Guerrilla’s Guide to Getting Things Done
The Guerrilla Gals had a lot of help, support, and encouragement as we explored Tactical Urbanism during the 2016 Spring semester. As the first semester of the Tactical Urbanism class at UTSOA, we had a few mentors that helped guide the development of this class from the very beginning. We would like to thank Dr. Michael Oden, the Associate Dean for Research and Operation at UTSOA, and Brian Ott, a Managing Principal at TBG Partners in Austin, for helping to develop the curriculum for the course. Thank you to our guest lecturers who shared with us their ideas, expertise, experience, and enthusiasm: Sophia Brenner, Sarah Filley, Chris Jackson, Adrian Lipscombe, Mike Lydon, Mark Tirpak, and Nicole Warns. We would also like to thank many people within the City of Austin who shared our energy and excitement about Tactical Urbanism. We enjoyed talking with and sharing our ideas with so many people who equally wanted to see Austin become a better, more involved, and more fun place to live. Lastly, we would like to show our gratitude to the businesses in the MLK & Chicon St area and the surrounding communities who graciously invited us into their community. Special thanks to McCarthy Print Inc., Blackland NA, The Chicon, The Chestnut Neighborhood, JuiceLand, The Wheel, Austin Daily Press, Bennu Coffee, and Shell Gas Station.
The Guerrilla Gals
of the first Tactical Urbanism class
of UTSOA
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Over the last few months, we have used Tactical Urbanism to help us identify and solve problems in our community. But what exactly is tactical urbanism? It is a new term that is still gaining popularity and recognition, and thus is a little nebulous to define. We have been working off of a few definitions by some of the first scholars of Tactical Urbanism who have written on the subject in the last few years. One of these definitions follows:
Tactical Urbanism is a movement that is owned by none and can involve anyone... A key motivation is to slice through the red tape of the conventional planning and building process. It’s about getting the basic elements on the ground quickly and cheaply, even if at times doing so goes outside the system. Let’s try something and see how it works. If it doesn’t, try it a different way or go back to square one.

- Mark Zimmerman, “We Own This City,” 2014
woMANIFESTO

Drawing **attention** for purpose of **educating**
Changing **perception** of space
**Challenging** the **assumed use**
For the **community**
Initiates **lasting change**
Quick, cheap & easy
Context sensitive/**deep understanding**/local knowledge
WANT MORE TACTICAL URBANISM BEFORE YOU JUMP INTO YOUR OWN PROJECT?
CHECK OUT OUR READING LIST!

Tactical Urbanism Reader

Brenner, Sophia, Tactical Urbanism: From Civil Disobedience to Civic Improvement. UTCRP Professional Report, 2013

“We own this City” by Martin Zimmerman p. 30-34 Planning: The Magazine of the American Planning Association July 2015


Chase, John. Everyday Urbanism. 1999. pg. 8–68

Hayden, “The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space,” from The Power of Place


Small Scale Creative Solutions for Better City Living Keith Moskow and Robert Linn. 2010.


GETTING OUR FEET WET
A major draw to the tactical urbanist approach as city planners, designers, and community members is the hands-on experience and quick implementation of an intervention that results in immediate positive impact. Tactical urbanism does not have to require endless meetings, working with the rules, securing funding, and other barriers that tend to block implementing change in our communities. The tactical urbanist approach asks us first and foremost to critically observe our communities for needs that are unfulfilled. Rather than just absolving ourselves of these issues and assuming someone else can fix them, the tactical urbanist approach asks us to creatively problem solve. Lastly and maybe the most important, do not just think and talk about solving the issue, the tactical urbanist approach is about implementation & follow through.
This intervention responded to an issue for cyclists. The bike trail ended in a curb, which is pretty difficult to ride over in a bike. The solution was to simply use a board and some sandbags to make this bike ramp.
While interventions can certainly involve more detailed planning, the integration of different community stakeholders, and ambitious goals requiring a longer time line for implementation, the heart of tactical urbanism is implementing creative solutions for problems solving in a quick, cheap, and creative manner. Don’t just talk about it, DO IT! From bench and bridge building to planting seeds and giving away clothes, here are examples of how we got our feet wet and started tactically implementing change in our communities.

This bus bench was made with 6 cinder blocks and 2 pieces of wood. These common objects created a cheap and simple solution for the lack of bus stop seating.
Packets of wild flower seeds were used to “flower bomb” this dangerous intersection to encourage cars to slow down and pay attention—stop and smell the flowers, so to speak.
This painted piece of plywood is an easy response to the 4-foot gap in the crosswalk. Unfortunately, the bridge disappeared shortly after it was installed. But when the bridge was taken away, so was all the litter in the area, creating an unintentional community benefit.
Spray paint chalk and the cover of darkness helped to create this temporary pedestrian crosswalk along a common walking route to campus.
The “Community Closet” was installed for one spring Saturday. We collected donations of all types of clothing and encouraged the park users to take what they needed.
BARRIERS
BRAINS & BRAWN
Our work in the spring of 2016 culminated in a big, celebratory event that would come to be called Keep Austin Crossing. On the surface, the event was a fairly straightforward two-hour creation of and celebration of a safe pedestrian environment at the intersection of Martin Luther King (MLK) and Chicon in East Austin. Behind the scenes, weeks of brainstorming, planning, adapting, and then adapting again brought us to the final event. We hope that sharing our experiences will help those who want to implement a similar event accelerate their project’s process.
When we began, we had a few big goals:

**Transform** a space to demonstrate a pedestrian-friendly possibility for the area

Create a public **forum for discussion** about the kind of Austin the community would like to see

**Educate** the public on how the land development code rewrite (CodeNEXT) could make these spaces a reality throughout the city

Draw attention to the **safety and mobility** needs in many parts of Austin

With such a broad set of goals and a big group of collaborators, we brainstormed every possible idea for the corridors, the intersections, and the surrounding property. Bike lanes, giant board games, local vending, painted crosswalks, musical stages, and a miniature build-your-own MLK set from cardboard were all imagined. We prepared lists of rough budgets, labor, and planning time lines and pitched these ideas to each other, trying to whittle the list down to things we thought would really make an impact. Our allies from the community, the City of Austin, and private businesses generously donated their time to act as a sounding board for our list as well.

At this phase, no idea was impossible; it was just a matter of what it might take to accomplish each. Following these brainstorming and pitching sessions, we chose a set of interventions and performances that we could reasonably pursue in the following weeks.
Now knowing what we were setting out to accomplish, we divided into teams to tackle each topic. One team worked on getting permission to paint the crosswalks, one coordinated the celebration of safe crossings, another looked at the details to make the event memorable, and a few people also began our early community outreach. We assembled an initial list of stakeholders consisting of neighborhood associations, community development corporations, local businesses, and the city council office for the district in which our event was taking place. Having focused teams gave us the creativity and flexibility of a small group but allowed us to keep our eyes on the prize.

The Guerrilla Gals began reaching out to partners in the community, finding opportunities to collaborate. We ran into a lot of dead ends, but we learned quickly that it never hurts to ask. A bar at the intersection of the event wasn’t going to be open for business until our event started, and we got permission to use their patio as a staging area during the morning of the event. When we tried to reach out to the owners of a vacant lot that would be an ideal headquarters during Keep Austin Crossing, the neighboring business offered to mow the grass in advance of the event.
PRO TIP FROM
THE GUERRILLA GALS:
ASK.
ask early & ask often.
Each group hit some road bumps, and being able to adapt quickly was essential to our event’s success. It’s hard to let go of an idea that has already been scoped, budgeted, and chased after, but many of our re-designs ended up being cheaper or more elegant than the initial proposal. We were really invested in the idea of a creative crosswalk with a design painted across the street. Our allies warned us about the complexity of this request, and we asked the Austin Transportation Department for direction to pursue it. We received a draft, hot-off-the-press set of guidelines for creative crosswalks. It seemed like great timing, as the city was already trying to make these projects easier.

However, we didn’t realize how many other steps existed beyond the design approval. To work in the right-of-way, you need an individual who is licensed and bonded by the City to do the work. This person should be kept safe, so an engineer must be hired to create a traffic control plan. Once the City approves this plan, you’ll need to hire a barricade company that is certified by the City to block off the road during installation. Finally, you’ll need a permit to change the right-of-way temporarily. By time we realized all of these steps, the event was upon us, and the many permits and contractors had not been considered in the budget. At the eleventh hour, we almost received funding, but time was running out.

We put our tactical urbanist thinking caps on. Tactical urbanism should be quick, cheap, community driven, and not too difficult to plan. The Guerrilla Gals had to find a way to get back to these basic principles for our crossings. We realized that we could chalk the corners on the sidewalks, or we could affix chalk to sticks and drag them as we crossed during legal crossing intervals, leaving the paths of all who passed through that day. We decided to take the celebration off of the corners and into the streets by providing pedestrians with a personal crossing escort in the form of a partner with balloons, bubbles, or a megaphone. It was still a creative crosswalk, but more of a performance than an installation.
Disclaimer: Even after months of trying to decode the process, we do not guarantee that this is even the right way to do it.
The final days leading up to Keep Austin Crossing found the Guerrilla Gals gathering materials, making plans for the big day, and doing a big outreach push. We began outreach early by leaving flyers in local businesses, abandoned phone booths, and bus stops. Our outreach leaders had also been in touch with the local media to ask for reporters for the event. The final days, however, were the big push for the attendees. Using press releases, Facebook, Instagram, and every listserv we had access too, we got the word out to a wide audience of community members and advocates. We also invited groups that we thought might help us draw attention to the crossing, such as a roller derby team and a skateboard club.

There are a few things we wish we had considered more during these last days leading up to the event. As the focus of the event narrowed and changed, we should have reevaluated who our stakeholders were. The groups we originally considered were certainly still relevant, but other local advocates for pedestrian safety could have been more involved in the planning and execution of the event if we had realized the nexus sooner. We also used these days to make a plan for responsibilities during the event (who would cross, who would answer questions at our headquarters, etc). However, we did not anticipate how interested people would be in stopping and speaking with us about the event. Better planning would have included volunteers for the event who could keep the crossing celebration going if all of the organizers got caught up in conversation.
LEARNING FROM DOING
The Keep Austin Crossing Event was held at the intersection of MLK and Chicon Street. We chose this intersection because it was a busy intersection and has had a history of problematic pedestrian safety. In addition, as the East side of Austin has been faced with much neglect since the founding of the city, we wished to improve the environment for pedestrians of that area. The intersection was home to many local businesses that we hoped to bring more foot traffic into their businesses. In addition, an empty lot at the corner could be utilized as the event gathering space. As a class, we aimed to have the celebration take place on a weekend in hopes of having more residents attend and capitalize on the weekend sales of local businesses. In addition, we chose a time that would be the most active and a length of time that would not be too exhausting. Therefore we chose Saturday March 28th from 2-4pm to be our event time and date.
The Guerrilla Gals gathers supplies for the event from different places to be used for each part of the event.

10 AM

The Guerrilla Gals collected materials and gathered at The Wheel. The Wheel is a local bar on site that does not open until 2 pm on Saturdays. They allowed us to use their outside patio space to prepare before the event. We had been in communication with the managers before the event, especially since we had been visiting The Wheel for our class meetings for a few weeks. Once at The Wheel, we divided up the work that needed to be done as prep. Some worked on folding the information flyers into origami cranes. Others blew up the balloons with helium tanks and tied on the strings. Another group painted and installed benches at the corner lot. Others painted the Guerrilla Gals’ logo on a large sheet to be used as a banner for the event. Some members also sent out emails about the event and posted on the #KeepAustinCrossing social media sites.
The group moved all the items over to the empty lot corner along MLK and Chicon. We set up tables, laid the banner on the bus stop bench, and started drawing on the sidewalks with chalk. Some of us wrote the bus schedule on the sidewalk in front of the bus stops. Chalk was left at the intersection corners so that others could use them and draw their own designs. Others placed the picket sign of “#KeepAustinCrossing” in the grass along Chicon Street.

1:30 PM

Visitors began to show up at the table. Some group members began to cross the intersection with balloons and bubbles. We crossed the intersection when pedestrian wished to crossed and we handed out balloons to the pedestrians. The television filming crew arrived and began filming at different corners of the intersection. The process was a little awkward at first but once we jumped in to it, we started havng a lot of fun with it!

2 PM
2-3 PM

Some group members split up and went into different intersections with different roles. Some held balloons, others continued to draw on the sidewalks, and others blew bubbles. The guerilla gals crossed the intersection with balloons and bubbles when pedestrians needed to cross. As we crossed some pedestrians asked what we were doing and we explained that we were trying to make the intersection more pedestrian friendly. Some members thanked cars that stopped behind the crosswalk lines. Other members conversed with Austin activists and visitors that wanted to learn more about the event.
3-3:30 PM

A local band began to play and was utilized to incentivize a critical mass crossing. Students and visitors crossed the intersection while singing, blowing bubbles, and waving balloons and signs. Others took videos and pictures of the mass crossing.
3:30 PM
The band finished playing and some members took a much needed break. We con-
versed with new visitors and lastly took a group picture with the banner.

4 PM
We thanked the visitors who came. The group disassembled the event props and
cleaned up the site. Later that day the group members that designed and installed the
benches relocated them in new areas of Austin. One was placed on MLK and the other
in the Eastside of Austin.
Now that we have shared with you the basics of tactical urbanism, our understanding of this exciting phenomenon, and our experiences as the inaugural Tactical Urbanism class, we aim to leave you well prepared to pick up our momentum and carry on with confidence and passion. Based on our own semester of trial and error and the lessons we’ve learned in the process, we pass on to you a set of recommendations concerning four of the basic factors of success in tactical urbanism: following through, finding your inspiration, getting the creative juices flowing, and fostering champions of the cause.
Following Through

It will be difficult to get almost anything accomplished without following through! The tactical urbanism process is almost never straightforward -- there will be twists and turns, and your plans will probably change at least a few times before they come to fruition. However, the most important thing is to follow through by accomplishing the goals that you set for yourself, one way or another. In our case, we were not able to implement a creative crosswalk for our Keep Austin Crossing event due to the nature of the process at the City. However, we still accomplished our primary goals of celebrating pedestrians and bringing light to street safety by incorporating bright colors, music, and a festive atmosphere at the event. And, even though we weren’t able to make a creative crosswalk, we decided to encourage participants to show us their ideas for creative crosswalks by letting people draw them on paper. So, the moral of the story is to pick an idea or goal and stick with it, but also to be flexible and have backup plans. If you say you will do something, take every step you can to accomplish it. In the end, if it still becomes impossible, find a solution that will get the same point across. After all, tactical urbanism is all about problem solving, even if it’s on-the-fly.
Finding Your Inspiration

When it comes to tactical urbanism, inspiration is one of the most important motivators in determining, planning, and implementing projects. There are several different ways that you can find your inspiration, including: researching past and existing projects from Austin or other cities across the country or even abroad, talking to members of the community to get an understanding of the problems and potential they see in their own backyards, and keeping your eyes peeled for issues you encounter in your everyday life. Finding other examples of tactical urbanism can be a great method for understanding what works and what doesn’t work based on the experiences of others. Connecting with the community to identify and tackle specific issues will help you gain community support from the get-go, which can be crucial to your project’s success. Finally, keeping your eyes peeled for issues that you encounter in your own life is a quick and efficient way to find inspiration for a tactical urbanism project - many of you may already know of spaces with this potential!
Getting the Creative Juices Flowing

So how do you get the creative juices flowing? Use the inspirations you’ve found to consider what types of solutions might work, and consider how certain solutions might be applicable to your identified project. Again, doing some research can provide a great starting point for coming up with creative ideas. Conduct brainstorming sessions as a group -- the more heads you put together, the more creative ideas will be generated. In this vein, keep in mind that no idea is a bad one, and each thought can help lead you to your final plan. One important method is to test your ideas ahead of time -- this will allow you to understand whether something works or doesn’t work, and will encourage creative fixes to any problems that you encounter. Sometimes the best creative solutions are the simplest, so try not to get too bogged down in complex efforts, because it is especially important to recognize as early as possible when an idea is just not feasible. Finally, talking to experts can be one of the most helpful ways to get the creative juices flowing. In several of our classes we had guest speakers who were experts in tactical urbanism, and we used their knowledge and past experiences to hash out some of our best plans.
Finding Champions of the Cause

No matter what type of project you plan, if it’s a large enough undertaking, you will need to collaborate with various stakeholders and people in positions of influence who can greatly add or detract from your success. This may include community members, press contacts, City of Austin employees, local business people, private interest representatives (e.g. pedestrian rights advocacy groups), various administrative staff at UT, and even individual citizens with an interest in and passion for urban affairs, civic activism and engagement, and the public good. People from these various groups have the potential to become champions of your cause, and in this capacity they have the ability to provide you with technical and administrative support, access to resources or funding, manpower, and publicity. Depending on what you plan to do in a space, you may want (or need) the approval and support of the community or of local businesses -- ahead of our Keep Austin Crossing event, we received general support from a community leader and we also got approval from a print shop to occupy a piece of land owned by the same person. Working with the UTSOA chief communications officer will help ensure that you properly represent your group’s relationship to UT and can also bring important press and event listing opportunities. Reaching out to various publications for press contacts will be an important strategy to give your project much needed coverage and publicity. We initially had trouble catching the interest of larger publications like The Chronicle and the Austin American-Statesman. So, we did our best to spread the word across social media and to create an online presence, and through our efforts we received press coverage from two UT journalism students. Having champions from the City can have a similar effect. We did not have success with gaining help from the City through the permitting and legal process for our event, but one of our main contacts with the City did greatly help in spreading the word by promoting our group and our event on social media.
In the end, no matter what issues you decide to tackle, remember that tactical urbanism provides an incredible opportunity to affect positive changes to the urban environment through passion, creativity, and resourcefulness. We hope that you can take the lessons we’ve learned and apply them to your own efforts as you work to improve Austin through tactical urbanism while also improving tactical urbanism through your experiences.