

Art in Methuen - A Report for a More Vibrant City

Initiative of:



City of Methuen
Mayor James Jajuga
Department of Economic &
Community Development

In collaboration with:



Golob Art



Overview

For some time now, downtown Methuen has been struggling to bring about the physical and social transformations that are occurring in cities like Haverhill and Lowell. While there are a handful of successful small businesses along the downtown stretch, changing economies and a lack of attention have resulted in empty storefronts, empty properties, and empty parking lots. This is unfortunate. With a diverse community coming from all walks of life, the downtown district could be the beating heart of the city. While it is not a cure-all, many kinds of public art, as described in this document, can help address this lack of community expression and contribute to vibrant economic activity in the downtown area. That is why Mayor James Jajuga and the City of Methuen's Office of Economic and Community Development, in collaboration with Alexander Golob of the public-art studio Golob Art, initiated a conversation with the Methuen community about bringing art to the downtown area. That conversation and the research it inspired have led to this report.

This document is a conversation-starter and a guiding document for future discussions and actions meant to fill the downtown area and all of Methuen with art. Contained within, you will learn about why the arts matter for cities and their communities, what the city has done to gather feedback and community participation, the results of those conversations, examples of successful art projects, resources for art projects and initiatives, and, most importantly, recommendations for sustaining continued engagement. To close, we would like to extend our thanks to the city that has supported this discussion and, more importantly, to everyone who arrived on a cold Saturday morning and spent a few hours discussing how to bring art to Methuen. We can't wait to see what the seeds that we are planting will grow into.



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Executive Summary

Methuen has immense potential for fostering a vibrant arts community. For this reason, Methuen commissioned a city-wide report on the Arts and subsequently engaged in community outreach on an art-walk. This report examines the value of the Arts in a community, evaluates Methuen's context, details the rationale and results from the community engagement efforts, and provides resources and recommendations for arts initiatives in the city.

Big Return on Investment *pg. 9*

Supporting the Arts boosts the economy, brings in tax dollars, improves educational outcomes, and increases safety.

What are "the Arts"?

Performing Arts to Visual Arts

Culinary Arts to Architecture

Community Activities to Poetry

The Research:



People attending art events spend **\$31.47** on average on their outing.

- Americans for the Arts 5-Year Study



Every single public dollar invested in the Arts generated between **\$2.4 and \$9.**

- UMASS Dartmouth Study on New Bedford arts non-profit, AHA!



Incorporating the Arts into children's lives resulted in **~18%** increases in math and English scores and lower crime rates.

- University of Pennsylvania and NEA studies



Art Walk and Engagement pg. 12

The art-walk's goals were to build a local audience for the Arts, identify sites for public art and arts initiatives, and to catalyze the development of an active and vibrant arts community.

When it happened: *Saturday morning, October 28th*

Where it happened: *Riverside Park, and around City Center*

Art Walk Results

15 Passionate community members

40+ Ideas for future art initiatives

Recommendations

Organized by:



Short Term/Long Term
pg. 33



Areas of Focus
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Resources pg. 23

The City, Local Non-Profits and Businesses, Mass Cultural Council, New England Foundation for the Arts, MassDevelopment, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission and more



Short Term

- Piggy-back off of existing events and organizations
- Use vacant properties for pop-up art projects
- Build an active core group



Medium Term

- Form arts non-profit
- Identity more stable funding
- Develop stand-alone art events
- Create small permanent public art



Long Term

- Large festivals
- Invite more non-local artists
- Develop art center, artist studios
- Create large permanent public art





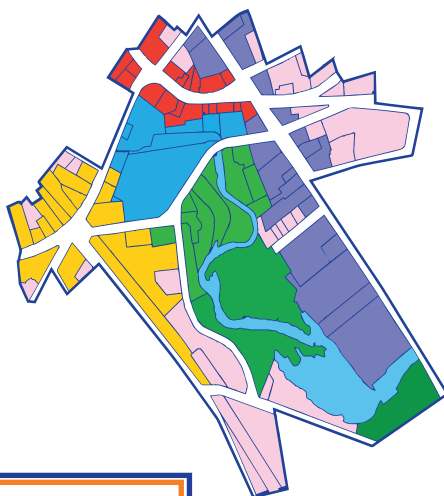
Public Support

- One-Percent for the Arts
- Micro-Grant program
- Aid with grant writing
- Facilitate larger art projects
- Diminish permitting barriers
- Map cultural assets
- Artist residencies
- Include artists in decision-making



Areas of Focus

-  Broadway
-  The Falls
-  Five-Points Intersection
-  Hampshire Street
-  Riverwalk Park
-  Secondary Sites



Note on Support

Whatever form of public support, consistency over multiple years is key to success.

Projects Ideas:

temporary way-finding chalk and paint projects, community gardens, wheat-paste installations, light projects, art fairs, murals, an arts center, and more celebration of ethnic and religious communities.

Art Near and Far *pg. 27*

Successful art initiatives can be found in Lynn mural festivals to integration of art in Phoenix utilities

Conclusion *pg. 52*

Methuen Center is poised to become a vibrant and exciting nexus of art and community. With consistent and inclusive efforts from community members and the city and an eye on taking small steps with a big vision, the authors of this report believe that Methuen and the Arts will flourish.

About Golob Art *pg. 11*

Golob Art, the public art studio that authored this report and which organized the art engagement, creates art that provokes thought in the public, lifts up its viewer, and transforms physical space. The studio has been working across MA since 2012.

Value of the Arts: Background and Context for Art in Methuen

Before engaging in a discussion of public art and its role in the public sphere, it is important to define our terms. The City of Fredericton in New Brunswick, Canada came up with a very useful breakdown of what “the arts” is composed of. Here is what we mean when we talk about public art:

Visual Arts – painting, sculpture, fine-craft, photography, and mixed media

Literary Arts – fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and playwriting

Performing Arts – theatre, music, dance, and opera

Media Arts – film, video, sound recording, and cyber arts

Industrial and Craft Arts – craft, culinary arts, publishing, and graphic and surface design

Culturally Specific Arts – arts influenced by the values, customs, and traditions of peoples of historical or contemporary settlement

Community Arts – recreational art and community-building art

Civic Arts – architecture, landscape, and urban design



What Can Art Do for Methuen?

Investing in the arts can provide huge benefits for the city and the Methuen community. The arts can generate economic activity and grow the local tax base, improve real estate, provide social benefits, increase livability, and build community.

Big Return on Investment:

The reality is that the Arts are already generating a huge amount of economic activity and could generate far more. Massachusetts' non-profit arts and culture industry alone produced \$2.25 billion in spending in 2015. And while a large amount of that spending, \$1.4 billion, comes from the organizations, a full \$879 million came from audience spending. That activity has resulted in 73,288 jobs and \$63 million in local government revenue and \$96 million in state government revenue – money that can go back into communities to support infrastructure, schools, and safety.

Social Benefits and Livability

The presence of art and arts programs could substantially improve happiness, sense of community, health, safety, and educational outcomes for youth in Methuen. According to a University of Pennsylvania study from 2017, when controlling for factors including economic status, race, and ethnicity, the relative higher presence of cultural resources is linked with health, safety, and educational benefits to as much as 17-18 percent increase in standardized math and English scores as well as similarly substantial decreases in child abuse and neglect as well as felony crime. Similar results were found in a study by the National Endowment for the arts in 2012.

People also prioritize the arts when choosing to stay in or move to a community. A Knight Foundation survey of 43,000 people in 43 cities across the United States found that “social offerings and welcome-ness” and, importantly, “aesthetics of a place – its art, parks, and green spaces,” ranked higher than education, safety, and the local economy. These numbers are similar to an Ipsos survey commissioned by Americans for the Arts that found 82 percent of Americans believe that art and culture are important to local businesses and the economy and that 87 percent of Americans believe arts and culture are important to quality life. With so many people making decisions about where to live and where to spend their time and money based on the presence of art, Methuen has a great deal to gain from bringing in the Arts.

What Can Art Do for Methuen?

A focus of Mayor James Jajuga along with Methuen’s Office of Economic and Community Development is to create a more vibrant downtown. The city has wanted to adopt 40R zoning for the area to create a more people-ori-

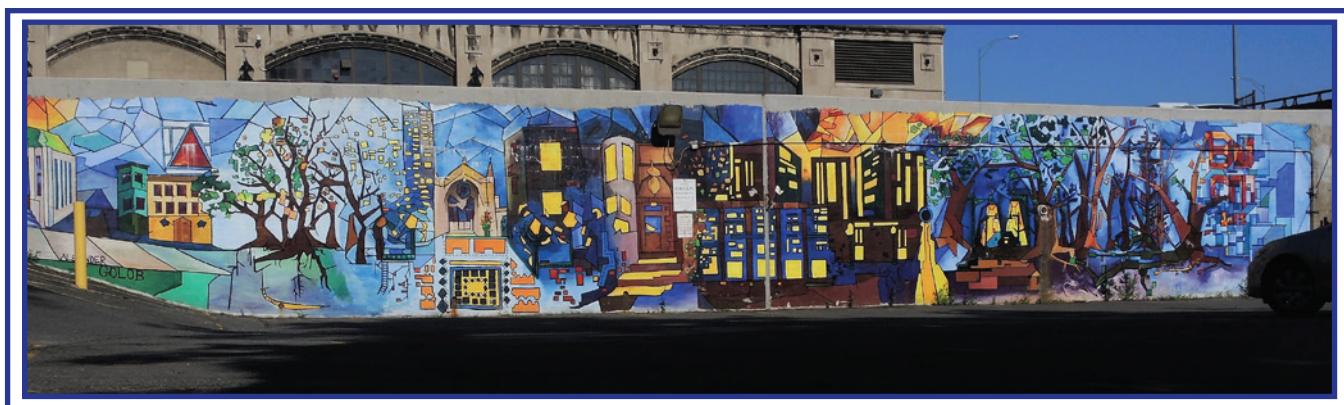


ented Methuen Center. This designation allows for denser building, larger pedestrian areas, and mixed-use developments. Because of the Arts' power for positive economic and social impact, the city's activity in its downtown, included exploring what bringing art to Methuen Center might look like. It was at this point that the city brought on board Alexander Golob of public art studio, Golob Art, to provide perspective on how to bring art to Methuen, engage the Methuen community, and create a report with the studio's findings.

About Golob Art

Alexander Golob founded Golob Art with the purpose of creating engaging artworks that provoke thought in the public, lift its viewer, and transform physical space.

The studio has already worked with several non-profits, communities, and companies. Clients range from Boston University (7 works) and the South Middlesex Opportunity Council in Framingham (3 works), to the City of Methuen, the City of Haverhill, the Peabody Essex Museum, the Northampton Film Festival, and a number of developers and restaurants across the Greater Boston Area.



Kaleidoscope Mural, Alexander Golob, 2013

Summary of the Art Walk

Goals, Outreach, and Results

Goals

Upon assessing Methuen's context, Golob Art recommended that the city conduct community outreach and gather feedback through a public walk around the downtown. This event and its associated outreach campaign had the following goals:

Community Audience Building – Research organizations relevant to this initiative and engage in publicity to increase awareness of the art-walk and the broader goals of the initiative.

Identify Sites for Public Art and Art Events – Gather public feedback along with expert experience in placemaking and knowledge of public art to identify locations that could be transformed through public art and public art events.

Write Report on Event Findings – Write a report that includes the findings of the walk-through and the community discussion.

Catalyze Development of Art Community – Catalyze the formation of a more vibrant art community in Methuen. By taking the lead to organize and bring together parties who are interested in bringing more art to the city, the event hopes to foster connections that will result in more grassroots arts organizing.



Art Walk Logistics and Information

The event was titled “*Calling All Art-Lovers! Let’s Bring Art to Methuen*” and was held the morning of Saturday, October 28th, between 9:30 and 11:30 AM. It began at the gazebo in downtown Methuen’s Riverwalk Park between 48 and 50 Osgood Street.

The art-walk path ran East from Riverwalk Park along Osgood Street to Broadway and then North to Hampshire. The walk continued along Hampshire towards Lowell Street but took a small detour down the public right-of-way that leads to a view of the falls. The walk then went down Lowell Street and, at the Five Point intersection, turned back onto Osgood Street and ended back at Riverwalk Park.

The schedule for the day was as follows:

- **9:30 – 10 Muffins, coffee, and ice-breakers**
- **10 – 11 Downtown walk to identify locations for art and brainstorm art ideas**
- **11 – 11:30 Wrap-Up talk to start planning next steps**



left, Falls
right, Riverwalk
Park, where the
Art Walk began

Outreach

To reach out to the greatest number of community members possible, the city pursued several avenues of outreach both physical and digital. The outreach campaign included the following strategies:

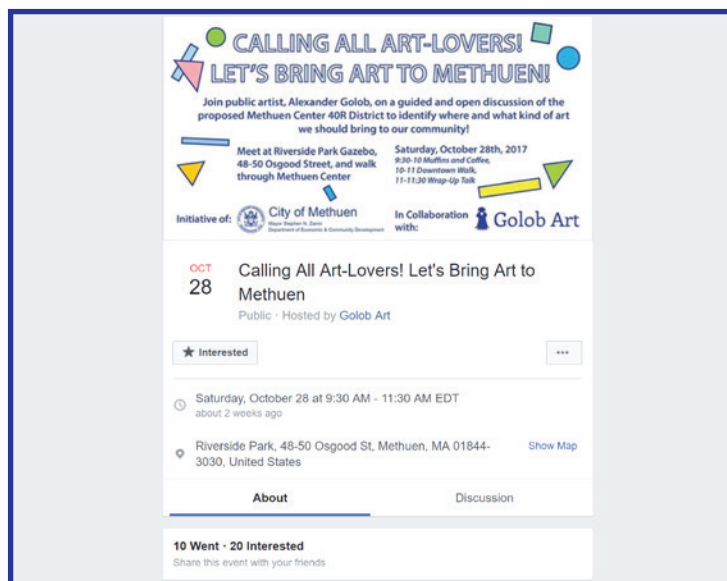
- **Communication with downtown Methuen businesses**
- **Post fliers on the premises of Methuen businesses**
- **Post fliers in frequented community centers**
for example: hospitals, coffee shops, libraries
- **Reach out to the school system for involvement**
- **Create a Facebook event**
- **Publicize the Facebook event through various city pages**
for example: mayor, police, fire dept
- **Reach out to electoral candidates to share with their networks**
the art event occurred a week prior to the city election
- **Outreach to community leaders who could highlight the event**
- **Outreach to local press to write about the event. The Eagle Tribune article can be found here:**
http://www.eagletribune.com/news/merrimack_valley/local-law-enforcement-to-talk-public-safety-at-chamber-event/article_f9e656ff-cffe-5c64-8294-f2b9caa9aa0c.html
- **Identify and reach out to arts organizations in Methuen**





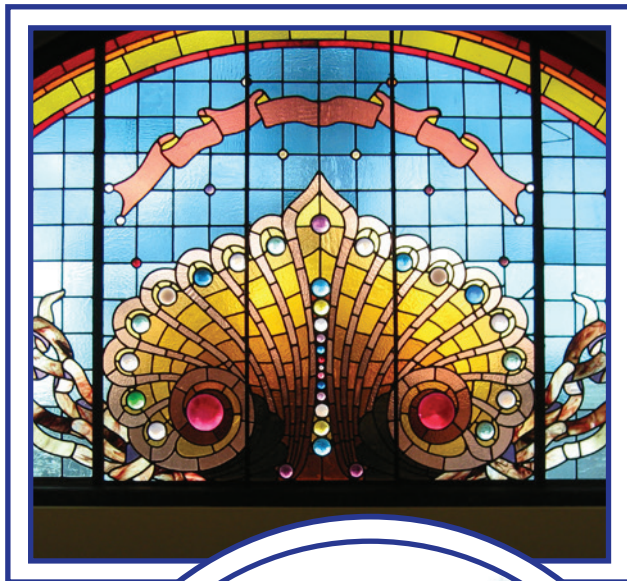
top, photo from
October Art Walk,
photo by Carl Russo

right, screenshot
of event's facebook
page



Results

Having completed a survey of the Methuen art landscape, gathered ideas from the Methuen community, and identified a core group of individuals interested in pursuing continued arts engagements, the city and Golob Art believe that the event was successful in its objectives. Within the next few pages, you will find the specific results of each aspect of the project.



top left, Stained glass at
Nevins Library,
top right, Methuen Music
Hall
bottom left, Clan
MacPherson Pipes and
Drums Santa Parade,
photo by Carl Russo

Community Audience Building:

A list of the identified arts organizations, public entities, and companies in Methuen:

Public Entities

- Methuen Cultural Council
- Recreation Dept.
- Methuen Public School Art Dept.
- Public Libraries

Martial Arts

- Methuen Karate Association
- Changs Taekwondo America
- Wah Lum Wellness
- iLoveKickboxing

Visual and Graphic Arts

- Absolute Glass
- Image-Tec
- Sarah Jordan Photography
- New England Sports Photo
- Melissa Kimberly Photography
- Saxon Cross Photography
- Borisyuk Photography
- Jim Shamberger Photography
- Greg Workman Photographic Art
- Fame Photo Booth
- Toflare Photography

Volunteer / Non-Profit Organizations

- Art Institute Group of Merrimack Valley
- Grey Court Poets
- Methuen Memorial Music Hall
- Methuen Historic Society
- Methuen Garden Club
- North Regional Theater Workshop
- Methuen Rail Trail
- Methuen YMCA
- M.A.N. Inc.

Performing Arts

- Center for Performing Arts Dance Studio
- Dance Images Dance & Music Center
- Studio of Dance Arts
- Interstate Gymnastics and Dance

Identify Sites for Public Art and Art Events:

With a healthy, energetic turnout to the art-walk, over 40 ideas both big and small were put forth to bring art to Methuen Center. Community members were encouraged to write how the space strikes them at the moment, how they would like the space to feel, and what they would recommend to realize their vision. Not all spaces were filled; empty spaces reflect the lack of an answer. Ideas have been sorted by the physical location along the art-walk's path. The names of people who suggested specific ideas have been kept anonymous for their privacy.

Key to Art-Walk Focus Areas

- 1 - Osgood and Broadway
- 2 - Broadway and Hampshire
- 3 - Hampshire Street
 - a. Main Business Stretch
 - b. View of the Falls
- 4 - Hampshire and Lowell
- 5 - Lowell Street
- 6 - Five Points Intersection
- 7 - Osgood Street - West of Riverwalk Park
- 8 - General Methuen Center Ideas

In the "Next Steps" section of this report, these ideas will be incorporated into recommendations for possible next steps.



early 20th century post-card of Hampshire Street



Art-Walk Results

Area	Location	Idea	What's it Like Now?
1	Old TV Building	Potential arts center, Gallery, Theatre	Vacant, under-utilized space
1	Old TV Building	Temporary art on the exterior	
1	Riverside Park	Mural in parking lot	
1	Broadway Retaining Wall	Mural	
1	Bottom of Falls		
1, 2	Empty Lots	Community garden	Overrun with weeds, beautiful architecture
1, 2	Empty Lots	Public park	under-used space and vacant
2, 3	Street Intersection	Paint patterns	
2, 3, 4		Parklets	
2, 3, 4		Art in business windows	
2	271 Broadway, gravel area	Parklet, sculpture, bench, flowers	
3a	Light Posts	Poetry Banners	
3a		Pedestrian spaces.	Benches, lights, maintenance, color
3a	Liquor Store	Gallery space	
3a	Parking Lots	Temporary art events - in colab. with local businesses	under-used space in critical location
3b		LED lighting	
3b	Falls	Light installation	hidden gem that should be more prominent
3b	Falls	"turkey feet" paint on the ground	walk-way feels abandoned

Art-Walk Results

Area	Location	Idea	What's it Like Now?
3b	Falls	Empty picture frame to take selfies with waterfall in back	pretty, but under accessed because no structured engagement.
3b	Falls	celebration to commemorate freeze and thaw of water	
3b, 5		red lantern festival	
4	Liban D'Or	Mural location that celebrates immigrant story	
5		fountain // sculpture	
5	Spicket River Bridge	Lighting	Dark at night
5		River clean-up along dam	Plants overgrown
5		Sound installation, tie-in with Organ Hall	
6		terracotta gateway sculptures	
6		stand alone structures	
6		art that uses existing structures similar to the birds silhouettes attached to street posts at audubon circle in Boston	
6		visual markers of five corners. Painted?	
6		Sign greeting people to the downtown	Open, plain, busy vehicular traffic
6		Art for the bridge that goes over the rail-trail	
7	Retaining walls	chalk drawing, mural, street-lights	Open, empty
7		Greycourt art festival	Open, empty



Art-Walk Results

Area	Location	Idea	What's it Like Now?
8		consistent signage	
8		historical photographs and info placards	no history shown
8		way-finding // possibly to railtrail	
8		community music performances	
8		victorian walks	
8		trolley tours	
8		self-guided tours	no tying together of interesting culturally and historically rich areas of Methuen
8		continued restoration of historical structures	
8		low cost art studios / art-space	

Catalyze Development of Art Community

The 15 dedicated art enthusiasts who attended were highly engaged and showed imagination in coming up with ideas for art projects and a great deal of interest in continuing their engagement with the project. We have created an emailing list and hope to provide those community members with support for additional art endeavors.

Another aspect of note was the lack of Methuen's vibrant immigrant, ethnic, and religious minority communities. We would recommend that for any additional art engagement, a special effort be given to reach out to minority and immigrant communities who disproportionately live in the center of Methuen and who may need targeted outreach to get them involved. While a great deal of energy was invested in outreach, the scope of outreach was narrowed to public institutions and arts organizations as well as art-affiliated companies to best leverage limited resources. For future outreach, it is recommended to expand beyond English-only outreach and actively reach out to immigrant, ethnic, cultural, and minority-focused organizations in Methuen.



Photo from Methuen
Festival of Trees



Resources:

Organizations and Methods for Realizing Art Initiatives

Although there may not be much art in Methuen at the moment, the city has made it clear that making the city more vibrant is a priority. There are a number of organizations and methods that can help realize that vision. Below you will find a list of some of the resources available to you in creating art.

Organizations and Resources

City of Methuen – The city is willing and interested in bringing art to Methuen. This includes passing regulatory hurdles, identifying potential collaborators, and providing a small amount of funding. While a number of city departments may be useful in your art project, the economic and community development department is the branch of the city that will be most useful for starting off.

Local and Regional Non-profits – Non-profits are created to provide benefits to the public. When building art initiatives, you don't have to re-invent the wheel! Reach out to and try to build relationships with non-profits. Organizations such as the Art Institute of the Merrimack Valley, the Methuen Music Hall, the Methuen Flower Club, the Methuen Rotary Club, and even the Essex Art Center in Lawrence are great potential allies. They can provide needed logistic help, provide a platform by adding on art activities to their events, funding resources, and name recognition.

Local Businesses – Local businesses are an integral part of the community and often have a soft-spot for the arts. That is because arts events and projects are wonderful for building up the communities that businesses serve. It also provides a great opportunity to bring in new customers by building up brand recognition and supporting events that increase local foot-traffic. Like non-profits, businesses can help in many ways ranging from in-kind donations (think food, gifts, and other materials), funding, physical space, and some logistics support.

Massachusetts Cultural Council and Local Affiliate – Every municipality in the Commonwealth has a local Cultural Council funded by the State of Massachusetts. These councils are often run by deeply engaged artists and art-lovers who are on the council for no other reason than they want to help you realize the creation of art; Make use of them and reach out, even if it's a small or crazy idea. Each council is given a modest amount of money to hand-out through a grant giving process. And while the funds from a local cultural council might not be enough for a block-buster project, the institutional validation of receiving a cultural council grant can help bring in other supporters. The Massachusetts Cultural Council also has some great grant programs.



New England Foundation for the Arts, NEFA – Founded in 1976 by the National Endowment for the Arts as one of the six regional arts organizations, NEFA supports the arts throughout the New England region. They offer workshops, events, and grants for everything from dance and placemaking to music, theatre, and guest presenters.

<https://www.nefa.org>

Mass Development – Mass. Development is a semi-public agency tasked with supporting economic development across the Commonwealth – often by providing aid with finding partners and financing for projects that lift up communities. They have a program called Commonwealth Places that supports community-driven projects. The program requires the community to engage in a crowd-funding campaign and if successful, Mass. Development matches the amount of funds raised up to \$50,000.

<https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/commonwealth-places>

Arts and Planning Toolkit by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, MAPC – The MAPC is a regional planning council for the Greater Boston Area. While it doesn't support Methuen, the organization has some incredible resources for public art and placemaking. If you are just beginning your journey into public art or want to expand your horizons, check out their toolkit.

<http://artsandplanning.mapc.org>

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, MVPC – The MVPC is a sister organization to the MAPC and serves the Merrimack Valley community. They have a broad network of connections across the region that can come in handy when looking for funds, sponsors, and cross-city project partners.

<http://mvpc.org>

National Endowment for the Arts, NEA, *Exploring Our Town*

Initiative – The NEA is an independent agency of the US government that provides support and funding for artists and art projects. The organization has an incredible registry of successful local art projects to get inspiration for Methuen. They also offer a handful of grants to communities, non-profits, and individuals who are doing work in the arts.

<https://www.arts.gov>

<https://www.arts.gov/exploring-our-town>

Artplace America – A national arts organization that focuses on the power art can have to support all aspects of life from placemaking and healthcare to transportation and housing. They organize regional summits for people interested in art in the public realm and they offer a great repository of information on art projects.

<https://www.artplaceamerica.org>



Art Near and Far: Examples of Successful Art Projects and Initiatives

Example 1 - AHA! New Bedford

Since July 1999, AHA! has been organizing cultural nights on the 2nd Thursday of every month. Through a great deal of work and determination, AHA transformed a downtown that saw nearly no activity into a bustling area filled with thousands of visitors from New Bedford and the surrounding area. In fact, when it comes to enriching the local economy, multiple studies have found that AHA's activity has generated between \$2.50 to \$9 in economic activity – fluctuating based on the year and study – for every dollar invested into the non-profit.

The event has now grown to involve over 60 downtown New Bedford museums, galleries, arts organizations, merchants, and restaurants. Each month's event is themed to provide a new experience and continue to generate interest. The event is funded by an alliance of the City of New Bedford, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Island Foundation, the Bank of America Foundation, the local business community sponsorship, individual sponsorships, and partner venue dues.



Photos of AHA! events

Example 2 - North Adams and Mass MoCA

North Adams is a post-industrial factory town of roughly 13,000 in Western Mass. While struggling with the loss of a major factory complex in the 1980s, community leaders came up with the idea of creating a cultural space out of the old factory. This idea eventually became a reality in the Mass MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art) in 1999. Nearly two decades later, the Mass MoCA and North Adams now attract audiences from across United States and the world.

A comprehensive study conducted 5 years after the opening of the museum conclusively points towards positive economic effects ranging from 100,000 visitors and \$15 million contributed to the local economy along with \$14 million of increases in property values. Although the study is from 2004, all indications point to continued positive effect from the public investment in arts and culture. This year, the museum announced that it is opening a new wing making it the largest contemporary art museum in the U.S.



photograph of event at Mass MoCA

Example 3 - Murals and Mural Festivals in Worcester and Lynn

Murals and mural festivals have been sprouting up across Massachusetts as communities and community leaders look for ways to anchor their identities, encourage more business, and revitalize areas of cities. In the past two years, both Worcester and Lynn have organized wildly successful mural festivals that have lifted up local talent and attracted international talent. Many of the murals also celebrated the diverse backgrounds of the cities' communities. These festivals garnered positive feedback from community members and created warm and people-friendly spaces out of cold and vacant spaces. Local businesses have seen a direct boost from increased foot-traffic.

While both Worcester and Lynn have taken a festival approach to kick-starting art creation across their neighborhoods, Boston has a full-time mural crew that works with local organizations and businesses to identify sites for murals, engage the community during the creation of the mural, and gradually paint the city.



mural by
Sabek, 2016,
Worcester



mural by David
Zayas, 2017,
Lynn



mural by Arlin
Graff, 2017,
Worcester

Example 4 - Providence Waterfire

What began as a commemorative art installation to the tenth year anniversary of Providence's First Night festival in 1994 has since become one of the top night-time event destinations in the world. The art installation, WaterFire, created by artist Barnaby Evans uses a combination of fire, ritual, torch-lit vessels, music, and scented smoke to great effect. Garnering such a strong reception in its early years, Evans was encouraged to form a non-profit to support making WaterFire an annual celebration. According to a 2012 study by the Army Corps of Engineers, the event has annual impact of \$114.3 million from visitor spending and generates 1,294 jobs.



left, *Providence Waterfire* event,
right, *Mountain Pass Bridge*,
Laurie
Lundquist

Example 5 - Phoenix Art Infrastructure

Since 1986, the city of Phoenix, Arizona made a commitment to the arts by including artists in all capital improvement plans and by setting aside 1 percent of any capital project for the arts – the decision has had a powerful effect on the desert city. The funding model – one similar to that pioneered by Philadelphia in the 1700s and many other communities over the past century – is a proven way to bring vibrancy to communities. However, what makes Phoenix so special is that throughout the design and planning for “regular” projects like road signage, garbage cans, light posts, and bridges, artists are brought into the process as equals to architects, engineers, and city planners. This has resulted in distinctive, imaginative, and engaging public spaces – and the city is better for it.

Example 6 - Kensington Street, Philly, Art Against Opioid Epidemic

In Philadelphia, art works hand in hand with various health and safety services to combat the scourge of the opioid crisis. After seeing first-hand the limits of treating addicted individuals, the city's Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services and the city's Mural Arts program teamed up. They rented a space on one of the most affected streets in the city. They opened the space and offered food to anybody who wanted to come in – with a catch: if you wanted to stay, you had to sew and make something with your hands. What started as an experiment to help those suffering from addiction is already garnering positive results: instead of listlessly wandering the streets, people with addiction come into a safe space where they are treated as equals and given the opportunity to express themselves creatively. The city is now looking into extending the program beyond its 2018 pilot program end-point and expanding services to include mental health support.



photo by Samantha Melamed, weaving workshop in Porch Light collaboration

Example 7 - Kaleidoscope Mural, Boston

Located in Boston near the Boston University Bridge in a lowered parking lot, the *Kaleidoscope* mural is an example of a single project bringing life to a space of Boston and Boston University that was left vacant or occupied by cars.

After researching and engaging with the university community, artist Alexander Golob's design for a mural was proposed for the space. However, before painting could begin, the design had to go through several approval processes from university and city officials. When painting finally began, Golob engaged over 80 people of all ages – from elementary school students taking music lessons nearby to elderly people going for a stroll – in painting and creating the vibrant and dynamic mural. Since the work of public art's creation, the parking lot has been used as a space for receptions, the backdrop of a dance video, social media profile backgrounds, university orientation event space, and even as a landmark in the hit smartphone game *Pokemon Go!*. Needless to say, this one work has had an outsized influence in lifting people up and transforming a forgotten space into an iconic part of the community.



Mural as Pokestop



Mural on instagram



Mural for performances

Next Steps:

Recommendations for Continued Art Engagement

In a short timespan, the city's attempt to energize and build up the local arts community has generated a strong positive response. Below are our recommendations on how to maintain the momentum in building up the arts in Methuen. The recommendations are organized into three sections: focusing on next steps, identify high-impact areas, and exploring levels of public support.

Planning:

One Step at a Time with a Vision

Growing the arts in Methuen will require taking visible and actionable steps that are individually successful and build towards a larger vision. The initiatives are separated into three categories: short-term, medium-term, and long-term.



View from Francis T. Roberge Memorial Bridge looking towards Broadway

Short-Term

During this phase, look for easily completed, highly visible, low-cost, and temporary projects that can engage many people.

Using Public-Facing City Property

Chalk drawing or temporary painting activities on sidewalks or often-vacant parking lots can add local character and act as way-finding tools. This could be done anywhere, but if placed in a strong location where it acts a way-finder, this can lead to greater temporary and potentially long-term foot-traffic. Since this project is temporary and will not have any impact on historical permitting, the project can happen quickly.



left, electric box in Rivewalk Park, center, alleyway from Hampshire St. to Falls, right, lightpost on Hampshire St.

Piggy-backing Off of Already Existing Events

Most organizations are happy to include the arts in their events. Start simple with showcasing local artists. Additional collaborations could include inviting arts organizations to have tables at the event, incorporating local music and dance performances, and having art activities for various age groups. Large Spring and Winter events include the Methuen Santa Parade and the Tree Lighting Festival.

Build Grassroots Support

Building up a core group of community members, partners, and supporters is key to driving change. At this stage where not much has yet been accomplished, it is difficult to get many people on board, so helping those who show an inherent interest is key. If they have a small idea and seem passionate about it – no matter how unconventional it may be – encourage them since they are the few who are choosing to participate. These individuals should also be strongly advised to reach out to their networks to further build up engagement and publicity. This group should also begin discussions around what a long-term vision for the arts in Methuen might look like.

As mentioned earlier, it is also critical to reach out to minority and immigrant groups to ensure that all of Methuen is being represented in initial conversations about how to bring art to the city. At the same time, it is also important to search for business and institutional partners. If a quick painting event is being organized, reach out to local businesses to see if they will provide food or material donations.



Photograph from October Art Walk taken at the intersection of Broadway and Hampshire Street - photo by Carl Russo

Make Use of Vacant Lots and Properties for Existing Art Projects

This point could easily be placed in the medium-term projects, but we have chosen to place it in the short-term category because of its potentially rapid turn-around from idea to realization. Empty storefronts like the Liquor Store on Hampshire Street or the old TV building on the corner of Osgood Street and Broadway are easy to transform into visually interesting spaces by reaching out to local artist to fill them. And while those spaces may be owned by private entities, owners are often receptive to temporary projects that can lift the profile of their building. The same easy transformations could happen on empty lots like those along Broadway between Osgood Street and Hampshire Street or on the northern side of Hampshire Street. They could easily be transformed by inviting a sculptor to temporarily show their work. The important piece is that this should use existing art projects for a quick turn-around.



Vacant property on corner of Broadway and Osgood St.

Medium Term

At the onset of this phase, long-term goals are determined, more creative projects are begun, and initiatives are more formalized. All of the recommendations for short-term projects are still very useful and should be carried out constantly.

Getting Organized: Long-Term Vision, Nonprofits, and Publicity

It is important to begin forming a network of individuals and partners who can determine long-term goals for bringing the arts to Methuen. This also includes creating a 501(c)3 non-profit that can help realize these goals.

It should also be a priority to create a centralized arts and cultural event calendar to ensure that it is easy to figure out what is happening around the city. This should coincide with the creation of social media accounts that also help to publicize and organize events and projects. This could include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat.

Establish Funding Mechanisms

Alongside greater and more consistent activity, is also important to identify and foster sponsors. This list should include general sponsors as well as supporters for specific projects. Funders can include the city, publicly funded organizations, regional organizations, local businesses, charitable foundations, and individuals. Providing tiers of support with potential benefits can also create added incentive to contribute more.

While tickets are a valid form of funding for certain events, special effort should be taken to ensure that events are free or only request a suggested-donation. By making art projects more affordable, a greater number of people can experience the arts. Also, acquiring non-profit status is a critical step to receiving more funds.

Engage Artists in Planning

If the city or a developer is planning on making a change to the city's lived environment, have an artist present. While this will take some work, the results will be profound. An artist may suggest a small change to create a performing venue out of the side of a building, moving a window to make space for what could be a spectacular work of art, or choosing a particular bench design to make it more welcoming. They could also simply help in thinking creatively in a more people-oriented manner. Artists have spent years learning to observe and think critically about human relationships with each other and space as well as how to engage people – it would be worth having them on any planning team.



Develop Independent Art Events and Small-Scale Permanent Projects

With more involvement, planning time, and know-how it is time to develop independent art projects and events. This includes a broad tent of projects that should leverage existing organizations and build partnerships in the community. The more tie-ins, the better.

Local artists should be consistently supported by the arts programming in Methuen. However, there should also be an effort to bring in artists from outside of the city to share their work with the local community. They can bring valuable new ideas and experiences to local artists and community members and lift up Methuen's profile as an art-destination.

photo from Piano in the Park, Philadelphia



Event ideas brought up during the artwalk include an art walk in downtown storefront windows, a farmers market and art-making event in Riverwalk park, a light festival along the falls and/or nearby parks, cultural festivals – the latino community, muslim communities, Lebanese communities, and Chinese communities to name a few – that celebrate the diversity of Methuen, trolley tours, Victorian walks, poetry readings, and open-space performances.

Small-scale permanent projects should also be pursued at this juncture. These should be lower-cost projects that provide high visibility. Something to remember is that whenever possible, permanent projects should be leveraged to tie-into art programming. This can include programming throughout the conceptual and creation processes as well as during the completion of the project. Examples of interesting projects for the medium term include:

- **A temporary community garden or park in empty lots or under-utilized parking lots.**
- **Creating parklets along Hampshire and Lowell Street – small parks similar to the program in Boston – where organizations and individuals can propose creating a pedestrian-friendly space out of a parking location.**
- **Developing consistent signage for the area.**
- **Creating wayfinding posts that can include historical information and photographs.**
- **Developing murals along small walls such as the retaining wall on the northwest corner of Osgood Street and Broadway, the walls of the old TV building, various retaining wall along the northern side of Osgood street along the mills, and the walls on the path from Hampshire Street to the view of the falls.**

- Develop small cut-out steel sculptures to attach to light posts at the five-points intersection and other areas.
- Creating an empty picture frame in front of the Falls for people to take selfies with.
- Creating light-post banners that have locally-composed poetry printed on them.
- Small paint projects on the five-points intersection.
- Creating interesting and vibrant “Welcome to Methuen Center” signs at major junctures such as the five-corners intersection and along Broadway.
- Paint images and patterns on Hampshire street or at intersections such as Hampshire Street and Lowell Street.
- Art along the rail-trail overpass at the five-points intersection.



left, *We Were Here* Poetry Art Installation by Kelly Sherman, Cambridge,
right, Metroway Community Garden, Barre, ME

Long Term

Long-term goals should focus on building up and maintaining consistency with the programming and initiatives that already exist, broadening artistic horizons, and pushing for larger, more permanent, and capital-intensive projects.

Larger Festivals

Large festivals and arts events like those in New Bedford and Providence are always the goal, but achieving that goal doesn't happen overnight. In both of those cases, the final event – a themed cultural night featuring over 60 organizations and a massive water and fire installation – were outgrowths of small and similar events that eventually took on different forms over time. With support, determination, and engagement, some of the initial Methuen events could form into larger art and cultural festivals. These events require a dedicated staff to coordinate logistics.



Central PA Art Fair

Greater Number of Non-Local Artists

With a greater artistic and cultural infrastructure, inviting regional and even international artists could provide exciting opportunities for cultural exchange and new modes of thinking.

Low-Cost Art Studios

Creating low-cost art studios can help bring vibrancy and local investment to Methuen's center. Artists often have difficulty finding spaces where they can work consistently since they are often priced out of buildings. The irony of this problem is that artists are often the lead cause in energizing local economies since they bring a creative touch to the communities where they work. Finding a way to ensure that art space is affordable and stable would bring greater foot-traffic and help pave the way for a much more vibrant public space in Methuen Center.



Left, Western Ave Artist Studios, Lowell,
Right, Chapel Hill, NC Festifall Art Festival



Large Permanent Projects

These are large, capital-intensive projects that take time to accomplish. While they are difficult to realize, they are well worth the effort. Some of the ideas suggested include:

- An arts center that has dedicated performance, gallery, and educational space. The empty lots along Broadway and the old TV building were spaces people expressed interest in seeing an arts center.
- A large mural celebrating immigrant stories along the wall of the new Liban D'or market building.

- A large mural along Riverside Park's parking lot wall.
- A dedicated community garden space.
- Gateway sculptures that make use of recovered terracotta sculptures from old Methuen estates.
- LED Light Installation for the Falls
- A sculpture for the Falls
- An interactive sound-art installation referencing the organ at Methuen's music hall.
- Greater pedestrian infrastructure – explore turning parking into parks
- Creating a child-friendly park space
- Building art into the new rail-trail.



top, two UC Denver
Students. right, London
Lumiere Light Festival



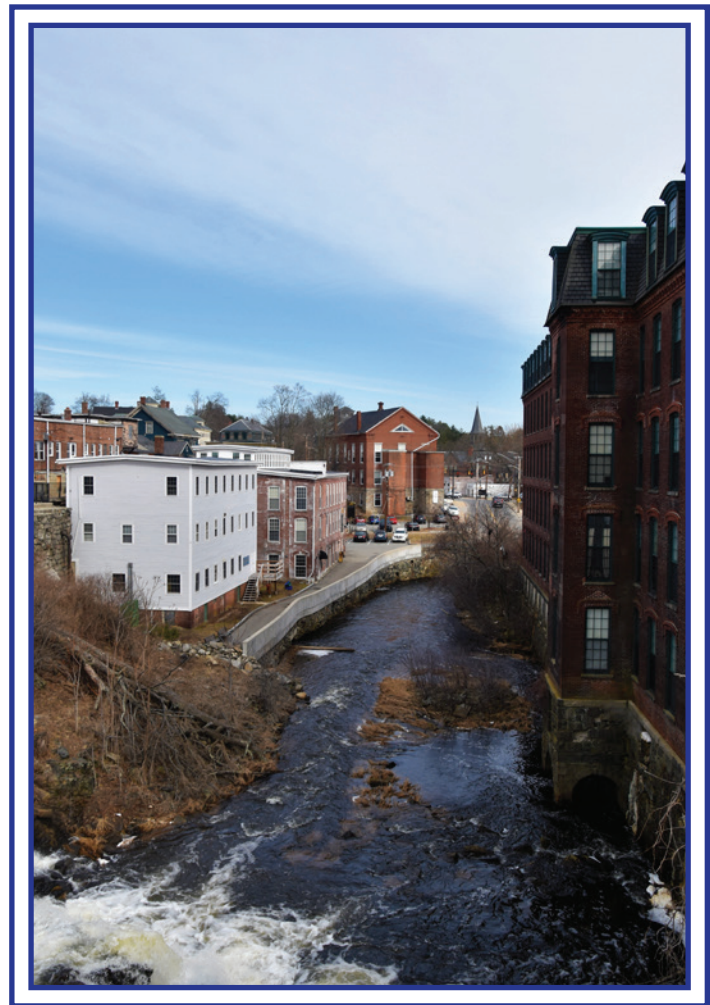
Location:

Focusing on High-Impact Areas

There a handful of areas in the Methuen downtown where a quick project could yield a tremendous visual impact. Furthermore, by creating density with art projects, people associate the entire location with art and culture rather than just considering the project a one-off initiative. Identifying these spaces is crucial. After careful consideration of the center, there a few locations that stand out.

1. The Falls - The first and clearest location is the Falls hidden away in between streets, buildings, and shrubbery. The Falls are a hidden gem and should be leveraged as much as possible. Simple actions include creatively painting the city-owned path to the top of the Falls. The Falls could eventually become a focal point for events and for additional art installations.

photograph of the Falls - this could provide a space for art along the cement walls, a small park at the base, an interactive artwork that can only be seen from different parts of the fall



2. Hampshire Street - This is the main downtown stretch and should be the pride of Methuen. Art can play a huge role in lifting up the area and increasing foot-traffic for local businesses. Easy next steps could include an event where a portion of a parking lot is blocked off to create chalk drawings. Moving forward, beautification and maintenance of traditional structures should be a priority as well as bringing art into storefronts and public spaces. A community garden space as a parklet on raised beds would also be a strong addition.

3. Broadway - As a major thoroughfare between highway routes and nearby cities, Broadway is what most people moving in and out of Methuen see when they think of the Methuen. It is unfortunate that the major intersection with the clock-tower at Hampshire street is surrounded by open lots and little street-level activity. Improving this area would have a major impact on Methuen Center and how those from out of the city view Methuen Center. Quick actions here include creating a small parklet in the gravel space beside 271 Broadway and painting the electric box by the Masonic Lodge building.

4. Five-Points Intersection - The five-points intersection is a major juncture for Methuen and an entryway to rest of the Center. When additional planned development comes on-line making Hampshire Street, Osgood Street, and the Rail-Trail more active, a vibrant entryway will be even more important.

5. Riverwalk Park - Riverwalk Park is a gorgeous but underutilized park. It also has a number of facilities that are in sore need of attention. There is a large cement area that has fallen into disrepair that was initially built to house an ice-skating rink but was only used twice and the murals along the parking lot wall are falling apart. That being said, the park and the surrounding area have a lot of opportunity to improve. The central cement area is a wonderful open space for events and there are many walls that could serve as canvasses for mural projects. Engaging this space will likely require greater planning than the quick projects recommended for other spaces, but would be worth the effort.



Riverwalk Park - This space could become active through community gardens, consistent programming, temporary and permanent art pieces, and art fairs.



Hampshire Street - Simple artistic banners can be added to great effect along with raised garden beds and pop-up galleries and performances in vacant lots and buildings.



Broadway - Small art interventions along Broadway and using interesting signage to pull passersby into the activity occurring in the center.

Options:

Paths for Public Support of the Arts

The City of Methuen has already shown interest in creating a vibrant community – its pursuit of a 40R Smart Growth District designation, its commissioning of this report for the arts, another report for changes to traffic patterns, and winning of a million-dollar grant are a testament to its commitment. The question moving forward is: to what degree should Methuen continue to support the arts? As illustrated in prior sections, while government is not the only entity involved in support the arts and arts initiatives, its support – in both regulatory and financial support – is almost always crucial. Below, we have provided a handful of scenarios on what various levels of support may yield.

- **Regulatory easing** – this is one of the cheapest initiatives since it makes it easier for artists to host art events and create art projects.
- **Creating a Map of Cultural Assets** – this will have a modest upfront cost and small upkeep costs that could likely be taken on by city staff or eventually, a member of the arts non-profit.



Cambridge City Dance
Party in Central Square



Illustration of Manhattan
Culture by Hye Su Lee



Pop-up performance, by
MKSK, Covington, KY

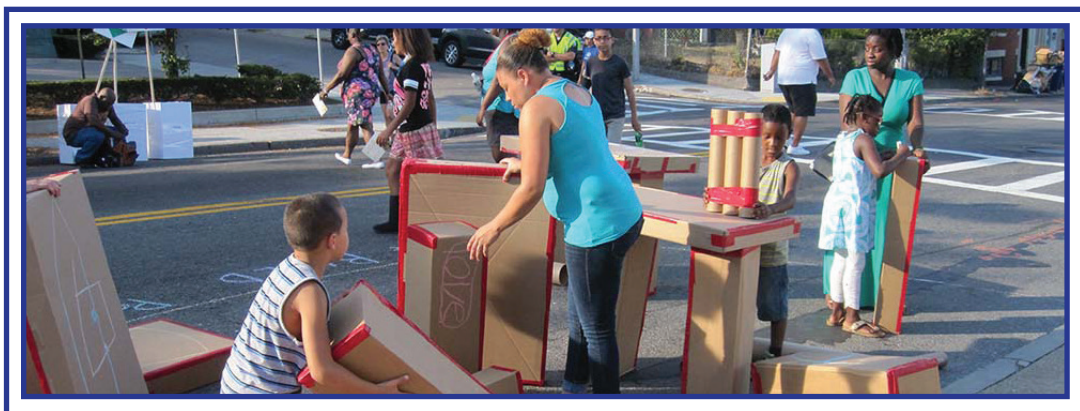
One Percent for Art Program – Enacted in many cities and states across the country, this program ensures that any city or real estate development project of over a certain amount (often \$100,000) set aside one percent of their budget for the arts. This policy has had an incredible effect on every city that has enacted it and has been welcomed by both the civic and business community for its positive effects. This is another method municipalities can use to develop a more consistent stream of funds for art projects.

Fireflies Art Installation - Cai Guo Qiang,
photo - Jeff Fusco, Philadelphia, 2017



- **Arist-in-Residence** – An artist in residence means that the city would sponsor an artist to work on their practice for a set time-period – often a quarter of half of a year. These programs provide unique support to artists and performers, bringing special cultural capital to the city. Residencies can also include requirements that the artist provide an educational component as well as showcase their work at the end of their time. Residencies provide sponsorship in a variety of manners that include free studio space, free living space, free workshop and machinery access, and a stipend.
- **Continued Programming (especially until non-profit is formed)**
 - Programming, building connections, and coordinating initiatives is crucial for a successful art initiative. Having a dedicated person working part-time or full-time with experience in the art field would help to ensure that timely and consistent programming occurs – particularly in the time prior to a non-profit getting off its feet. This person would aid in continued outreach efforts, active engagement, planning for the future of the arts in Methuen, aiding with the formation of an art non-profit for the city, and working with active community members to create art events and projects.
 - ***Grant-Writing and Project Realization Resources*** – a part-time or full time person could also provide important aid to Methuen residents who are interested in developing art projects but do not know how to transform the project from an idea to a reality. This would include knowledge of funding resources, help with grant-writing, and proposal reviews.

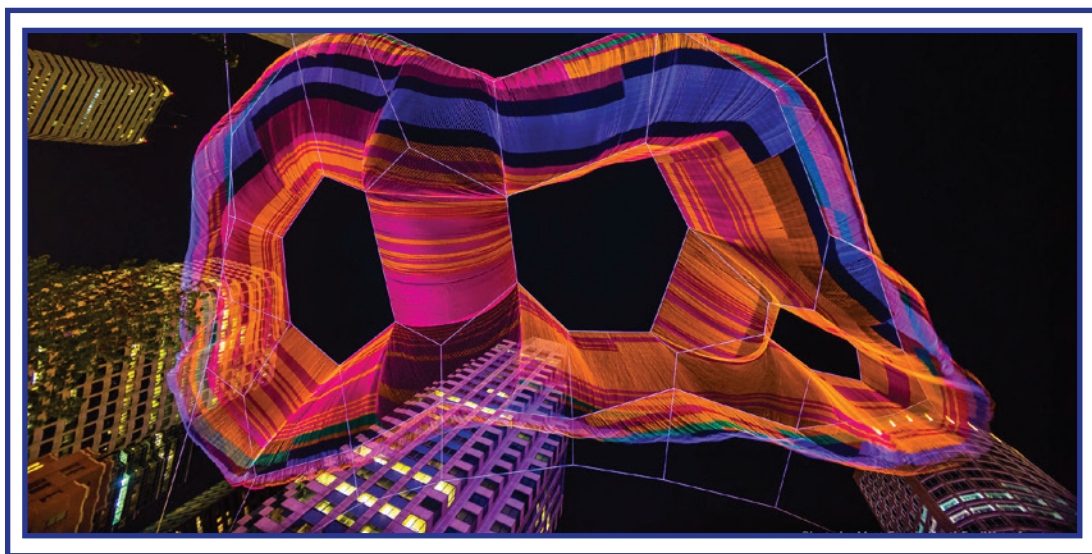
- **Micro-Grants** – These would include a handful of small block grants to artists and arts organizations proposing some sort of placemaking project. Funding would go to materials and artist stipends. Funding could be variable based on the project with a maximum of \$600. Consistency over a long period of time is far better than a one-off project. Five \$400 grants each year is far better than twenty grants in one year without follow up.
 - The city could work with its various departments and private property owners to identify locations where people could easily propose work. This would require additional work.
- **Large Grants** – Larger grants lead to larger and more laborious projects. These projects can often range from \$1,500 to \$8,000. The process for these projects can be either requesting proposals or requesting qualifications. For projects that require engagement and greater deliberation for a public space, the RFQ process is recommended. However, if the city is hoping to spur imaginative projects in sites that haven't yet been identified for projects, the RFP or a mixed approach may fit better.



Pop-up playground for Circle the City Festival in Boston

- **Large RFQ Projects** – Large art projects are exciting and impressive additions to neighborhoods. When embarking on one of these projects, the city could either partner with an outside entity or organize the project itself. When working with an outside entity, there is greater flexibility for artist selection as open calls are not mandated. For instance, a non-profit may already have a particular artist in mind for a project and is looking for the city to provide a grant for their project.

When a city organizes a large project itself, it should always rely on a Request for Qualifications approach. The first round would identify up to three artists to provide a design for the project and an honorarium to compensate them for their design regardless of whether they are chosen or not. This approach ensures both equity of opportunity for artists since applications for large RFPs are often impossible for small art studios and individual artists and well designed and thoroughly researched projects since the artist is being compensated for the research phase of the project.



Art Installation, Janet Echelman, Boston Greenway, 2015

Conclusion

Methuen has immense potential for building a vibrant arts community. However, the city's center has certain problems: a knotty road system, a lack of commons, and a number of vacant, and unkempt properties – not to mention siloed arts groups and a lack of formal public arts organization. While navigating the context of Methuen will not be easy, in the author's opinion, there is a pent-up desire to make the Center vibrant and energetic. When performing outreach, everybody lit up when they heard the city was conducting the art-walk to identify ways to bring art to Methuen's center.

In the six months since the initial outreach and research were conducted, an explosion of activity is poised to transform Methuen's Center. Since the Art Walk, there have been community meetings and over 20 Methuen residents are actively engaged in bringing Arts to the city. In this short time, the nascent group has found a name, the Methuen



Arts Partnership, and has begun to chart out several impactful Arts initiatives including a public art grant, a monthly Art in the Park series that incorporates interactive music, mosaic installations, dance, and visual arts components, a little library program, a cleanup day, and free studios for Methuen artists.

We hope that this report honestly portrays the situation in Methuen and provides the needed context, tools, and recommendations to build a Methuen filled with the arts and all of the social, cultural, and economic benefits that the arts bring.

