



Dundas Works Roundtable #12: Block Captains

Thursday, March 25th, 2021 7:00-8:30 pm

Meeting Minutes Rev.1 - draft

We hosted our second virtual roundtable. 21 people including 4 facilitators were in attendance. We used the breakout room feature to maximize individual input. 2 participants left near the end of breakout rooms, we had 19 people for group wrap up.

Brian Baetz presented the concept of Block Captains. We then split into 3 breakout rooms to discuss

1. What do you think of the Block Captain idea?
2. How would you implement it?

Presentation by Brian Baetz

The Block Captain is assuming a local canvassing role – walk up to the residence, knock on the door and say hello, present any literature. It is relatively easy if you know the person. If you don't know the person, just make the connection. It's simply a neighbour making a connection with a neighbour.

When they used this method for Rashne's election campaign, they put a dot on a map of Dundas where people they knew lived. At the end of the exercise, they had a map of the town with 65 dots on it. They asked these people to be Block Captains. 64 out of 65 people agreed. Using the map, they asked friends to help them find people in the parts of the map without any dots.

Post pandemic – we need our local community more than ever. Some people don't like the term Block Captain. Brian feels it is a neutral term. Sports teams have captains. He feels that 4 square blocks is an ideal size of area for one person.

He feels the concept is applicable to much more than just elections. He feels the block can share and exchange ideas about issues and topics of importance to the neighbour specifically and the town in general.

Jim McDonald's Witherspoon Whisperer is an example of a block starting up. The ECO Park, safe sidewalks, cycling safety, trail safety, urban growth are all potential topics that can be used as a "call to action" or "call to arms".

Getting to know your neighbours can lead to sharing equipment, tools and skills. It can be used to organize fun events like barbeques. Dundas is made up of neighbourhoods and micro-neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods are not just physical things; email chains are also an example of a neighbourhood.



Breakout Room #1 facilitated by Jim Sweetman

- Consider rotating the Block Captain role. Request people to join via email.
- Agree with the speaker – we need neighbours now more than ever. Taking a logistics view, our neighbourhoods already have “natural” boundaries. We need to clearly define blocks. There will be a difference in uptake of this idea across the town. We need to share resources, tools, templates across the blocks. Make it a fun exercise.
- Representing Dundas Rides – in April we are planning a garden tour and possibly a pottery tour that will take people through neighbourhoods by bicycle. This could be an event to start a block.
- Our neighbourhood had a BBQ pre-COVID. It seems people have forgotten how to be a neighbour. I see my neighbours on the road walking. We need people to help each other. Seems that we need a purpose to knock on someone’s door. Action 13 is focusing on climate change. What should be our focus to start?
- Representing Routes Youth organization – how could they help raise awareness of this idea? Do we leave it open or does each Block Captain follow a set issue. He was moved by hearing how one neighbourhood in the past shared the news when a neighbour had passed away. He likes the spirit of this idea. Should we organize around political issues? Maybe the Block Captains will form a network to share ideas and experience?
- With reference to the “natural boundaries” our neighbourhoods already have as defined by the City of Hamilton, we can also consider census tracts and postal codes as ways to gather data about our neighbourhoods. We can seek common ground to establish a connection. Should we take a listening approach first – find out what is on people’s minds? What is important to the neighbourhood now?
- Believes in simplicity to start. What about a standard email from Dundas Works out to each of tonight’s attendees to send out to their networks explaining what we are trying to do?
- Keep this simple. Can we build critical mass?
- Hwy 8 closure is an issue for his Greensville neighbourhood.
- Use geo mapping with postal codes. Use OpenData from the City of Hamilton.
- We can use a Google Map to identify where people live – just like the map with the dots.
- What is the problem we are trying to solve with the Block Captain idea?
- We should start by trying to build interest. Do not start with “an ask”. We are not requiring people to “do anything” other than exchange ideas. The newsletter seems like a good way to start “softly”.
- Once we gain traction, we should share best practices among the Block Captains.

Breakout Room #2 facilitated by Tim Leslie and Reuven Dukas

Need a new name

- Turn off for younger generation - Not a clear enough descriptor
- Possible names - “Block Moderator”, “Convenor”



Communication

- Relationships should be the focus....how to increase connections in your neighbourhood
- Need to communicate through the social media platforms that are used
- Need to have convenors through Social media to get people connected again after COVID

Community

- There will be a community reset after COVID Many former social connections have been lost or changed there is an opportunity to engage people who may have had other social connections before the pandemic....people may be open to new relationships
- Churches used to fill this need for the community....their impact is not as great as in times past...nothing has replaced this for non religious people
- Need to build trust before you can do anything as a community
- Start with something social...neighbourhood gatherings
- In smaller groups people get to know each other better
- On a busy street it's harder to foster connection

Focus and Structure

- Need both a focus and a structure to truly engage people
- Need an issue or campaign to galvanize the community
- The “Block Captain” will provide a focus based on their passion and interests
- The overarching focus should be our ability as a community to deal with the changing climate

Breakout Room #3 facilitated by Bob James

Attendees

- Marie from UPARA, Art from Dundas Rides, Alex from Action 13, Harriet from Spencer Creek Village, Brian whose talk we started with, Deborah from Permaculture

Question #1: What do you think of the idea of Block Captain?

- while there are concerns about the number of hours needed, they thought it was a phenomenal idea
- Wondered about the nomenclature, since words matter. There was the suggestion of “community connector”.
- Is this a form of political activity, and does it matter if it is?
- There may be a need for some training
- The idea is reminiscent of the “block parent” idea of the 80's and 90's, where parents would be available to children in need on their way home from school.
- The workability would depend upon who the “captain” is, since it is a pretty loose or generic idea.
- Dundas is a pretty “white” community, so it would be nice to have more diversity in age, ethnicity, income
- Suggestion that the name might well follow the function that the captain idea encompasses



Question #2: how do you see this working out?

- We could look at a map of Dundas and divide it up into areas. This seems pretty daunting. Or, we could start with existing groups
- It is good to ask other people how we can help them, one person, as a community connector, could go to other houses and ask this question.
- You need one person to start it. As an example, Nrinder Nann did some work in her ward in the early pandemic to organize the community for help and services to get through the pandemic.
- There are phases of development. The first might be food, like a community dinner. There might also be “pods” to share skills such as carpentry, gardening.
- There are grants for place-making available
- Be careful how you approach people, and what question you ask
- Sometimes good to start with a fun/social event, and it could then develop into something more.
- Often just meeting people and knowing their names is the best way to begin to foster a connection. Probably will start as something loosey-goosey.
- Social with an overlay of cycling, or elder care, etc.
- Having a work bee is a good idea and a place to share ideas and skills
- Article by Joey Coleman
- “Green Street” idea
- May need to work out guidelines for captain responsibilities
- Possibility with COVID that there may be more connections. People will say hello, and chat briefly to you when walking, etc.

Technical Facilitator Margot's impressions

- several people suggested exploring a different name than "block captain", i.e. Nrinder Nann's office uses term "Pod Mapping"
- could consider contacting Councillor Nann's office for feedback on their Pod Mapping
- need an issue on which to focus to give purpose to structure, i.e. climate change
- Dundasismyhome.net/covid19updates example of a map with sections of Dundas for Covid mapping purposes
- may be able to use software application to connect people within block and to connect between the different blocks
- there are existing "hubs" or blocks already: Dundas Works, Action 13, Witherspoon Whisperers, UPARA, Wentworth Lodge Lands Group. If individuals in these groups volunteer to be captains (i.e. Brian Baetz, Alex Wilson already volunteered), many blocks could be initiated