

Turn to the Creative Conquerors

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Who do these people think they are?! Why would citizens want to change something that works perfectly well, and has for years! Why waste time and money on something silly like a festival, or art project that will only last a day, week or month? We have bigger issues than worrying about one neighborhood's wants. We know what's best for our citizens and they will see it our way, or learn to deal with it.

OK, perhaps that seems a bit extreme and over the top; however, it wasn't that long ago when municipal government would decide the direction of a whole city without the input of the people, neighborhoods, and the assets in it. Sadly, if you think some of these cities don't exist anymore, think again. Fortunately, some cities have caught on and seen the light. They now understand the people within the city ARE the difference makers, the creative conquerors, and they should be invited to the table to *not only* help be the drivers of initiatives, but help create the new initiatives of

the cities they live in. However, this means that city agencies are going to have to become much more flexible in a very rules and regulations oriented arena, or else the cities slow to adopt engagement from the communities will see youth and the new wave of companies flock to the cities that are inspiring new ways of looking at... well, everything, a city has to offer. Cities that highlight walkability, unique areas to live, great parks, art, and a city council not afraid to try new things, even the ridiculous, will prosper!

A recent example of a creative conqueror making a difference in Raleigh, NC just took place in the Glenwood neighborhood. Jim and Donna Belt, two retired patrons in the city, have been trying for the past 10 months to take bland ordinary crosswalks and turn them into art pieces called Cool Walkings. Sounds easy enough: get some paint, a few artists, and make a design on the street. Not so fast. It took looking at the bureaucracy of changing city ordinances, closing streets, several thousand dollars including grants, finding artists and volunteers just to name a few. The city didn't make it easy for an amazing project to happen in the being stages. If municipalities continue to create hoop after hoop for creative people to jump through, then nothing will get accomplished. City professionals should be finding more creative conquerors and paving the way for people like Donna and Jim, not putting roadblocks in their paths.

So, how do we find more creative leaders who are willing to push the envelope, not give up when they get a little, or a lot of push back and see a project through to the end?

According to author Peter Kageyama who wrote "[For the Love of Cities](#)" and most recently "[Love Where You Live](#)," there are 7 steps to this process:

1. Identify the anchor personas: Find the community activists, social entrepreneurs, and connectors who operate as the big fish

in your cities social pond.

2. Bring the co-creators together: Get a half dozen to sit down with top city leadership.
3. Ask them for help: The next step is a bit unusual, the city is going to ask the co-creators for help. Historically it is people asking the city for help, but in this case the city tapping a new resource.
4. Amplify what they naturally do: A deft touch is needed to help by not dictating, but letting the creators tell you what the city can do to help via resources
5. Provide them with "other" resources: Waive fees, provide police and fire for events, and help cut through various department bureaucracies.
6. Ask them to identify more "lovers" of the city: The next time you call back the co-creators, ask them to bring other like-minded creators. These will be the up and coming individuals.
7. Expand the circle: Before you know it you will have 2 dozen co-creators engaged with some sort of capacity building for the city!

The writing is on the wall if a city wants to take it to the next level of community engagement and ownership in the spaces we live. City officials need to embrace creative conquerors, break the old mold of doing business by making it easier for unique ideas to happen, and resolve that they want to take a fresh look of the city through the eyes of amazing people who have so often been overlooked. If more cities do this, it will most certainly be a pretty cool space to live in. So come on, what's your big idea!