Commoners:
Cedric Douglas – Upham’s Corner Public Artist
Maria Finkelmeier - Founder of Kadence Arts
Kadahj Bennett, Alexander Castillo-Nunez, Jesse Tolbert – HOME Association
Jamie Gahlon – Associate Director of HowlRound
Charlie McCabe – Director of Public Programs at the Rose Kennedy Greenway
Brian Militana – Project Manager at Sebastian Mariscal Studio

Introduction by Ron Mallis

Looking at Dewey Park as a canvas for an “Arts Commons,” we identified a series of ideas focusing on an interdisciplinary approach to art in public places and sharing resources.

Jamie Gahlon presented on Howl Round and the Theatre Commons:

Howl Round is a movement of theatre practitioners committed to advancing the health and impact of not for profit theater. We want theater to be accessible to all with no barriers. A Commons to us is a form of wealth we inherit or create together, which is shared in order to benefit an entire community. No one should own culture - it should be a human right.

At HowlRound we use common - based peer production, or open sourcing, to produce content. Using this method a large community of stakeholders is created.

Howl Round also has a data project: the New Play Map. Modeled after Wikipedia, anyone can contribute or participate by adding information. The map charts development and production of new works through space and time. The goal is to create a new narrative around how theatre gets made and to democratize everyone’s knowledge of theater.

Another component we have developed is HowlRound T.V. We use it to broadcast theatre performances, panel discussions and more, anything of interest to the theatre community. This connects people across geography and provides an accessible archive of recorded video.

In addition we also host weekly Twitter discussions to provide an open platform for theatre makers as well as in-person convenings to inspire action.

The key ideas behind all of these platforms is that that community sets the agenda and every person is a stakeholder. Our role is as stewards, facilitators and infrastructure designers. We unlock abundance and don’t promote scarcity behaviors (there is enough for everyone, if we share resources efficiently).
This has worked very well for HowlRound, people have been very responsive and the participation has been incredible. We are really bringing people together and connecting. There is so much potential if we can all work together and share our resources.

Charlie McCabe presents on Dewey Park:

Greenway at a glance: 15 acres, 1.5 miles long, owned by the city and sits over a freeway. The greenway does about 300 events a year with many different collaborators. Greenway open from 7am until 11pm and we estimate about 100,000 people walking through the plaza everyday makes it one of the busiest pedestrian crossings in Boston.

This area is really great in terms of flexibility and amenities as well as the number of eyeballs that end up on it and it would be a great place for an Arts Commons. It is heavily programmed to begin with, we aim to have it programmed most Monday through Fridays as much of the year as possible. For example we have a Farmers Market on Tuesdays and Thursdays that has been running for five years. We also have demonstration gardens – where we grow and harvest food and then donate it. Plus, a large number of temporary events.

The air intake structure is a huge part of Dewey park. There is a giant box fan that pulls air out of the area in case of fire. And the park is maintained entirely organically.

There was a hesitance towards busking in the past but recently we decided we would try and do a little more Ad Hoc performances. The Greenway has started bringing in singer/songwriters to the farmers markets.

A lot of daily use of the park in warm season is just people eating and hanging out on the park. The food trucks onsite serve between 1,500 and 2,200 Monday through Friday during lunchtime.

With the number of people who pass through the area, to have even a small fraction of that veer off course and check out something in the park would be huge.

Maria Finkelmeier discussed her work, and performed:

Being a Percussionist means 6 years of higher education to make anything sound like music. Maria has performed in many different locations and areas including on stage, in galleries, at festivals and even in treehouses.

Strengths as a collaborator:
- Can perform in many styles
- Comfortable improvising & composing
- In touch with many musicians
- Capable of organizing events such as Make Music Boston and helping with concert production
Needs from an Arts Commons:
- Visual or contextual inspiration
- A place to perform and collaborate
- Ideas of how to preserve a single performance for sustainable public art
- Introduction to different sounds, instruments (found and traditional).

Alex Castillo Nunez presented on the Home Association, and performed:

Studied theatre at the Boston Arts Academy and has been involved in theatre and now photography as well. He then got into writing and poetry. Words become pictures become films.

Inspiration is found in surroundings, Alexander likes to be able to connect emotion and imagination and put them together which is something we find a lot in music. There are many ways to express emotions, music helps not only in voice but in the things behind it – they complement each other. In an Arts Commons – I can give some words and take some pictures, there’s only so much weight in that, but things become more connected when they are together.

Kadahj – Home Association also works with schools and other organizations to cultivate the creative voices of young minds. We focus on issues kids and youth in Boston are dealing with and help give them a voice when they feel like they don’t have one. We try and understand their positions through questions and conversations, and we want them to put that into something creative – an expression of how they are feeling.

Cedric Douglas presented on his work:

The number one reason – as an artist growing up in Boston I feel like Boston is not a creative place. Go to all these lectures and talk but we need to take action. This is a revolutionary city but we do not continue with that attitude in the arts. Now it seems like a lot of things are changing with a new Mayor and the appointment of an Arts Czar both committed to bringing arts to the city.

I am a Graffiti artist, and have worked for 20 years but there are not a lot of places in Boston to do graffiti art, I did work in Bartlett yard. I want people to see this type of art they never see. Graffiti and street art is prevalent in many other communities and cities in the world.

I have used my art on projects to projects aimed at solving a problem, like connecting youth to arts organizations, or reaching out to people and getting them involved in decisions about their communities. Many people don’t have the time to go to town hall/planning meetings, but I created a platform to reach those people. Imagine if we all came together the kind of things we could do.
I am now working on Uphams Corner community project. I received a grant form Art Place America. The goal is to get the community members feedback about what kind of art they want to see in their community so I created the UpTruck. We just set up in the middle of the street, and people just come up and work with us on art projects. Soon you have people working together and talking to strangers. We are bringing people together through art and get people to think creatively while getting their feedback to make public art. We want to take this stuff further, we want to bring in more technology so people can use that and pursue art in a different way.

We have to come together and make art in our communities and make Boston better.

*Brian Militana presented on his work:*

We are an architect and design firm working on large scale multi family project in Mission Hill that is unique because of the public spaces it has incorporated into it.

The site sits between Parker and Terrace streets. It is built into the slope of the that area and so we have a very steep three story building. There was an existing art park and community garden that the community felt very strongly about keeping. So we put a garden on the roof at Parker Street and set of courtyards in between areas of the building for community members and residents to use.

We are trying to integrate the public greenspce with art based programming and create different platform for events. The way we can contribute to an Arts Commons is in identifying potential and physical space and figuring out how they might be able to use that.

In terms of principles, its good to not start from scratch - work from resources that are there - both physical and social. Then be able to develop the physical and social structure in parallel. It’s also important to bring many different kinds of activities together in one space. Be inclusive and maximize the number of opportunities that can happen.

Be aware that sometimes when we try to be open to many different things we get a generic framework; that may be a mistake. Create new and different settings for people to react to to make people excited people about where they are at. Dewey Park is an incredible place with a lot of great stuff happening already.

*Break into working groups to brainstorm what an Arts Commons would look like:*

**Group 1:** Favorite idea was thinking of a monument or interactive permanent or semi permanent installation. Sonic playground walk, or a big public chalkboard on one side of the building, something that people can interact with in an impromptu manner 24/7. Then have mini residencies around the space. Also focus on having the public installation be something that local Boston people can insert their lives, faces and voices into. Not just a passing tourist experience - something reflective of the city. Have cccess points to draw people in and make it media and technology rich.
**Group 2**: “Boston Commons Too”
Lots of ideas, inspired by the notion of the Gum wall in Seattle. How can we make a public art installation that people can interact with? Large wall structures for each Boston neighborhood. Tall and moveable that people can interact with. They would be set up all over like a forest that you can move through. Since they are portable, they can go into the neighborhoods and the neighborhoods can curate their own pieces.

Also, because they are movable, they can be anything - backdrops or stages or take them and turn them into their own individual art installations.

Other idea is to have “Saturday Morning Springboards”. You can go to the are and learn a craft (or teach one) and it can advertised creatively all week. Put a screen up over the mural, have projections and images, also a great place for all the people who come in from South Station.

**Group 3**: Couple ideas around food trucks, lunch is a very good time with huge crowds so have performers on top of food trucks. People are in line, so you have a captured audience. If we could connect the trucks, have large scale or individual performances.

Make large scale tapestries then people could take them into the park and have their lunch there.

Snowman army – make your own snowman

Camp night- on the weekends basically vacant, have a camp night – reimagine the space with movies, food, etc.

Seed bombing – Greenway is equipped to nurture that. Seed bomb a plant or area. People can go back and be reminded of that. Learn to become green people.

*Plan to reconvene in three weeks to refine these ideas and go to the next level.*