who do not attend the same schools get a chance to meet and appreciate one another, that's community-building. If event publicity calls attention to your great residential opportunities, overlooked tourist attractions, vacant storefronts, or ready supply of skilled laborers who are out of work, you may be able to accomplish several objectives.

## 6

**How can you avoid dead space?** This question challenges all event organizers. By dead space, we mean empty storefronts, vacant blocks, empty booths, whole half-hour stretches without music or other sound, or long distances between parts of the event venue. If you're doing a house tour, we don't want to walk or drive five blocks between houses routinely. If you continue your parade tradition, make sure that the more mundane entries are sandwiched between parade units that have plenty of visual and auditory pop. If you don't quite fill all of your available exhibit space, have a Plan B ready for how to activate the space.

## 7

**What moves and is unpredictable?** Babies and animals add life to almost any street festival. But why? Because they are cute, they tend to be always in motion, and we don't know what they are going to do next. You have other categories of unpredictable in your community, or can figure out how to bring in some kites, water balloons, or whirligigs. Bring in some musicians that haven't worked together before, throw in some mimes or clowns, invite and feature some rappers or chalk artists, or make a 30 foot long burrito or something that no one has ever done. This question obviously focuses on the fun portion of the summer event rather than the work day. Work days are opposite; keep the techniques familiar and the projects confined to something that most people will have some idea how to tackle.

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**Help Us Help You**

Did you know that our website contains numerous opportunities to brag about your own community's great project and to ask for help with your biggest concerns? If our editors can add value to your question, we will publish the question and our answer right on the page. To access this feature, start at the [Community Development Question](#) page.

In another section, [Community Development Ideas](#), visitors (YOU) can share your favorites and stories. We posted 19 thought-starter ideas for you during this past month.

This month we especially need help finding some items that several of you know about:

1. [Best city plan](#). What is the best city plan you have seen, why and how is it helpful, and what were its special features? Consultants, promote your own good work here and add to the dialogue.

2. [Street parties](#). Going along with this month's theme, many more of you need to share the details of your successful street festival. You can include up to four photos, and your description and pix will become a separate page on our website. Share your creativity and hard work with others, or send this link to someone else who should be sharing.

Bear with us as we make the site much more mobile-friendly. Visit us soon.

### Flowers Make a Big Impact

Adding a few planter boxes to a block can improve your look in a hurry. Checking sources for a consulting client recently, we liked three particular companies that let you browse and order commercial-scale planters online. Check out [Pots Planters and More](#), [The Park Catalog](#), and a self-watering [Earth Planter](#), as well as the larger containers at your local garden center.

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