

BETTER BLOCK

THE WHO, WHAT, WHERE, AND WHY OF A BETTER BLOCK

Overview of Better Block Foundation



WHAT IS THE BETTER BLOCK?



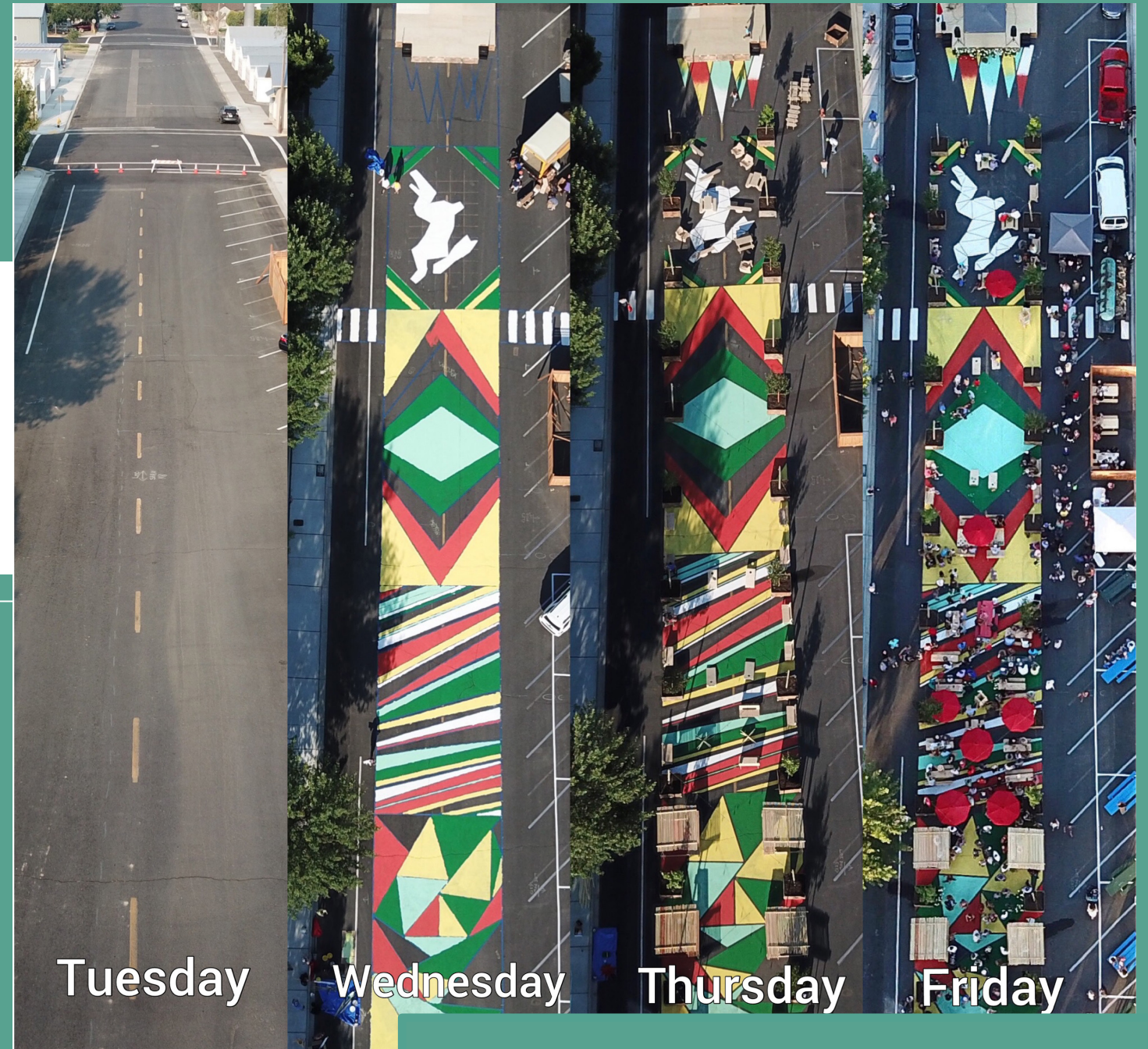
The Better Block is a 501(c)3 urban design nonprofit that educates, equips, and empowers communities and their leaders to reshape and reactivate built environments to promote the growth of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods. We work to show neighbors that they have the power and resources to affect change in their communities, and we work alongside city staff to identify hurdles and overcome them to bring this change to life.

Based out of the Oak Cliff neighborhood of Dallas, we work around the world turning empty lots into beautiful plazas; overbuilt streets into markets; and have given run-down, vacant buildings new life. We would never proclaim to know it all or have seen it all, but we have seen a lot and we've learned a lot. We are creative when it comes to roadblocks, tenacious in turning a permitting no into a yes, and adapt at finding fixes.

We also work well alongside communities. So often, when it comes to changes in neighborhoods, the people who are a part of the community feel left out. We find unique ways to bring them into the process turning strangers into neighbors and creating a sense of ownership.

We believe we can work with you to make the changes you want to see, and perhaps propose a few ideas you hadn't thought of.

Plus, our team is pretty fun to work with.



Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Your Investment Goes Further With Us

Because we're a nonprofit, your investment will continue to aid us in our pursuit of educating the public on good urban design principles and the possible transformation of communities. The old saying, "Do what you love, and you'll never work a day in your life" is very appropriate for our company. We're doing what we love.

Daily, we work to find ways to teach people how they can take control and literally reshape their communities. We work alongside neighbors to transform spaces during a 90-120 day process, but the actual demonstration happens over the course of a few days. The instant a community member gets to actually live in the space they've created is one of the most special moments of our work. They've imagined and dreamed of this better block, and then they get to be in it.

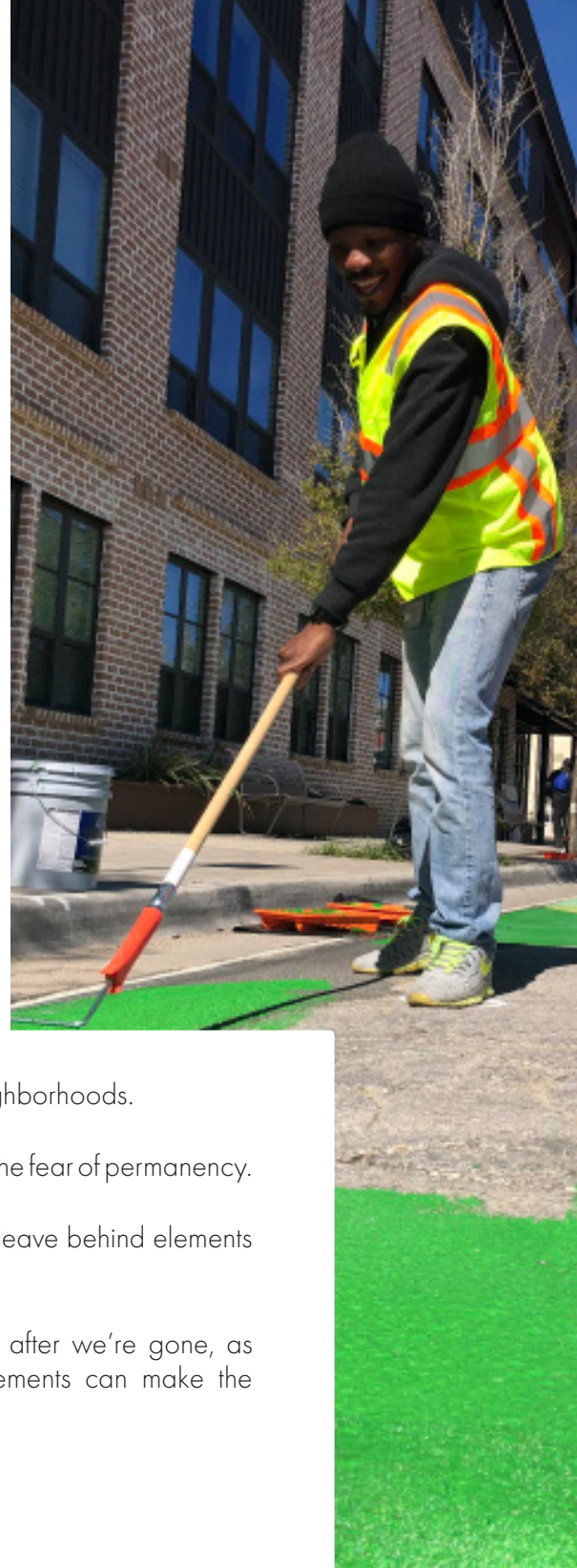
SERVICES

The Better Block Foundation has a wide range of services for all types of neighborhoods.

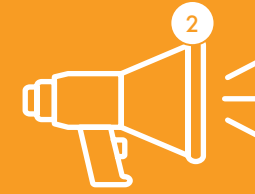
With our **temporary** projects, we work quickly and use the prototypes to erase the fear of permanency.

With our **semi-permanent** projects, we create the drastic transformation but leave behind elements that the community can continue to reuse to create ongoing projects.

With our **permanent** projects, we're creating elements that can stay long after we're gone, as well as providing programming and management advice so that the elements can make the impact the community would like to see.



SELECT



ORGANIZE



DESIGN



BUILD



EVALUATE



ESTABLISH

THE PROCESS

We work quickly at Better Block, with most of our projects happening within 90-120 days. For this reason, we depend on a local team that is organized and ready to go. Once we are officially onboard, we begin working to find the site, organize the team, design the concept, build the interventions, evaluate how it went, and work on permanency.



Elements of a
BETTER BLOCK



MARKETING



MATERIALS



VOLUNTEERS



PROGRAMMING



VENDORS
COORDINATOR



FUNDRAISING LEAD



CITY
SUPPORT



TEMPORARY

8 80 Streets

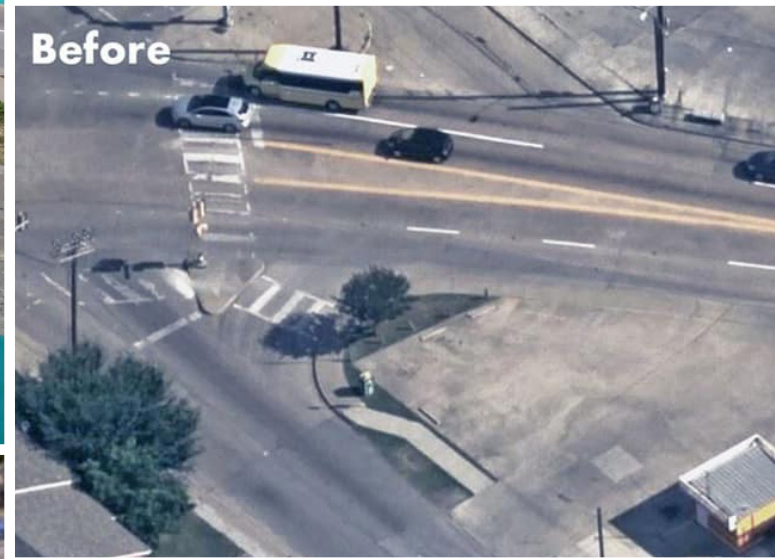
We provided the technical support to create Canada's first-ever Vision Zero pop-up. The idea behind the Vision Zero policy is very simple: reduce traffic fatalities to zero. With this project, we worked with our friends, 8 80 Cities, to transform a busy section of Danforth Avenue by implementing a road diet, extending the sidewalks, and introducing protected bike lanes.

Obtaining the permitting took several months, but the transformation happened over the course of four days. The implementation lasted for 48 hours, and then was taken down, washed away, and one year later, a version of our design was implemented permanently.

We worked with 880 Cities to create a design for the road that would slow traffic down and create a protected bike lane to connect various parts of the city. We used several Wikiblock designs to activate the sidewalk, and introduced parklets. We worked alongside neighbors to create the transformation, and worked closely with the city councilor on the concept.

The implementation elevated the conversation around Vision Zero and the importance of protecting pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages and abilities.





SEMI-PERMANENT

Safe Spaces for Kids

In the summer of 2019, multiple murders took place on a neighborhood block, which led to it being designated as one of the highest crime areas in the city of Dallas. A year earlier, the area was put under the Project Safe Neighborhood umbrella, which brought more local police surveillance, community engagement, and federal support, but crime still persisted. The lead attorney for the project began researching concepts on how to make an area feel safer outside of the traditional approaches, and came across our work at the Better Block Foundation in rapid transformation of blighted and disinvested areas around the country to promote safety, healthier public infrastructure, and robust community engagement.

After meeting and listening to area community groups, nonprofits, school staff and students, property owners, and existing businesses, we devised a concept plan made up of multiple interventions that were assembled by the community and remained in place for 12 months to study the impact.

The project has lasted well beyond 12 months. While there have been no incidents in the Plaza since it was installed, we have also seen a reduction of crime in the PSN area of 16% whereas crime in the City was up 10%.



For this project, we addressed:

- Enhancing sightlines to increase safety
- Removing bars and coverings from windows to enhance visibility, permeability, and safety
- Developing and installing a lighting plan
- Creating a community safe space in the form of a public plaza that can be passively and actively programmed
- Providing enhanced multi-modal access into the area
- Installing community art and landscaping to have the area feel taken care of
- Working with existing businesses to develop an enhanced front door

PERMANENT

Exchange House

The Exchange House works to engage the international community that exists in Akron, Ohio, and to provide a space that invites additional immigrants to share with the North Hill neighborhood, transfer skills, and bridge barriers between communities.

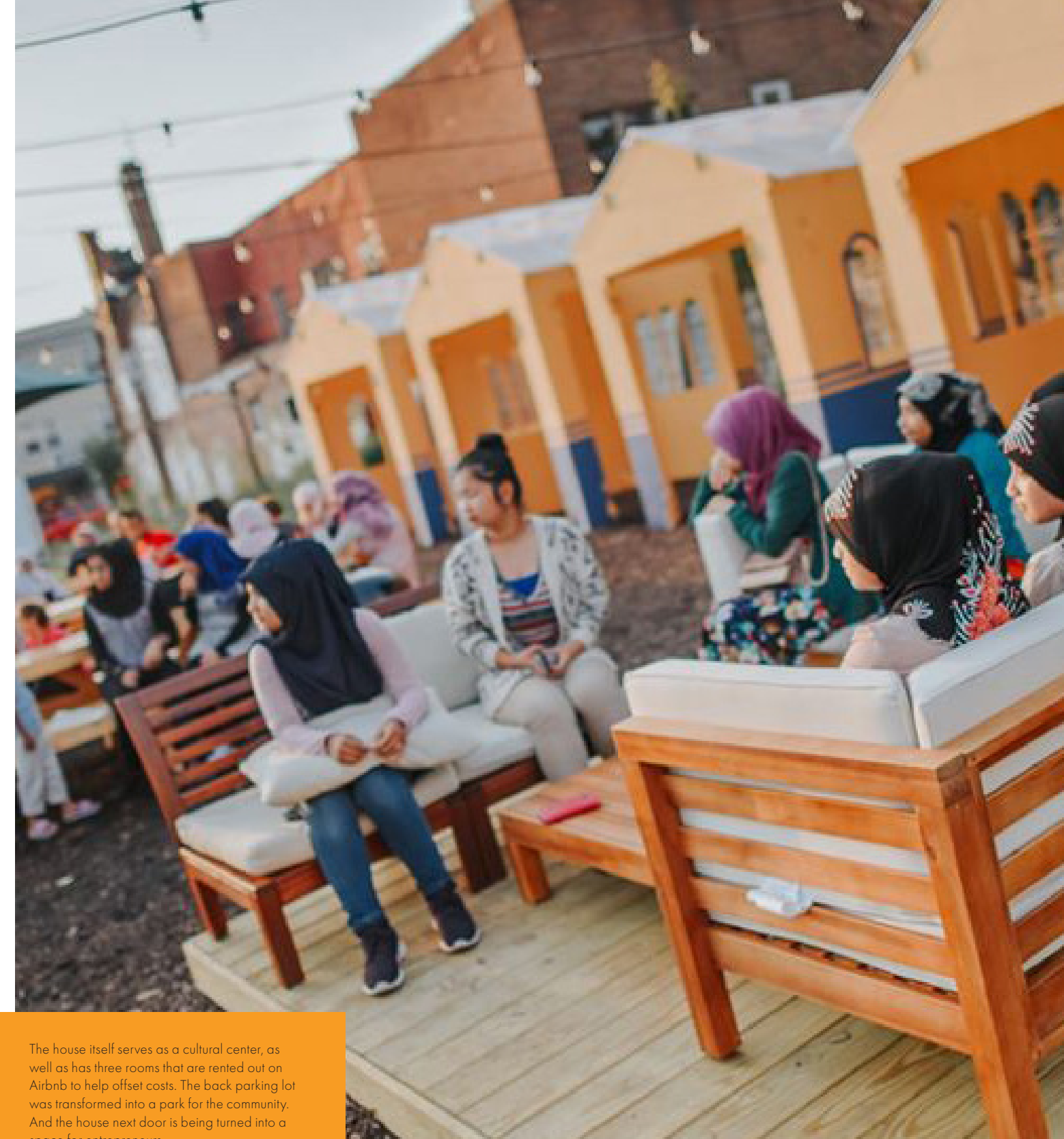
The idea for the project was conceived during a two-day Better Block, which showcased ways in which the neighborhood could be made better—from bike lanes to pop-up shops to rethinking the use of old buildings. During the project, our Founding Director got to know several of the Bhutanese refugee neighbors. He was inspired by the baby-naming ceremony he was invited to attend and the conversations that took place over tea. “What if,” he wondered, “we could take one of the empty houses in the neighborhood, and show that it can be used as an office space, a cultural exchange, and as a revenue stream?” The idea was to turn one of the floors into rooms that can be rented out via Airbnb and create a bottom floor that was open to programming—ESL classes, sewing classes, space for board meetings, and even just a space to share conversations over tea.

The Exchange House is just that. But the idea was never for the Better Block Foundation to own/manage the house forever. The idea was to get it up and running, put the process and management in place, and then hand it back over to the community. In 2019, we did just that. The house now operates under a CDC, and continues to grow, adapt, and reflect the community it serves.



\$7,163

MADE ON AIRBNB



The house itself serves as a cultural center, as well as has three rooms that are rented out on Airbnb to help offset costs. The back parking lot was transformed into a park for the community. And the house next door is being turned into a space for entrepreneurs.

A Look at the Exchange House's First Year

6

IMPROMPTU
NEPALI DANCE PARTIES

24

CLASSES
TAUGHT

268

NIGHTS BOOKED
ON AIRBNB

54

AIRBNB
GUESTS

32

COMMUNITY ORG
PARTNERSHIPS FORMED

45

HOURS OF
PERFORMANCE

150

MEETINGS
HOSTED

23

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED
BY VISITORS

DESIGN

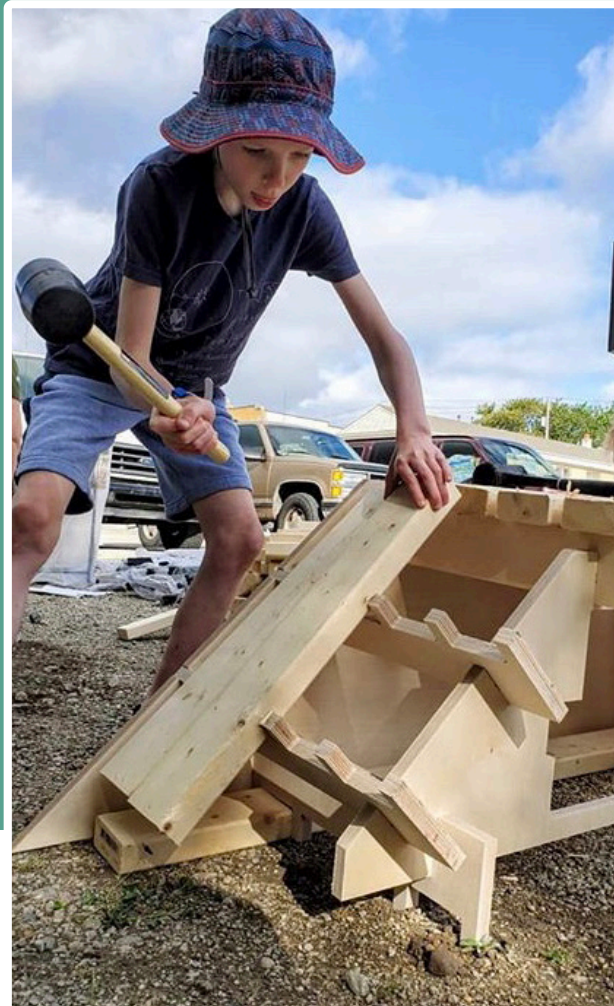
Wikiblock and Fabrication

Launched in 2016, Wikiblock is an open-source toolkit of designs for benches, chairs, planters, stages, bus stops, beer garden fences, and kiosks that can be downloaded for free and taken to a makerspace where a CNC router (a computer-aided machine) can cut them out of a sheet of plywood. Most products can then be assembled without glue or nails, and used instantly to make a block better.

Since its launch, Wikiblock has been used all over the world. It was recently the center of a design competition in Copenhagen, it has popped up in front of municipal buildings in Canada, and multiple students have made Wikiblock a focus of their work during their studies.

Wikiblock has helped us elevate our design and create elements that last longer than the typical two-day event. Many of these elements remain in the neighborhood and are used by businesses and community members.

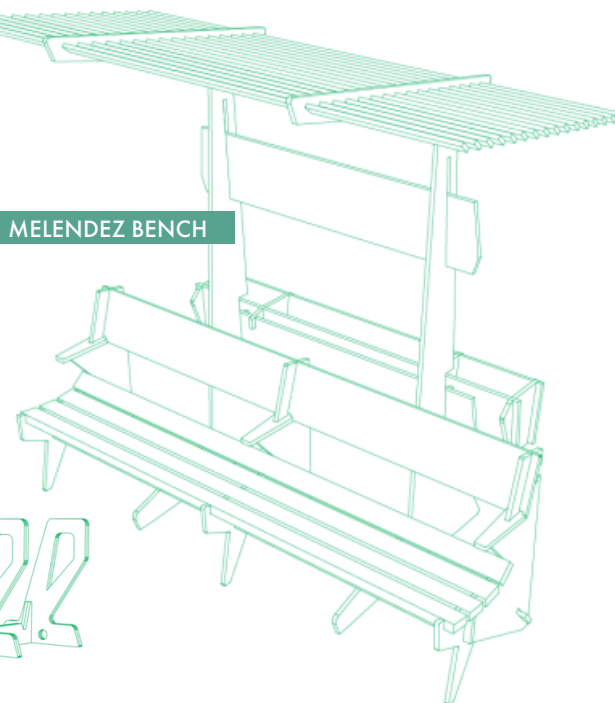
To learn more, go to betterblock.org/wikiblock.



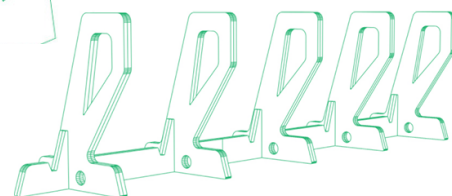
AMOS ADIRONDACK



MELENDEZ BENCH



ALLEN BIKE RACK



DESIGN

Better Block in a Box

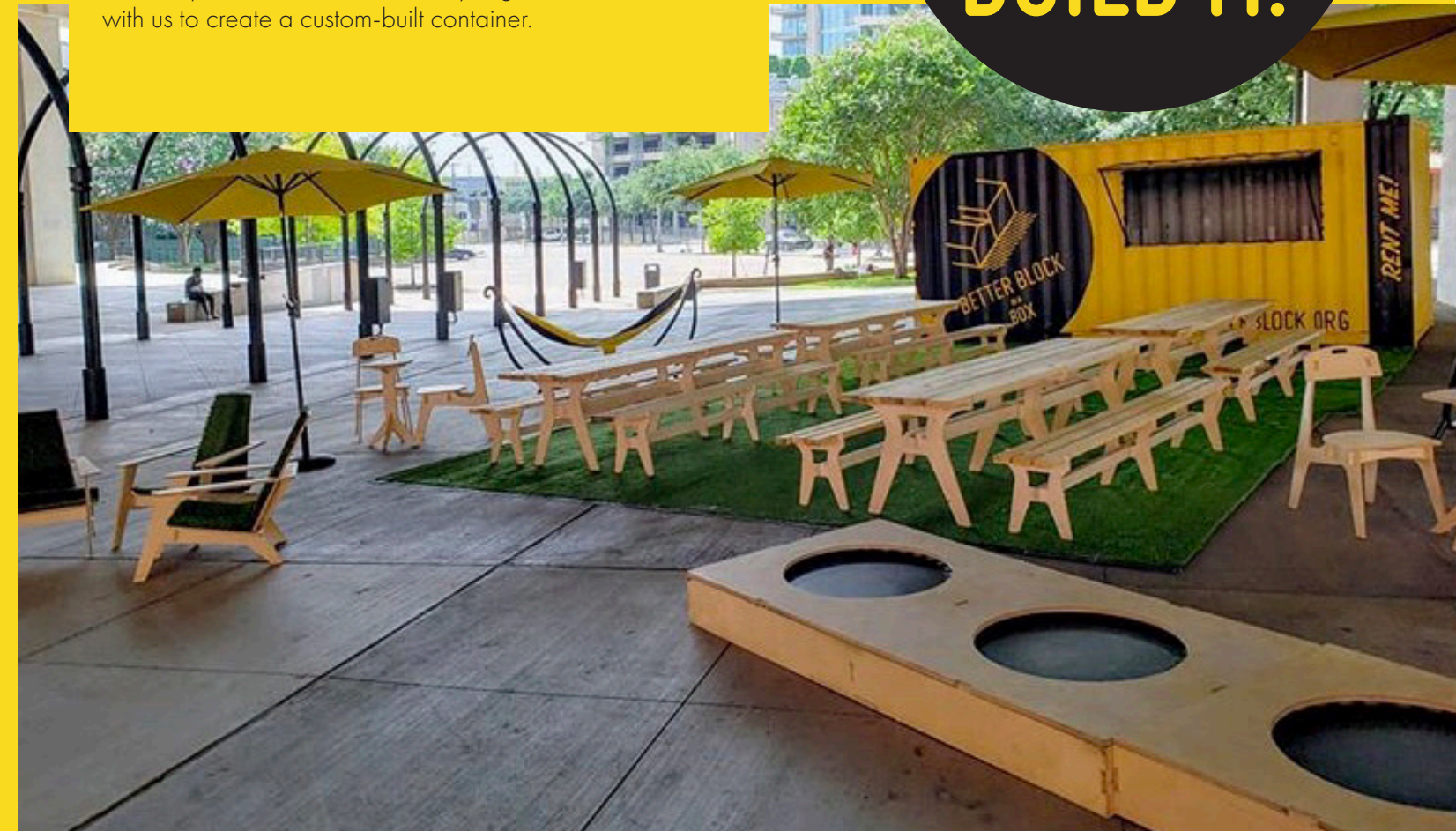
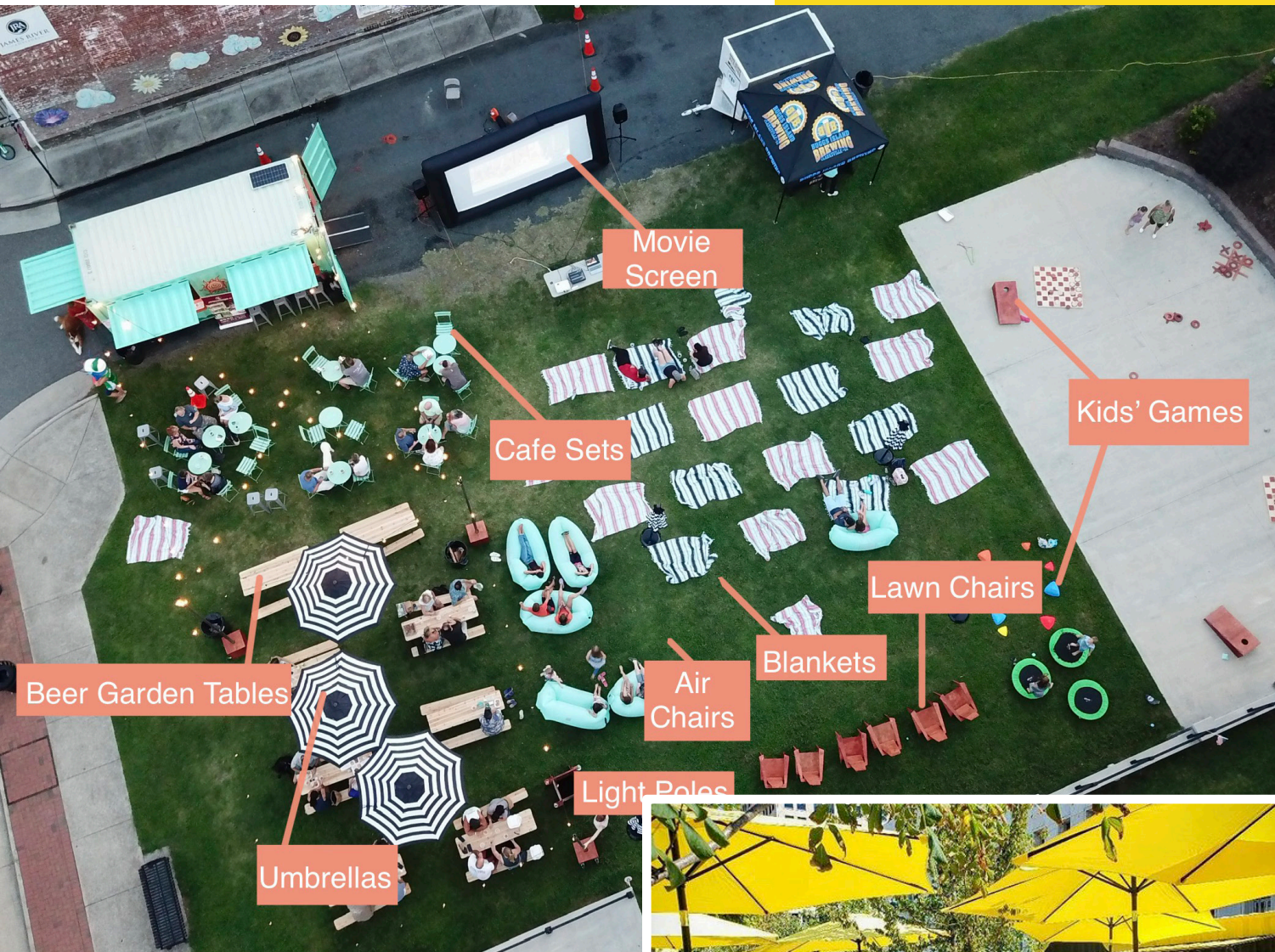
With the Better Block in a Box, you have all the elements you need for your next placemaking event.

Over the past few years, we've found there are a few elements needed to make an event successful: places for people to sit, string lights to add romance, shade for the hot days or rainy ones, and places for people of all ages to play. So we decided to package all these together, organize them into a shipping container, and create a way for them to easily be set up.

Once emptied, the shipping container becomes a bar, a checkin kiosk, or an inside gallery. The elements are built by the community in a couple hours, and then enjoyed by all. When the event is over, everything is packed back up and the container is then used as storage.

For multiple activations, community organizations can work with us to create a custom-built container.

**SHIP IT.
DROP IT.
BUILD IT.**



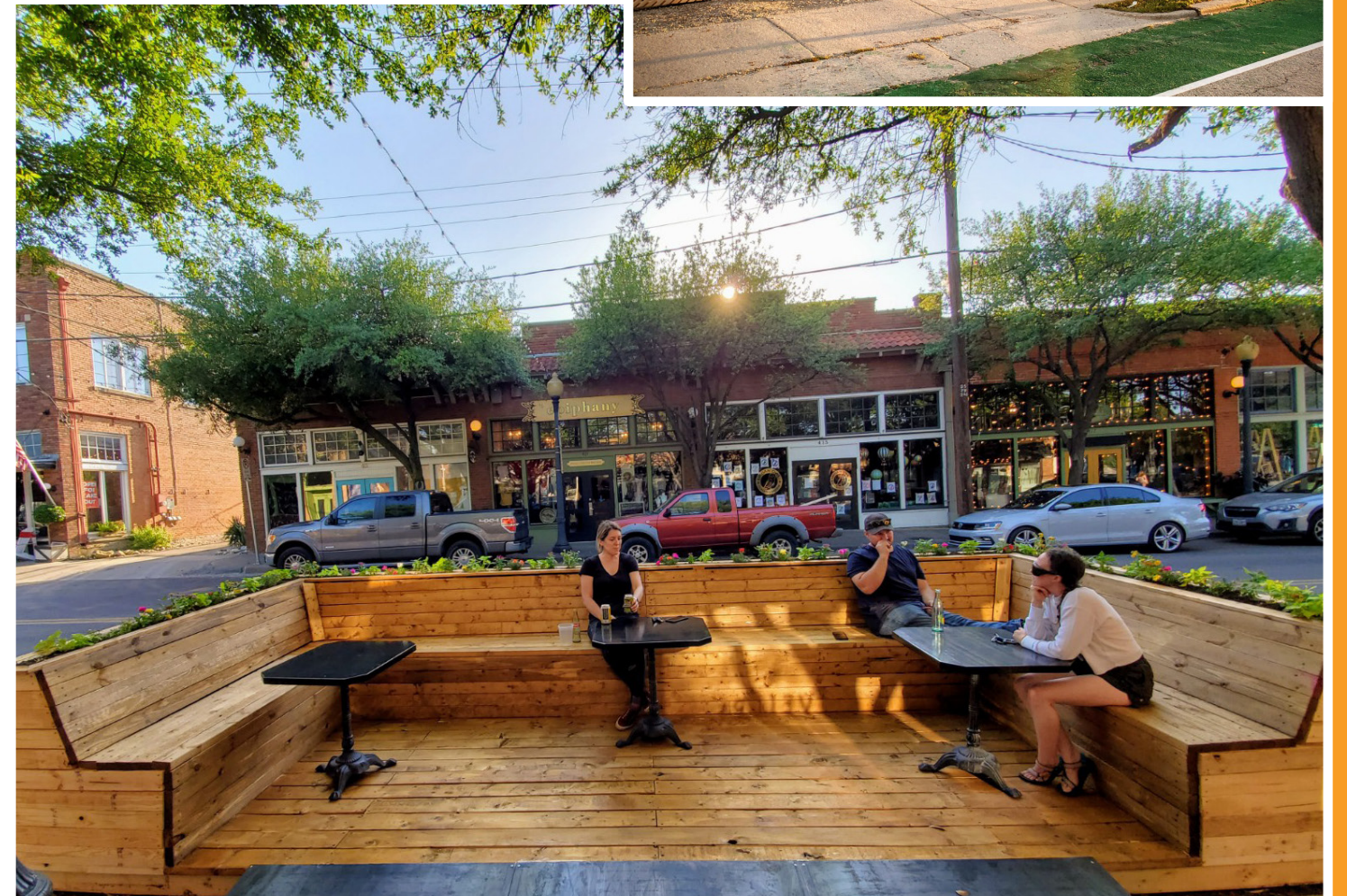


DESIGN

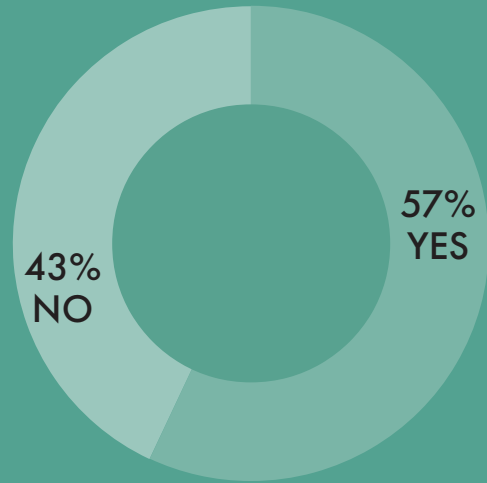
Competitions

Over the years, we have found that beautiful design can truly speed up change. We're constantly looking for ways to support all types of creative to address the streets, sidewalks, and plazas in our cities.

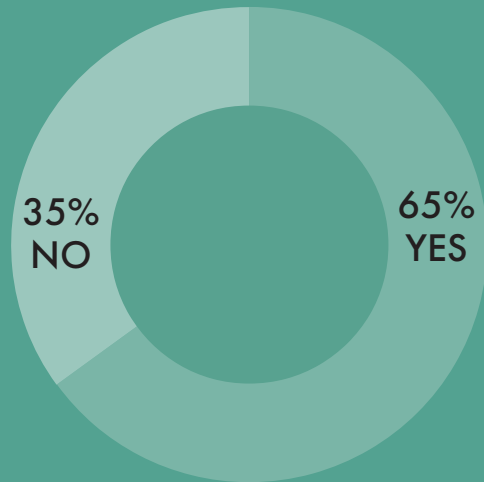
Through our design competitions, we're doing just that. We have hosted several at our headquarters in Dallas and one with Spin in Denver. We have found that the impact can be quite lasting. Our parklet competition in Denver, which was sponsored by Spin, a Ford-owned company, resulted in a winner from Kansas City, which is now exploring a parklet policy for the City.



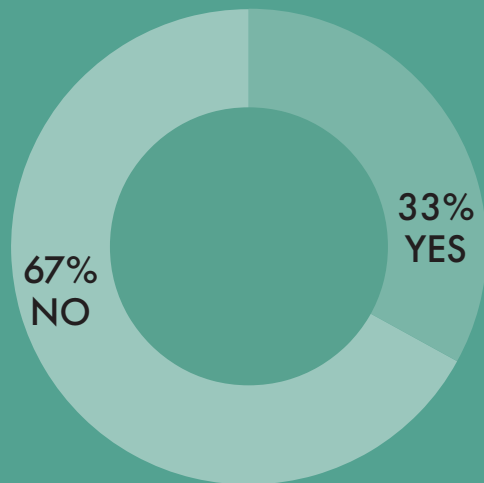
OUR IMPACT



Newly Formed Community Partnerships
Throughout the process of creating and implementing Better Blocks, many community partnerships are formed that last well beyond the activation.



Policy Changes After Project
Generally, policy changes take years. Through our projects, we demonstrate the ways in which policy needs to change; and in a lot of our projects, those changes do happen.



New Businesses After Project
We often work with local businesses and entrepreneurs to test out ideas. One of the best results of our work is seeing some of these businesses become permanent after a project.

In 2020, we asked what impact our past projects had seen on projects ranging from 2016-2020. The pie charts and quotes on the next page are based off the responses from that survey.

Beyond the hard stats, we have also seen an increase in other aspects. A report commissioned by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in 2019 found that our work resulted in:

1. Developing Leadership
We often work to identify new leadership, and give them the tools and resources to affect change. Per the report, "Creativity was an additional key ingredient. In interviews with participants, they used the words "joy" or "fun" in describing grantee events. This was particularly common among interviews with ... Better Block participants."

2. Inspiring Activity
Through this inspiration, we showcase new ways to go about dusting off some old ideas. Per the report, "The director of an organization focused on revitalizing downtown says their work with Better Block has changed their approach."

3. Influencing Local Government
While we started out a bit guerilla, we now work alongside many local governments to identify the hurdles, overcome them, and change them. Per the report, "Work by ... Better Block inspired city leaders - including city planners, designers, and engineers - to focus more on public life considerations. They are working to identify ways to better measure public life-related behavior and use that information in developing policies and designing public space infrastructure."

4. Advancing Economic Opportunity
Working closely with local entrepreneurs to test out their concepts is vital in our work. This has been effective, per the report:

In Ottumwa, Iowa: Small businesses sparked by pop-up Better Block events - a bagel store and a boutique - are looking for a permanent home downtown.

In Akron, Ohio: The creation of an incubator for small businesses, called the Northside Marketplace, was inspired by a Better Block event in Cuyahoga Falls. A local real estate developer participated in the event and decided to create a 6,000 square foot site that now hosts 40 local businesses - many of which are the same businesses that were operating on a pop-up basis at the Better Block event.

1

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

2

INSPIRING ACTIVITY

3

INFLUENCING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

4

ADVANCING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

OUR IMPACT

“COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP HAS SHIFTED AND MORE PEOPLE WANT TO SEE CHANGE IN THE AREA.”

“I think there is a perception that the current intersection situation can be changed and there is a will to change it.”

“I believe that the event has given hope to the community to a vacant space that was forgotten. The event really made a lot of noise in the community and showed the residents and the property owner that there is a lot of potential on the vacant property. I also believe that it improved the sense of community in Burtonsville due to the number of visitors who came to the event. Also, due to the success of the event, the community has expressed interest in changes to the vacant land to happen sooner than later.”

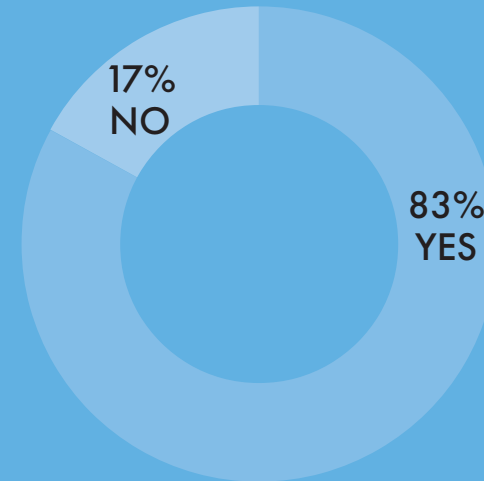
“WE HAVE TAKEN A MUCH MORE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, OUTREACH, AND EVENTS.”

“We haven’t permanently made changes yet, but it has helped give us the confidence to experiment in other neighborhoods and we have now budgeted for permanent improvements in this neighborhood.”

“WE HAVE FULLY IMPLEMENTED THE BIKE LANES ON GREENVILLE AVENUE AND HAVE EVEN FURTHER ENHANCED IT WITH ADDITIONAL VERTICAL SEPARATION, MAKING IT THE LONGEST SEPARATED BIKE LANE IN NORTH TEXAS.”

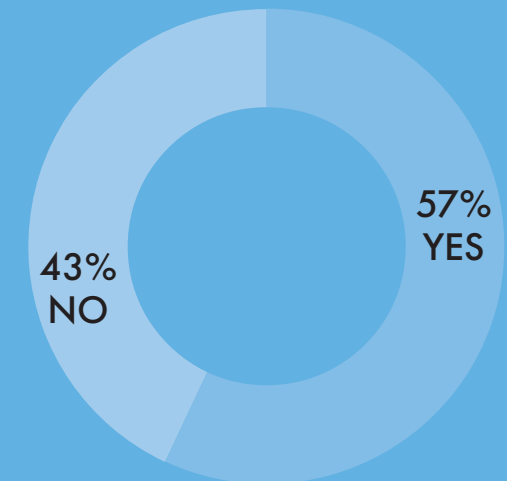
“WE HAVE SEEN \$2.6 MILLION IN BUILDING ACQUISITION SINCE OUR BETTER BLOCK BUILD.”

“8 80 STREETS HELPED CHANGE THE TONE OF THE CONVERSATION. PRIOR TO 8 80 STREETS, THE QUESTION WAS IF BIKE LANES WERE EVER GOING TO BE BUILT. NOW, IT’S A QUESTION OF WHEN WILL THEY BE BUILT.”



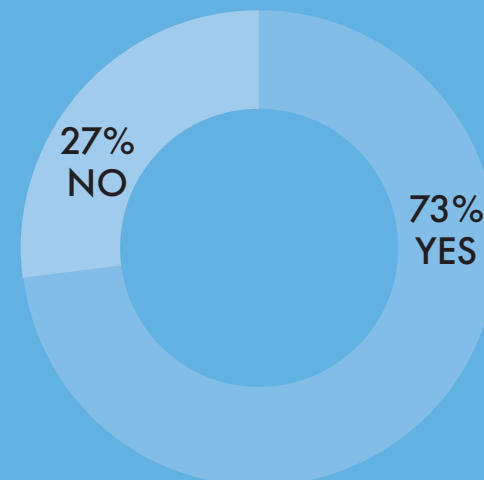
Programming Continuation

During a Better Block, programming ideas are brought to life (and many more are dreamed up). Because of this, a portion continues on, both in the spot we transformed as well as in other parts of the neighborhood.



Street Changes After Project

As we all know, street changes (including road diets and bike lanes) can take years. But we’ve seen that the process speeds up after our projects as people want to see the permanent change.



Increase in Community Engagement

Unsurprisingly, after a Better Block, there is an increase in community engagement. This begins at the kick-off and builds throughout the design and implementation of the project.

For more information, email krista@betterblock.org.



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