

Marbleheader moves ‘Beyond Walls’ in Lynn

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Marbleheader Al Wilson left his job and gave himself a year to try and make something happen. The result is an art installation, “Beyond Walls,” that will light up Central Square in Lynn, literally.

“There are four components to the installation,” Wilson said.

- There will be “dynamic LED” lighting that will fill 189 bays under the MBTA underpass that runs from the far side on Central Square through the Washington Street corridor, which is typically quite dark. It should be installed in June and lit up in July.
- Twelve large-scale neon art pieces, which are actually old signs from long-ago Lynn businesses, will light up Lynn’s downtown business district, which Wilson hopes will increase foot traffic and in turn spur the economy.
- Ten murals, two by local artists and eight by international artists, reflecting the city’s cultural makeup will go up on buildings.
- A 1942 vintage I-A jet engine from GE will be turned into a sculpture and placed at the corner of Mt. Vernon and Exchange streets.

Beyond Walls is actually a group of Lynn residents, business owners and public art/placemaking enthusiasts, headed by Wilson, that is trying to create a sense of place and safety in downtown Lynn.

“We went really hard at this thing,” Wilson said.

The mission of the project is to “improve the lives of people who live and work in Lynn now and to target millennials who are becoming priced out of traditional housing markets like Allston and Brighton,” he said.

Wilson said typically if people go to The Blue Ox for dinner then to a show at Lynn Auditorium in City Hall, or over to RAW Arts for an event, they drive from one place to another. Beyond Walls is about getting them to walk, he said. If they walk maybe they stop at White Rose Coffee House or Land of a Thousand Hills on Monroe Street, he said.

“If they walk maybe they grab a cup of coffee, eat, shop,” Wilson said. “All that can be increased by placemaking.”

Which can also bring job opportunities, which could be followed by market rate housing, he added.

And they have been fortunate to find some grants to get things started. The group partnered with Lynn’s Neighborhood Development, which gave it nonprofit status and allowed the group to seek grants. Wilson said they applied for Commonwealth Places grant, which supports community-driven projects, like art installations, with matching grants.

Wilson said the entire project will cost \$255,000 when all is said and done, and thus far he has collected \$56,800. It’s enough to trigger the matching state grant but leaves him a little short of his ultimate goal, the \$255,000.

“We hit the goal to qualify for the state match April 6,” he said.

Wilson however said he’s confident they will find the remaining money to pay for the project. He has several other grants he’s sure will come through, and a fundraising event planned for May 20 at Bentwater Brewery located on the Lynnway.

“It’s from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m., there will be six bands, food trucks and Beyond Walls will do a live installation of street art on a shipping container,” Wilson said.

Donations to the project can also be made via patronicity.com/lynn, which will also give visitors a true overview of what Wilson, in his year off, is hoping to accomplish.

To keep tabs on the installation, check out the Beyond Walls Facebook page at facebook.com/BeyondWallsLynn. Committee meetings are also held every Tuesday at 6 p.m. at PickUp Modern and More, 68 Exchange St., and everyone is welcome, Wilson added.

“It’s about increasing the walkability of Lynn,” he said. “It helps everyone.”