



# Interactive Storefronts: Engage Residents Through Artistic Installations in Storefronts



CULTURAL/  
ARTS

Provided by SME Consultant

Civic Space Collaborative

Location

Creative Commons storefronts at 554 Main St, Worcester, MA

Origin	During the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan (2020), Interactive Storefronts was created by Claudia Paraschiv, Adrienne Schaeffer-Borego, and Michelle Moon (Civic Space Collaborative), with Evelyn Darling and Andrew McShane (Worcester BID) and Hank Van Hedio (Worcester PopUp at the JMAC), and Courtney Truex (Menkiti Group).
Budget	 <p>Low Budget (\$4,800): Full installation, including \$900 artist stipend and \$300 material budget for each artist/storefront</p>
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (6-9 months)</p>
Risk	 <p>Low Risk</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Transformation of empty storefronts; Increased foot traffic; Ongoing implementation of the storefront program
Partners & Resources	Funding by Downtown Worcester BID and the storefront space’s owner, the Menkiti Group, with instrumental support from Hank Van Hedio of Worcester PopUp at the JMAC. The Downtown Worcester BID oversaw the installation days and coordinated directly with the artists.
Diagnostic	<p>Interactive Storefronts were a direct response to the shifting COVID-19 landscape, where social distancing was a key factor to maintain public health, yet engaging the community in public processes remained an important goal.</p> <p>The Interactive Storefronts operated simultaneously with an online survey and the development of a Downtown Placemaking Plan. Interactive Storefronts enabled civic art for public engagement in a creative and safe manner according to current COVID-19 best practices for public safety. Staggered installation times and viewing art through a storefront was a COVID-friendly activity. The use of photography, social media, and QR codes were engaged. The project helped bring art to a diminished Downtown, support a local artist community, and engage residents in a planning process while maintaining public health.</p>
Action Item	<p>Interactive Storefronts enlisted local artists to engage residents in feedback for the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan and enliven downtown storefronts in anticipation of the Creative Commons at 554 Main Street. Residents and Downtown visitors were able to view the public process of the placemaking and beautification survey unfold in-person. Over several months the Interactive Storefronts traced the survey progress from survey questions, to community answers, and finally to proposed public space placemaking interventions. The goals of the project included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging residents to enjoy public art in Downtown Worcester.</li> <li>• Encouraging residents to provide input toward the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan in a real physical space, and to interact with the installations through photography and social media.</li> <li>• Motivating residents to access the full placemaking survey via QR codes.</li> <li>• Supporting the local artist community, especially emerging artists, while keeping opportunities for engagement alive during COVID-19.</li> <li>• Prototype Interactive Storefront Art for future iterations.</li> <li>• Creating public art while maintaining safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>



## Action Item (Continued)

The storefronts featured temporary installations from August to December 2020 with a rotation of three phased installations:

**Phase 1:** Placemaking survey engagement to prompt people to take the online survey (with a QR code) and respond to a question on site through safe interaction.

**Phase 2:** Survey results to communicate primary survey results to the public.

**Phase 3:** Placemaking proposals to illustrate primary placemaking interventions coming to Downtown Worcester.

Artists creatively brought empty storefronts to life and engaged residents to participate in a placemaking survey with such novel artistic strategies as creating a “mirror” to show who Downtown Worcester is and encouraging viewers to take a photo for themselves and post on social media.



Interactive Storefront Installation Phase 1 (Survey Questions) by Joshua Croke

## Process

### Planning

In Worcester, the Interactive Storefronts served multiple purposes: engaging the community to participate in the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan, activating empty storefronts, supporting the local artists community, and keeping public health as a priority during Covid-19. The Interactive Storefront Committee emerged from these desired outcomes. Our Interactive Storefront Committee met weekly for several weeks and communicated by email to get from concept to implementation efficiently.

It is important to engage the community around a common issue: Identify a local policy, public realm / placemaking, or community / environmental issue that would benefit from creative community engagement. For Worcester Interactive Storefronts, the project engaged residents to participate in a survey for the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan.



Interactive Storefront Installation Phase 2 (Survey Answers) by Joshua Croke



## Process (Continued)

### Create an Interactive Storefront Committee:

Identify one to three local groups to help shepherd the project. In Worcester, the collaborative efforts between Civic Space Collaborative, the Downtown BID, the building owner, and local Worcester PopUp covered all the necessary needs for a successful project. Local groups should have expertise, connections, and missions around local placemaking, creative endeavors, community building, or particular issues as they relate to the policy issue to be addressed. For instance, if the goal is to inform residents about sea level rise, then a local nonprofit focused coastal clean-up may be a good partner.

**Identify a Project Lead, clarify roles for the Committee members, and create a project implementation timeline, and clear budget.** The Project Lead is responsible for overseeing the Call for Art, shepherding the selection process, and aiding the implementation. The Lead can be a member from the Committee, or a hired local with an interest in civic and/or artistic engagement and can themselves be an artist. Civic Space Collaborative led the initial process including the Call for Art, and up until the artist selection, and then wrote the artist prompts for Phases 2 and 3 based on survey responses and selected projects. For implementation, the local Worcester team (Downtown BID and Worcester PopUp) took over to support on the project on the ground. This was a successful transition of leadership that strengthened the relationship between local institutions and individual artists and built local capacity to create similar projects in the future.

**Identify location(s):** Identify visible and accessible empty or underused storefronts for the art-work. Note that underused means that, while the space may have a tenant, the tenant might not have the ability or inclination to outfit their public facing storefront and may benefit from the artistic installation. In Worcester, the Interactive Storefronts served the plans of the building owner to create an artistic hub in the future, Creative Commons, as well as the goals of the rest of the Committee. Ideally, finding shared goals is important, but equally effective is using a storefront activation to serve multiple discrete goals.

**Build and support the local artist community:** One of the goals of the project is to help build up the local artist community. To create a more supportive and inclusive process, the Call should clearly favor local artists, and it should be accessible to artists at different levels of their career, especially beginning, and of varying degrees of proficiency in English, technology, or other barriers to applying. The Committee Members should be comfortable acting as support to the artists. In Worcester, four artists participated over the course of seven months as they activated the storefronts and were involved in the civic process of the Downtown Worcester Placemaking Plan, the Covid-19 response of bringing art Downtown, and building community with each other.



Artist: John Vo, Phase 3 (Public Space Interventions)



Artist: Pamela Stolz, Phase 1 (Survey Questions)





## Process (Continued)

### Installation + Removal

**Preparing for Installation:** The client and artist should sign contracts and be clear about expectations soon after selection that outlines the deliverables, time, and payment amount. In addition, discuss need and coverage of insurance. In the case of Worcester, the building owner provided insurance coverage for the artists during installation, as well as for the artwork.

**Publicize and promote the installation:** Distribute press releases, post in eNewsletters, and on social media about the installation. The Worcester BID and Civic Space Collaborative worked to develop the materials and publicize the project.

**Installation day and events:** Determine appropriate times and a timeline for installation. If social distancing is required, then stagger installations of multiple storefronts. If the installation is entirely from the interior, then public viewing on the installation day can still follow public health social distancing guidelines. If social distancing is no longer required, then installation day is a good opportunity to engage the local community by providing a local ambassador to speak with the public about the goals of the project. In the case of Worcester, we maintained social distancing as was necessary for public health. Each artist had a set time for the installation and a BID staff member met the artist on site. The installation is also a good opportunity to hire a local photographer to document the process and any events.

**Help visitors view and understand the storefront art:** Provide simple, legible information about the purpose of the installation and a bio of the artist(s) on site, and to translate the information as appropriate. A QR code is an effective way to connect interested viewers with more information. At the Worcester Storefronts their signs about the survey with QR code and website links posted for the Phase 1 installation.

**Removal of installation:** In few cases, the artist can save the installation for another purpose; however, in most cases, the installation will need to be removed and properly disposed. Recycle as much as possible, for instance in the case of fabric art installation, use textile recycling. In the case of paint on glass, use a bladed paint scraper to remove all paint without getting it into the storm drain system. If the paint is stubborn, spray the on the glass mural/paint with a mixture of warm water and acetone at a 1:1 ratio, soaking the scraper in the mixture prior to scraping. Keep a trash barrel close by to toss the paint chips and a broom and dust pan to sweep up and properly dispose of paint dust.

Following this Storefront Installation the BID installed a snowflake installation in winter 2020-2021 and is working on larger storefront installation in 2021.



Artist: Eamon Gillen, Phase 1 (Survey Questions)

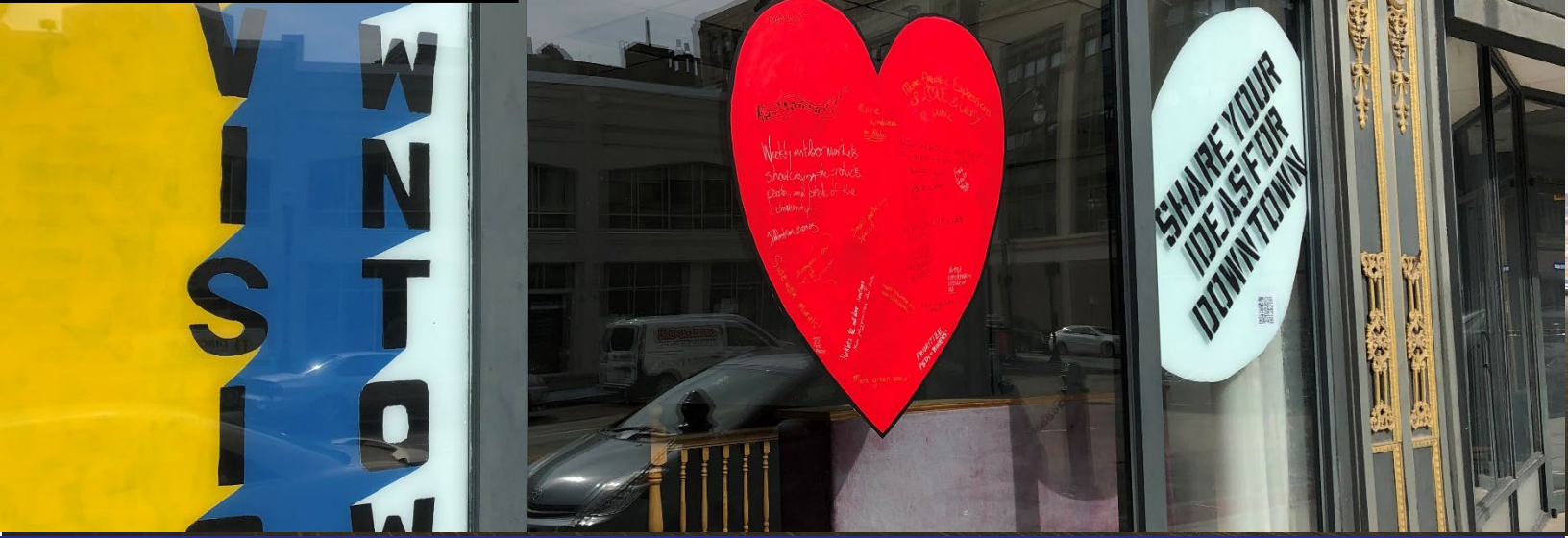


Artist: Eamon Gillen, Phase 2 (Survey Answers)



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