

Painting streets and sidewalks



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



How to reach us

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NEIGHBOURHOODS WEBSITE

Check out the [neighbourhoods website](#) to find more how-to guides, find your neighbourhood and subscribe to the e-newsletter.

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible format upon request. Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before it is required.

GUIDE VERSION

This guide was last updated November 2025.

About this guide

Street or sidewalk paintings draw attention to a path of travel with colour, design, and creativity. The main objectives of street and sidewalk painting can vary but often include:

- Traffic calming
- Neighbourhood beautification
- Resident relationship building
- Placemaking
- Creating a sense of belonging

This guide will help residents explore the idea of a street or sidewalk painting project in their neighbourhood and understand the steps involved.



The steps throughout this toolkit provide a general guideline based on steps community members, city staff, and artists will take for each project. Each location will have its own variations based on the project idea, location, and applicable guidelines.

Step 1: Gain community support

Share your idea of a street or sidewalk painting project to get others interested in being involved. To move forward with the project, organizers will need to demonstrate support from the surrounding area in some way. Consider connecting with:

- Neighbourhood associations
- Neighbours
- Schools
- Local businesses
- Other community organizations such as recreation groups, arts collectives, or service clubs

It is particularly important to involve neighbours who are directly adjacent to the painting area to receive their feedback. Consider hosting a community meeting or community vote to provide feedback on design ideas.

When you connect with individuals about the project, be sure to ask if they are willing to volunteer for any project tasks. Make sure to give those interested a chance to involve themselves during all stages of the project. Residents can:

- Help brainstorm ideas

- Connect with neighbours about project ideas and updates
- Assist with grant writing and obtaining funding
- Contribute to planning stages
- Connect with neighbours to share important neighbourhood stories and features to be illustrated or told in the installations
- Volunteer and participate in the project painting day celebration
- Help organize a community meeting or vote on design ideas

It's also useful to ask if you can take down their contact information to be in touch about project updates.

Step 2: Organize project details



Each project is unique. It's a good idea to contact neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca to talk about your specific neighbourhood, idea, location, and design early on.

LOCATION

Staff will help you to understand some of the benefits and considerations for possible locations. The area chosen will influence the type of design, traffic calming features, and longevity of the project. The following are helpful to consider when proposing a location:

- Condition of the asphalt or concrete surface
- Current street crosswalk locations
- Width and characteristics of sidewalks
- Planned construction projects
- Streets on bus routes or with heavy traffic patterns because they will cause the design to wear more quickly
- Eligibility based on road type; residential city street locations are possible, but large regional roads are not allowed.

Once you have some ideas in mind, please send a photo of the location(s) to neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca for review. Staff will contact the organizers with questions and consideration on the location choice. Not all proposed locations will be feasible, but the tips above will help organizers to select potential options.

When the location is approved by the City, the organizers will receive a letter outlining considerations and actions needed to advance to the next steps of the process.

TIMELINES

Each project timeline will vary based on unique details and process of each neighbourhood. Please estimate that a painting project will take approximately one year from start to finish, as there are a number of steps to take.

Painting days should occur between late May and September, weather dependent. Consider the factors of seasonality and weather in the timeline planning.

Most designs will have an estimated lifespan of 1 to 3 years. Impacts that effect design lifespan include materials used, traffic volume, installation conditions, and more.

COSTS

The estimated cost to complete a street or sidewalk painting project is approximately \$1500-\$3000. This includes appropriate paint and supplies but the size of the art and the materials used can affect cost. You may want to consider additional costs to best support a project including:

- Flyers to get other residents involved
- Hiring an artist to design and lead the project painting
- Road closure event insurance
- Personal Protective Equipment appropriate for the painting materials used
- Power washing services to ensure a clean surface prior to painting
- Hosting a neighbourhood celebration upon completion



All groups are encouraged to consider neighbourhood grants to assist with project costs. You can learn more about grants at the [funds webpage](#).

TELL A NEIGHBOURHOOD STORY

One of the main goals of art in Waterloo is to tell a story. Use the sidewalk or road painting as an opportunity for art to tell a story about the neighbourhood, the residents that live there, or the history of the community. If a local artist is involved, the individual can help the community understand what creating artwork that accomplishes this goal can mean.

WORKING WITH AN ARTIST

Working with a professional artist is strongly encouraged to ensure an effective design and implementation. Individuals with artistic expertise can work with the community to ensure the design process and completed project reflects the goals of the community. In order to facilitate working with an artist, a clear outline of expectations should be developed to define the scope of the project and project goals including:

- Realistic timelines
- How community members will be involved
- Design specifications
- Payment
- Copyright/ownership



City staff can provide support around the development and promotion of opportunities for artists and the creation of an artist agreement.

Step 3: Design specifications

To encourage a vibrant and inclusive project for all community members, including those with visual impairments and disabilities, the key design guidelines for a painting project include:

- A simple design
- Select a single picture theme per crossing (e.g. stripes or stars are suitable but don't mix stripes with stars)
- Avoid designs that create any illusions such as 3D effects or shadows
- Use a maximum of 4 paint colours- bright primary colours preferred and avoid darker colours
- Make sure phrases, words, and designs are inclusive
- Corporate logos or slogans are not allowed, as per the [city's sign bylaw](#)
- Choose a slip resistant product
- Select flat and even surfaces to paint; surfaces such as interlocking stones are not suitable

For a road painting project, additional guidelines include:

- Ensure the two white crosswalk lines are fully visible and the design remains within the white lines (a person with a visual disability uses the two white lines as a guide when crossing)
- Do not use yellow, grey, or light blue paint directly next to the white crosswalk lines
- End the design before it reaches the curb cut

For a sidewalk painting project, additional guidelines include:

- Any design should cover no more than half of the sidewalk (vertically). The unpainted half should remain consistently clear throughout the full length
- The sidewalk should be divided by marking it with a bright yellow linear line
- The picture below helps describe the details above



Photo Source: Painting project in Bexley, Ohio

Step 4: Submit the art

Once you have made the final decisions about the artist and the design, you must submit your design, including dimensions and a materials list for approval by staff and the City's Public Art Advisory Committee. The application also requires proof of insurance. The application also requires proof of insurance. Connect with the [neighbourhoods team](#) to learn more about insurance requirements and to submit your design.

Step 5: Project agreement

Once all project details are confirmed, the organizers and the artist (if applicable) will meet with city staff to sign an agreement about the project to confirm the responsibilities of the city, organizers, and artist. The document will include details about who is responsible in cases of removal, repairs, graffiti or vandalism, and that the art may be removed at any time (for example, emergency road repairs may be needed).

Step 6: Final preparation for painting day

ROAD CLOSURE

Prior to the painting day, organizers will need to submit a [special event permit](#) and proof of insurance for a road closure at least 60 days in advance. Organizers can contact the [neighbourhoods team](#) for help to purchase coverage for a road closure. Include a proposed rain date in your application in case weather is poor on the first date.

ARTIST ARRANGEMENTS

If working with an artist on the project, be sure to communicate well in advance about what the process will be on the painting day. For example, the artists may request volunteers for

assistance during the painting or ask community members to gather at a certain time once the painting is almost complete.

PLAN FOR SAFETY

Organizers and the artist (if applicable) should develop a plan to ensure everyone remains safe during the painting. This could include details such as how participants will remain visible, personal protective equipment needs, steps to protect against contamination of storm water, guidelines for cancelling the event due to weather, plans for communication, and any event safety details needed.

NOTIFYING NEIGHBOURS

Organizers should plan to notify neighbours of the project details and road closure in advance of the painting day. Be sure to include the rain date in all communications. Social media, neighbourhood newsletters, or event flyers are a good ways to notify neighbours. In addition, a short letter explaining the reason for the closure is helpful to leave in mailboxes around the closure. Contact neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca for a sample letter.

Step 7: Painting day

Before painting begins, it is important to get the road as clean as possible. Limited dirt and debris will allow the paint to adhere and last. Include time for the road to dry after cleaning and before painting in your timeline for the day.



If you plan to take photos of neighbours enjoying the paint day, make sure to post a photography notification or ask permission to take photos.

Celebrate! Groups are encouraged to bring neighbours together to celebrate and view the completed painting project. Consider hosting a street party, potluck, or other activities near the painting.

Check out our [Planning a Neighbourhood Event](#) guide for tips and ways to help organize a neighbourhood celebration.