

Melrose

People-powered parklets

In June 2020, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation launched the [Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program](#) to assist municipalities in meeting their individual needs for safe outdoor recreation, commerce, community activities, and mobility in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The grant provides technical and funding assistance to help Massachusetts cities and towns conceive, design, and implement tactical changes to curbs, streets and parking areas in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. Some municipalities have also incorporated creative elements to further enhance their new spaces; the case study below highlights one such creative activation. For more case studies and examples, please visit www.mapc.org/resource-library/shared-streets/

Overview

Community advocates in Melrose, Massachusetts corralled this small city's grassroots energy and local creative community to design and build their own modular parklet.

Key Features:

- Strong partnership between Mayor and City staff, advocates, volunteers, local arts organizations and businesses.
- Modular design can be easily replicated, expanded, and made with readily available materials.
- Wooden parklet with planters and interchangeable painted panels featuring contributions from local artists and community members.

Goals:

- Cultivate stronger networks among community advocates, municipal departments, and the local creative community.
- Provide safe options for outdoor seating and socializing near local businesses and public transit during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Develop a sturdy, modular design that could be redeployed annually and easily replicated in parking spaces throughout town.

Context

When the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) announced the first round of funding for the Shared Streets and Spaces Program in June 2020, Jonah Chiarenza and Ryan Williams, officers in the volunteer-led Melrose Pedestrian and Bicyclist Committee (Ped/Bike Committee) took note. They realized that the grant offered an exciting opportunity to kickstart the expansion of shared spaces and safer streets and reached out to the City to pursue the idea.

Thankfully, the City was already on board and poised to pursue the Shared Streets and Spaces grant opportunity: adding parklets was part of the City's 2017 Master Plan, and City staff were exploring opportunities to create more outdoor gathering spaces amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The City had also heard from many members of the community expressing interest in more seating downtown and in other business districts, specifically in the form of parklets, through an extensive community outreach campaign associated with the recently launched [Wayfinding & Creative Placemaking Initiative](#).

Process

Following a series of conversations with the Ped/Bike Committee and Chamber of Commerce, the City of Melrose applied for Shared Streets and Spaces grant funding in July. For budgeting purposes, the City based the proposed parklet design on an example already deployed in neighboring Andover, MA. However, as a sign of the great working relationship and trust between the Ped/Bike Committee and the City, the Public Works Department agreed to an inventive approach that would yield something a little bit different.

Jonah reached out to a friend, Melrose-based architect [Emily Lammert](#), and floated an idea: what if they designed a parklet themselves? Eschewing off-the-shelf concrete barriers and plastic fencing popping up in parklets in other communities, Emily and Jonah developed a modular wooden design that could be made using readily available materials and quickly scaled to expand shared outdoor space in locations throughout the city. The design also featured space for planters and panels to showcase art and branding.

Following a conceptualization and design phase, including construction of a test build module, the project kicked off in September 2020. The Department of Public Works coordinated all materials procurement working closely with the Ped/Bike Committee throughout the process, from concept development through last-minute design modifications. Materials were sourced from numerous local vendors, including Avon Supply and Moynihan Lumber. The Ped/Bike Committee then invited fellow committee members, friends, and family to a volunteer work session. Over the course of one weekend in October, a group of local volunteers built the parklet in the parking lot of a local school.



Image Credit: Jonah Chiarenza / Melrose Ped/Bike Committee

But one key piece of the project was still missing: the Ped/Bike Committee wanted to showcase local creative talent on the parklets and designed a system of modular panels, but weren't able

to coordinate with any artists in the fast-paced development and design process. The Committee reached out to Melrose's local community arts organization, [Follow Your Art](#) to see if they could help. Follow Your Art's director, Kris Rodolico, stepped up to the challenge and organized an outdoor, pop-up painting workshop on a busy stretch of Main Street outside Starbucks. Knowing that she had little time for community engagement and marketing, Kris timed the workshop to coincide with the launch of a new wayfinding project hosted by the Melrose Wayfinding & Creative Placemaking Committee.



Image Credit: Kris Rodolico, Follow Your Art Community Studios

In late October 2020, the parklet debuted on Main Street in downtown Melrose with a ribbon cutting attended by the Mayor, a former Alderman, two City Council Members, and the Chair of the School Committee. Brightly colored, painted panels featuring creative contributions from community members were added to the parklets shortly thereafter, in early November. In January 2021, the City moved the parklet to the Melrose Public Library, which has transformed the parklet into a free, outdoor space for community members to access the library's Wi-Fi network.



Image Credit: Jonah Chiarenza / Melrose Ped/Bike Committee



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Timeline

- June – August 2020: Planning, design, and test build.
- September 2020: Melrose Department of Public Works procures materials for parklet.
- October 2020: Volunteer build day; parklet installed on Main Street.
- November 2020: Painted panels added to parklet on Main Street.
- January 2021: Parklet relocated to the Melrose Public Library.
- April 2021: Parklet redeployed on Main Street.

Partners

- Melrose Pedestrian and Bicyclist Committee (lead organizer)
- Follow Your Art (creative community partner)
- Melrose Department of Public Works (materials procurement and installation)
- Melrose Office of Planning & Community Development (grant management and reporting)

Funding Sources

- Grant Funds: Melrose received two grants totaling \$59,160 from the Shared Streets and Spaces grant program. Of this total, **\$39,600** was allocated for parklets, and the remainder was used to implement sidewalk extensions and traffic calming on residential streets.

- Municipal Funds: **\$1,240** of City operating funds for planting materials, tables and chairs.
- In-Kind Support:
 - Melrose Pedestrian and Bicyclist Committee and Volunteers: **200 hours** of project development, management and construction services.
 - City of Melrose Department of Public Works, Office of Planning & Community Development, and Mayor's Office: **100 hours** by various City staff on grant application, budgeting, management, and reporting; materials procurement; transportation, assembly, and installation services
 - Melrose Office of Planning & Community Development: **40 hours** of grant management and reporting.
 - Follow Your Art: **15 hours** of design and facilitation of community arts services, plus materials at an estimated value of \$200.
 - Emily Lammert Design Studio: **45 hours** of design services at an estimated value of \$5,625.

Direct Costs:

- Lumber and other building materials: **\$10,000** (Moynihan Lumber, Home Depot, and Avon Plumbing Supply)
- Tables and chairs: **\$1,085** (Central Restaurant Products, Indianapolis, IN)
- Plantings: **\$155** (McCue Garden Center, Woburn, MA)
- Paint and Sealant: **\$200** (Follow Your Art)

Successes

- The project proved politically popular: several local elected officials showed up for the ribbon cutting.
- Residents appreciated the opportunity to linger outdoors in the Downtown (which, while lovely for strolling and shopping, does not have very much seating).
- The project has spurred local conversation about the need for more shared outdoor spaces.
- The parklets have also spurred greater interest in the possibilities for community arts projects in Melrose.

Tips for Success and Lessons Learned

Advice for other municipalities:

- **Art is not an add-on.** Engage artists and community organizations at the beginning of your project to understand their needs and ensure that creative partners have a seat at the table when conceptualizing and developing the project.
- **Get to know your local creative community.** Talk with artists to understand their creative practice, including kinds of media and materials they work with and how they work.
- **Compensate community partners.** Be sensitive to artist's and community organization's needs, processes, and time constraints, and compensate them for their work.

- **Find your champions.** The Melrose parklet project was a success thanks to the energy of local volunteers as well as the support of local political leaders, who trusted and empowered the Ped/Bike Committee to spearhead the project.

Our takeaways:

- **Identify allies in local government.** Melrose had recently elected a new Mayor, who was receptive to expanding and improving the public realm in this suburban Boston bedroom community just north of Malden—a key factor in generating political buy-in for the project.
- **Be opportunistic.** The COVID-19 pandemic unleashed new sources of funding, and community advocates quickly put funds to use to address a local need for shared outdoor space.
- **Build a network.** The project | **Future Vision and Projects**
- In winter 2021, the Ped/Bike Committee applied for and was awarded \$1,500 from the Melrose Cultural Council to collaborate with Follow Your Art and the City of Melrose on rolling out an art program for the parklets in 2021.
- Leads recognized that Melrose already had a strong network of people interested in working in and with community and organized residents accordingly.

The Committee has partnered with Follow Your Art to develop and implement artist-led workshops that will engage community members in art-making for forthcoming parklets. Most importantly, the City procured materials over the winter to build another three new parklets based on the same modular design, and plans to install this next round of parklets in spring 2021 in several additional commercial areas around the city. The Department of Public Works has committed to building these parklets, a significant investment in this important community and business amenity.

For more information, visit the [Melrose Ped/Bike Committee website](#) or contact the [Melrose Department of Planning and Community Development](#).