

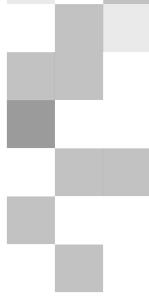
Making it possible for children to play in residential streets and back alleys in complete safety

A tool to achieve it.

Family lifestyle is influenced in large part by the environment. Town planning, policies and bylaws can influence how children and adults engage in physical activity. Though municipalities hold no formal authority in the area of health, their decisions can have a significant impact on the lifestyle of their citizens.

Authorizing play on certain public roads

Municipalities play a leading role in developing leisure, physical activity and sports on their territory. According to Canadian guidelines, children and adolescents should be active at least 60 minutes per day¹. However, many youths are sedentary both in their leisure time and when getting around. In recent years, the physical condition of young people has deteriorated to the point that a growing number of them present risk factors for cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. Today, one in four children in Quebec are overweight².



Outdoor free play can be beneficial for the overall health and development of children. Unfortunately, it is practised less and less in the industrialized world. Yet, outdoor free play is much more than just spontaneous activity for having fun or passing the time:

- **Children who play outdoors are more active and are at lower risk of becoming overweight or obese^{3,4};**
- **Outdoor play develops decision making, risk assessment, problem solving, social interaction, creativity, and more.⁵**

Though parks and backyards are the ideal places for free play, not all young people have easy access to these spaces. Residential streets and back alleys remain an interesting option for such activity on account of their vicinity and the absence of travel time. In this regard, nearly 2/3 of citizens feel that children and citizens should have the right to play in streets and back alleys⁶.

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Rethinking the occupation of public roads

More and more people are speaking out in favour of taking back the public roads long dominated by the automobile. A process of reflection on the matter is essential, as is the implementation of measures to this end, in order to allow citizens to take full advantage of life in their neighbourhoods. People want cities that are suitable for building a family and raising children and offer environments that promote health. In this regard, taking action to facilitate play sends a positive message to families that they are welcome on the urban landscape.

When it comes to authorizing play on public roads, safety is a key concern: children must be able to play in an environment where the sources of risk are greatly reduced. It has been demonstrated that children tend to be more active in streets with little or no automobile traffic^{7,8,9}. To diminish this risk, it is essential to calm traffic by regulatory and physical means so as to force drivers to slow down and/or change routes. Nearly 90% of citizens are of the opinion that streets and back alleys must be made safe by reducing the speed at which automobiles circulate and limiting traffic¹⁰. In addition, such measures would contribute to lower the risk for accidents with pedestrians and cyclists¹¹ as they would encourage active transportation¹².





Various municipal bylaws discourage or prohibit play in public streets. At a time when solutions are being sought to get young Quebecers to be more active, **here are the three main types of municipal bylaws** that can prevent children and their families from playing in residential streets and back alleys:

- 1. Bylaws prohibiting noise considered a nuisance. An examination of municipal bylaws brings to light the principal concerns: tranquility, public order, peace and quiet. These are the top priorities, including in parks, where yelling, screaming or shouting can sometimes be banned.**
- 2. Prohibition on hindering or obstructing traffic.**
- 3. Explicit ban on playing or practising sports on public roads. Little known to the public, this type of bylaw exists in numerous municipalities.**

A model resolution has been created for municipalities interested in reconsidering their bylaws in order to allow families to play more freely in public spaces. It comes with a legal notice to help support the process (see Appendix). Each municipalities can use the model as is or adapt it to their own reality and specific needs. ■

Endnotes

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3. Burdette, Hillary et al. (2006). "Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children: Looking Beyond Fitness and Fatness to Attention, Affiliation and Affect". *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, vol. 159, 46-50.
4. Demers, M. and L. Lapierre (March 2012). Québec en forme. "**Le jeu libre à l'extérieur comme élément indispensable au développement des jeunes**". Retrieved online April 30, 2015.
5. Ginsburg, K. R. et al. (January 2007). "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds". *PEDIATRICS*, vol. 119, no. 1, 182-190.
6. Ipsos online omnibus survey carried out on behalf of Coalition québécoise sur la problématique du poids on a sample of 1000 French- and English-speaking respondents 18 years of age or over (April 27-30, 2015).
7. Alexander, S. A., K. L. Frohlich and C. Frusco (2012). "Playing for health? Revisiting promotion to examine the emerging public health position on children's play". *Health Promotion International*, vol. 29, no. 1, 155-164.
8. Hochschild Jr, T. R. (2012). "Cul-de-sac kids". *Childhood*, vol. 20, no. 2, 229-243.
9. Holt, N. L. (2008). "Neighborhood and developmental differences in children's perceptions of opportunities for play and physical activity". *Health & Place*, vol. 14, 11.
10. Ipsos online omnibus survey carried out by Ipsos on behalf of Coalition québécoise sur la problématique du poids on a sample of 1000 French- and English-speaking respondents 18 years of age or over (April 27-30, 2015).
11. Committee on Environment Health (June 2009). "The Built Environment: Designing Communities to Promote Physical Activity in Children". *PEDIATRICS*, vol. 123, no. 6, 1591-1598.
12. Villanueva, K. et al. (2012). "Where Do Children Travel to and What Local Opportunities Are Available? The Relationship Between Neighborhood Destinations and Children's Independent Mobility". *Environment & Behavior*, vol. 45, no. 6, 479-705.

MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR CHILDREN TO PLAY IN RESIDENTIAL STREETS AND BACK ALLEYS IN COMPLETE SAFETY

WHEREAS (name municipality) is actively engaged in promoting the health and wellness of its citizens through its municipal policies, urban planning, and service offer;

WHEREAS young people are less and less active and only 13% of boys and 6% of girls 5 to 17 years old meet the guidelines for 60 minutes of physical activity on a daily basis¹;

WHEREAS promoting physical activity on its territory allows offering families a good-quality living environment from both a social and health perspective;

WHEREAS the regular practice of physical activity strengthens social unity and the sense of belonging to a community;

WHEREAS the practice of free play should be encouraged and facilitated from a child development and health perspective;

WHEREAS some public streets in residential neighbourhoods can be occupied in different ways;

WHEREAS reducing the risks associated with automobile traffic encourages the practice of physical activity among young people, aside from improving the quality of life of the community as a whole;

WHEREAS the city/municipality holds the wellness of families high among its priorities;

It is moved by _____, seconded by _____ and unanimously resolved (or resolved by majority vote) that:

The city/municipality of (name of municipality) shall undertake both to revise its bylaws* in the aim of allowing young people to play freely in residential streets and back alleys, and to implement traffic-calming measures for the safety of all road users.

* A legal notice is available as an appendix to help with bylaw revision.

Taking it a step further:

Install road signs or publish a cartography indicating the streets where citizens can play freely.

1. Statistique Canada (2015). *Activité physique directement mesurée chez les enfants et les jeunes, 2012 et 2013*. Retrieved online June 28, 2015.