



Cedar Rapids Better Block

WHAT:

In April, members of the Better Block visited Cedar Rapids to explore the issues in downtown, and help the community brainstorm rapid and unique solutions.

WHO:

Jason Roberts, Founding Director, Better Block
Colin Amos, Project Manager, Better Block
Members of the Cedar Rapids Community

WHEN:

April 19 and 20, 2018

WHERE:

Czech Village, New Bohemia

Cedar Rapids

Keynote and Mini-Build Project

The evening started off with a keynote presentation by Jason Roberts to members of the Cedar Rapids community. This was followed by a mini-build project.

The inspiration for the mini-build project came from the lack of pedestrian infrastructure in the up-and-coming neighborhoods of Czech Village and New Bohemia. Although the neighborhood is experiencing significant investment and redevelopment, there are still areas where pedestrians are not prioritized and public infrastructure could be improved.

For the mini-build project, we created a pop-up midblock crossing with a pedestrian island. This helped create a safer crossing between the Geonetric office building and the NewBo City Market.



Community members painting the midblock crossing.



Community members helping align straw wattles as pedestrian islands.



Community members painting the midblock crossing.

Summary of Day Two

Meetings were held on Thursday with community members ranging from business and property owners to city planners and architects to identify the issues Cedar Rapids is facing, and brainstorm some possible interventions that could address these problems using Better Block's process of rapid prototyping and quickly moving mountains.

The major concern within the Czech Village neighborhood and the New Bohemia neighborhood is that New Bohemia is receiving a majority of the reinvestment from developers post flooding, which is furthering the disconnect between the two neighborhoods. The Main Street District should focus on interventions and programming that works to reconnect the two neighborhoods. Long-term, the District should work to incentivize development and restoration of buildings and sites along the route between the neighborhoods to encourage pedestrian activity.



Signage

What: How to improve the walk from Czech Village to New Bohemia

How: Install signage that encourages walking, such as citing the number of steps it takes or wayfinding to popular destinations, paint murals or quotes on the sidewalk throughout the route



Local Business

What: How to support local businesses on both sides of the river

How: During events, highlight local businesses in the form of pop-up shops, also create a coupon system for businesses across the river to encourage people to patronize businesses in both neighborhoods



Streetscape Activation

What: How to make the streetscape more inviting for pedestrians, improving the walking experience

How: Create murals and public art along the route, activate vacant lots with art or interactive seating and structures, improve side avenues using lights and benches, create pop-up fitness stations



Programming

What: How to activate the spaces between the heart of the two neighborhoods

How: Create outdoor markets in the empty spaces, host a bridge party, host a 5k or short race between the two neighborhoods, kite flying day on the bridge, build the mall or building frontage and facades on the bridge or in empty lots