



CultureHouse Kendall

Impact Report

CultureHouse Kendall

Supported by



culturehouse.cc

©CultureHouse, 2020



Looking for a place to **ponder** ?
Come to CultureHouse

Looking for a place to **WATCH ALEX MORGAN SCORE GOALS** ?
Come to CultureHouse

Looking for a place to **meet your neighborhood** ?
Come to CultureHouse

Introduction



On the evening of July 6th, 2019, over 60 people came to a previously-vacant storefront on an otherwise-empty street in Kendall Square's Canal District to just... hang out. On that rainy Saturday, they played ping pong, drank free tea, made tie-dyed t-shirts, and spilled out onto the sidewalk. They brought their families, friends, and neighbors. They talked with people they knew and made connections with people they didn't. A warm glow emanated from the large picture windows of 500 Kendall Street, inviting people in from the dark and stormy summer night. This vibrant, warm, and energetic gathering might not seem like anything out of the ordinary. Except if you walked down that street at the same time any Saturday before, there wouldn't be a person to be found.

All these people were there for the opening of CultureHouse Kendall. Over the course of nine months, from July 2019 to March 2020, the pop-up community space provided space to gather, added vibrancy to the street, and drew people to the Canal District. CultureHouse Kendall, our second

and longest indoor pop-up project, was a radical experiment in creating vibrancy in a place that was lacking it. The response we got from the community was overwhelming, demonstrating the need for more social infrastructure in the area.

We are endlessly thankful for our collaborators, volunteers, and staff who created a warm and welcoming community. We are immensely grateful to BioMed Realty for putting their faith in us and supporting our project. We also owe a special thanks to the maintenance team who removed our keys from the door when they got stuck, silenced alarms when they wouldn't stop, and fixed broken pipes when it started raining inside.

While the pop-up was temporary, we gained important insight into creating vibrancy in the community. This report, created from months of qualitative and quantitative data, sums up what we learned and serves as a permanent vestige of what happened during those nine months.



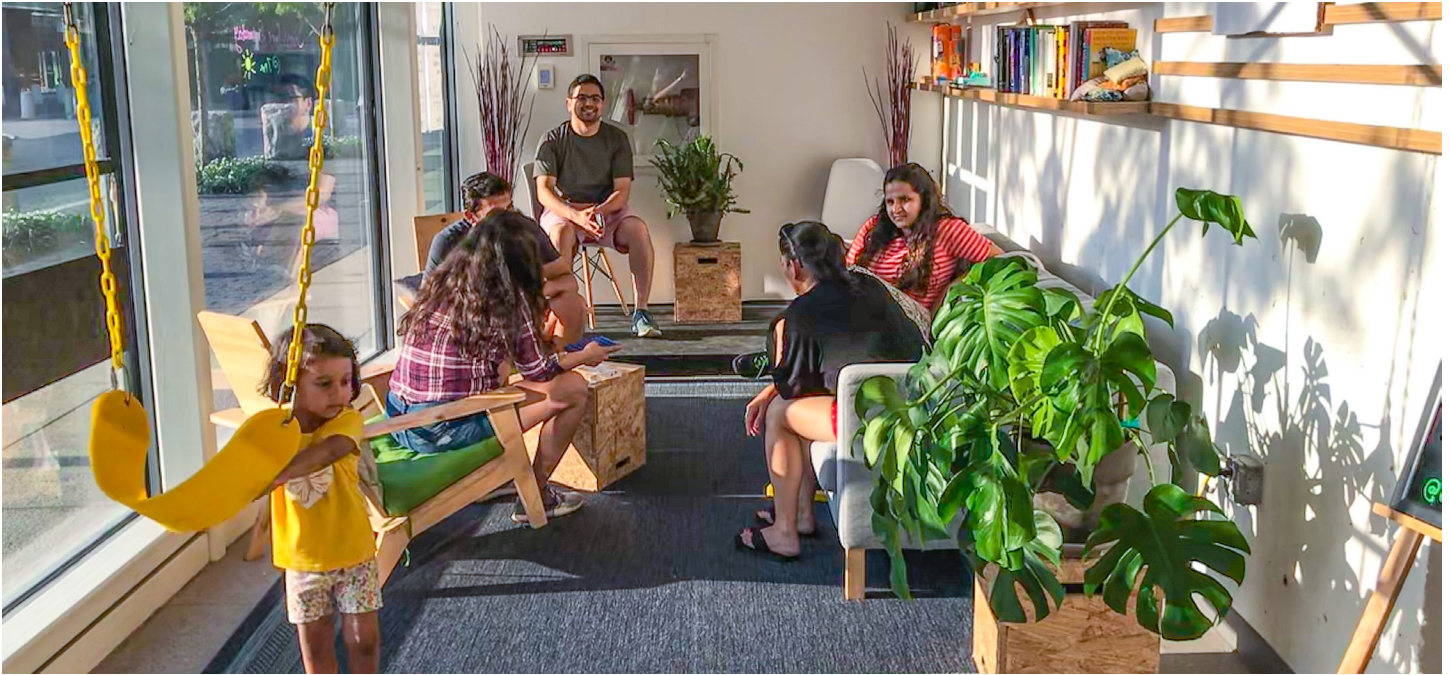
City of the Future

A Conversation with Sidewalk Labs

CULTURE HOUSE

Instagram Facebook Twitter @culturehousebos

Table of contents



Introduction	4
Context	8
Site	
Social infrastructure	
Neighborhood	
Pop-up	14
A living room for the Canal District	
Design	
Uses	
Programming	
Visitors	
Impacts	26
Stickiness in the Canal District	
Designing for vibrancy	
Spaces for families	



CULTURE HOUSE

Welcome to
Culture House
Come Inside
for Donuts
& Bread
FREE!

Association



Context

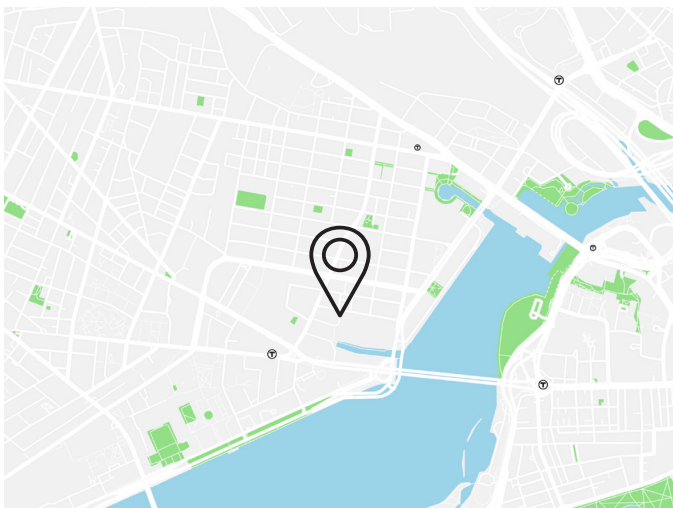
Context

Site

Kendall Square has been an industrial hub for over a century. Over 50,000 people work in Kendall Square, primarily in technology, life sciences, and professional services. It is often described as “the most innovative square mile on the planet,” due to its high concentration of start-ups and research institutions.

Canal District Kendall

The Canal District, located in Kendall Square, is a newly-developed neighborhood that has traditionally been associated with biotechnology office and lab space. In recent years, the district has become more mixed-use. New housing, restaurants, and businesses have given it the building blocks for vibrancy. From the Canal District, there is easy access to the heart of Kendall Square, the Charles River, and the MIT campus. The Canal District sits between the center of Kendall Square and the largely residential neighborhood of East Cambridge. This unique position gives the Canal District the opportunity to serve as a mixing zone for the two neighborhoods that are often separated by physical and social barriers.



500 Kendall Street

The CultureHouse pop-up site at 500 Kendall Street is on the ground floor of an office building that was unoccupied for the duration of the pop-up. The storefront, which measures about 1,300 square feet, became vacant in early 2018 when K2 Café, the previous tenant, closed. The space is laid out in a “C” shape that curves around a central serving bar. It has bathroom facilities as well as a direct connection to an open space of 1,500 square feet next door.



Mobility

With a MBTA Red Line stop a short walk away and several bus lines in the vicinity, the Canal District is very accessible. There is an extensive network of sidewalks and bike lanes with various levels of protection. There is also an underground car garage and multiple BlueBikes stations nearby, including one on Kendall Street. The City of Cambridge gives Area 1, the area of the city in which the Canal District resides, the highest Bike Score, Walk Score, and Transit Score rank.¹ The Canal District, and Kendall Square as a whole, is well-connected and easily accessible.

¹ Cambridge Community Development Department. (2019). *Cambridge Neighborhood Statistical Profile*. Cambridge, MA: City of Cambridge.

Streetscape

Kendall Street is well dimensioned for vibrant public life. With a flush curb on one side, a road made of pavers, little to no vehicle parking, and slow vehicle traffic, the street feels safe for walking and biking. During the summer, tables and chairs are put out on the side of the road across from 500 Kendall Street. They see near constant use and provide space to gather. However, when the furniture is taken away in the colder months, very few people linger on the street. The near side of the street is more inviting due to the bike racks and small trees, however there are no opportunities for sitting and staying.

Though the street itself is well set-up for vibrancy, the buildings that surround it have monotonous facades, lack street-level activation, and are not dimensioned to the human scale. Additionally, the buildings create a wind tunnel along Kendall Street that compounds any bad weather.



585 Third Street

The gravel lot at 585 Third Street, across the street from 500 Kendall Street, is immediately noticeable from the site. This lot, which has been vacant for decades, contains contaminated soil and is fenced off from the public. The area around 585 Third Street has been built up, putting the lot in increasingly stark contrast to its surroundings. The lot was originally intended to be the site of the

Constellation Center, a performance arts space, though the concept never came to fruition.

In August, 2018, the lot was sold to BioMed Realty.² They intend to build a mixed-use building on the site that will include arts and culture facilities. This project provides a significant opportunity to increase access to arts and culture facilities in the area, improve the streetscape, and create gathering space in the Canal District.

Social infrastructure

Over the past 20 years, the area now known as the Canal District has undergone a dramatic transformation. A formerly industrial area, the district now has housing, office buildings, restaurants, parks, and seasonal activities.

Activities

The area around Kendall Street is anchored by two seasonal activities, kayaking and ice skating. During the warmer months, Paddle Boston rents kayaks, canoes, and paddle boards at Broad Canal. During the winter, an ice rink is set up in Termeer Square. These attractions bring people to the Canal District on nice days, especially on the weekends. Visitors often use the skating rink and the kayak dock as their primary wayfinding landmarks for the neighborhood, a clear sign that they offer memorable, site-specific experiences.

Many people, however, come for an activity and leave directly after. With limited staying power, people tend to spend the rest of their day elsewhere. When neither kayaking or ice skating are open, there is little activity in the area.

Businesses

Several restaurants, bars, and businesses line the Canal District. The majority of them are along Third Street, Broad Canal Way, and Binney Street. 30% of area restaurants

² BioMed Realty was a sponsor of the CultureHouse Kendall pop-up

are open only during the work day, and just 20% are open all weekend. This trend further contributes to a lack of vibrant public life, especially on nights and weekends.

Public space

With no indoor public space in the area, the two parks in the Canal District serve as the main pieces of social infrastructure. In the warmer months, Termeer Square and South Plaza are both well-used during the work week. South Plaza, with its open layout, has the flexibility to host events like the Farmers Market. In the winter, when the seating is removed, the plaza often sits empty. Events like the Winter Market activate the plaza during the colder months and bring much-needed winter vibrancy.



Neighborhood

In the City of Cambridge's Neighborhood Profiles, the Canal District is part of Area 1, which includes all of East Cambridge and Kendall Square east of Broadway.

Area 1

The neighborhood contains 10% of the city's land area, 9% of the city's population, and 14% of the city's dwellings. However, 17% of the neighborhood's dwellings are vacant, compared to 11% citywide. Area 1 is quite dense, with 72% of the neighborhood's housing units on properties with 26 or more units, compared to a citywide rate of

48%. The area's high vacancy levels are a detriment to fostering strong communities, but the dense development provides an opportunity for increased public life.

Demographics

Area 1's population has risen dramatically in recent years, from 5,780 residents in 1990 to 10,336 in 2017. The neighborhood's share of the city's population has also risen from 6% to 9% in the same time period. Though the neighborhood has a median household income of \$89,818, there are 1,684 people and 182 families living in poverty. Area 1 is slightly more racially diverse than Cambridge as a whole, with 37% of the population composed of people of color. Given the neighborhood's recent population growth, inclusive gathering spaces are critical for the community to flourish.

Observations

Kendall Street is a major thoroughfare for people going to and from work. There are very clear pedestrian flows going north from 8:30am to 10:30am as people travel to work. From 11:30am to 1:30pm, many people leave their offices to eat lunch, especially in warmer weather. Finally, from 4:30 to 6:30, there are strong flows south on Kendall Street as people head home. Outside of these specific time windows, there is very little activity on the street.



Desire lines showing pedestrians in red and cars in blue

During weekday observations in June 2019, only 5% of the people we observed on Kendall Street were over 60 and not a single person was under 20. However, the neighborhood as a whole has a population that is 20% over 60 and 15% under 20. Additionally, 63% of passersby were men, while the neighborhood has an even gender split. We also observed that 28% of the people walking on the street were people of color, as compared to 37% representation in the neighborhood. This discrepancy shows that the Canal District is not attracting a representative portion of the population, with young, white men representing an outsized majority.³



Pedestrians on Kendall Street

77% – Aged 20 to 40

63% – Men

72% – White



While most people use Kendall Street as a thoroughfare, the chairs that are out in the summer encourage some people to stop and stay on the street. On weekdays, we observed an average of 40 people per day who spend more than a few minutes stopped on the street.

Before CultureHouse Kendall opened, there was very little activity in the Canal District on evenings and weekends. Our weekend observations in June of 2019 captured so few passersby that we did not get enough for a representative demographic sample. While we did observe some people who stopped and stayed, it was an average of only about 10 people per day.

³ *Observational data is based on identity perceptions, not an individual's understanding of their own identity.*

CULTURE HOUSE

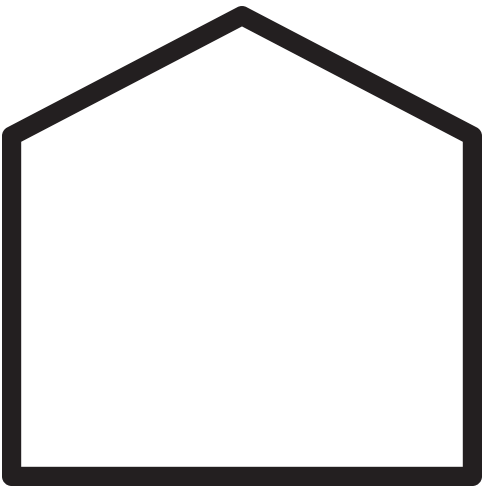
@culturehousebos

We are

- A living room for the community
- An urban design test kitchen
- A third space
- An indoor public park
- A host for regular programming

WELCOME TO
WIFI - CULTUREHOUSE
50XKUNDA
@CULTUREHOUSE

HEY!
WELCOME TO
CULTURE HOUSE
WE ARE OPEN!
Come In!



Pop-up

Pop-up

A living room for the Canal District

On July 1st, 2019, we opened CultureHouse Kendall as a living room for the neighborhood. We drew on the area's strengths – its walkability, access to public space, and anchor activities. We also filled its gaps by creating space to gather, enhancing the streetscape, and introducing the element of “stickiness” (the special sauce that attracts people to a location and makes them stay).

Non-transactional space

Free-to-enter spaces like public parks and plazas are essential building blocks of vibrant neighborhoods. They welcome a diverse set of people and give them permission to linger. Adapting this paradigm to an indoor space, a realm often thought of as private, required intentional design and stewardship.



Visitors did not have to purchase anything to be in CultureHouse Kendall, dramatically changing their interaction with the space. Rather than acting as salespeople, CultureHouse Kendall team members served as guides – explaining the pop-up's purpose, pointing people towards activities, and providing a friendly face to talk to.

Free coffee and tea

The service bar, where we served free coffee and tea, was one of the first things people saw when they walked in. Once we explained what CultureHouse was and that there was no charge, most visitors were interested in having a conversation and engaging in the space. By using pour-over coffee and made-to-order tea, we created a time buffer that encouraged visitors to interact with the staff while their drink was brewing. We also did not offer to-go cups, requiring people to stay at CultureHouse to enjoy their drink. This policy not only cut down on waste, but also encouraged people to spend more time at CultureHouse Kendall, and in turn, connect with the community.

Stickiness



CultureHouse Kendall kept people in the Canal District by providing them with a place to spend time before or after other activities. During the summer, especially on the weekends, many visitors stopped by CultureHouse Kendall after kayaking to cool off, get some water, or extend their outing with a game of ping pong. The same pattern was true with ice skating in the winter, especially with families looking to warm up. On one cold Saturday, a woman spent

two hours at CultureHouse Kendall while her niece skated. She was appreciative to have a place to send time and stay warm. CultureHouse Kendall was effective at capturing people visiting the Canal District for an outdoor activity and keeping them in the area for longer, increasing their positive associations with the area and the likelihood that they would patronize a local business.

Engaging across boundaries



CultureHouse Kendall staff played a crucial role in facilitating connections between visitors. Visitors automatically understood that the staff member, positioned like a bartender or barista, was someone they could speak with. We had countless experiences of interesting, sweet, weird, or funny conversations with visitors.

“

There were a lot of Middle-Easterners who came into the space and struck up amazing conversations with me about our shared heritage and how they ended up in Boston.

- Noor, a CultureHouse intern

”

Once a conversation started, visitors would often sit down and stay awhile – sipping coffee or charging their phones. Other visitors then felt more comfortable joining

the conversation. The area around the bar offered a platform for casual but meaningful interactions between visitors that were previously strangers.

Connecting to East Cambridge

Though the neighborhood of East Cambridge is near the Canal District, it can feel very separated. We made a concerted effort to welcome the residents of East Cambridge to CultureHouse Kendall to foster connections between the two areas. Before we opened, we asked residents of East Cambridge what they were looking for in a community space. Some people asked for space to bring their families, while others asked for chess boards. We took these suggestions to heart and, when we opened, saw many families from East Cambridge come to CultureHouse Kendall. One family told us that they don't normally come to Kendall Square, but CultureHouse made them feel welcome. They even called some of their friends and they all met up at CultureHouse Kendall later in the day.

“

It's so great to see this. There are no public gathering places besides the park and as a family, we like to do stuff together.

- A woman visiting with her family

”

Collaborating with BioMed Realty

We are often asked why we “choose” the locations we pop-up in. Though we do occasionally search out spaces ourselves, we always prefer when they choose us. BioMed Realty saw the need for increased vibrancy in the Canal District. They also saw the detrimental effect of their vacant storefronts. These goals, which aligned directly with our mission, created a strong backbone for our collaboration. Our commonalities, along with open communication, were key to the success of the project.

While the pop-up was originally scheduled to last four months, we extended our stay for an additional five months – a sign of the strong collaboration. This sustained partnership compounded our impact and allowed us to continue creating positive impact in the Canal District.

Design

Sidewalk activation

With no furniture and little activity on the sidewalk outside 500 Kendall Street, the site did not contain the conditions for vibrancy. In addition, the tall height and homogenous glass facade of the building felt unwelcoming. Activating the space in front of the storefront brought vibrancy to the street and counteracted the prevailing vernacular of the area.



One of our first actions was to create activity in the front windows. Before we opened, almost no one stopped to look into the windows of the space – there was nothing to look at. We filled the space by the windows with plants, seating, games, and frequently wrote on the windows themselves. We also hung lights close to the windows to provide warmth and coziness; a stark contrast to the rest of the block.

After seeing the popularity of the seating on the sidewalk across the street, we put out two chairs and a table each day. When the seating across the street was taken in for the winter, we kept our chairs out. These chairs, which were covered in a green turf material, were well-used throughout the fall and winter. Even in cold weather, people will sit if you give them a place to.

To provide more interaction on the street, we created a super-sized interactive voting installation adapted from the “dueling tip jars” often put out at coffee shops. The voting station, which we put outside each day, consisted of two large, clear tubes, each corresponding to an option in that day’s poll. Passersby could put a ball in one of the tubes to vote for their choice. This activation got people to stop in front of the storefront and spend time on the street. We often heard debates from inside about topics like “rom-com vs. sci-fi” or “sweaters vs. vests”.

With voting, seating, window activation, and a sandwich board, we saw a significant change in people’s interactions with the street. We noticed that people were more likely to walk on our side of the street while we were open. Even when they did not enter the space, many more people stopped in front of the storefront to talk to a friend, take a seat, vote, or make a phone call. When people linger, they are more likely to form community connections and support local businesses.¹ An active facade, like the one we created at CultureHouse Kendall, has also been proven to increase the mood and well-being of passersby.²

Interior

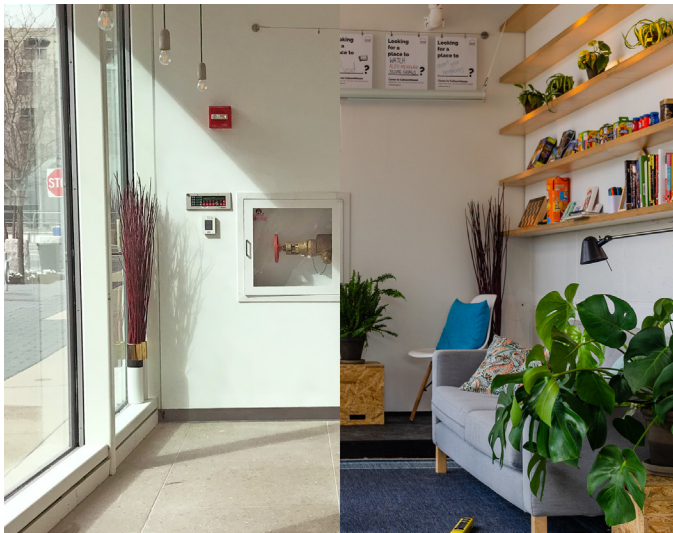
At CultureHouse, we always say that no one has a white-walled, perfectly square, and completely empty 2,000 square foot vacant space. 500 Kendall Street was no exception. Luckily, we are fine with that! In fact, we believe that the quirks and oddities of spaces

¹ Grodach, C. (2009) *Art spaces, public space, and the link to community development*. *Community Development Journal*.

² Walker, C., Nicodemus, A. G., & Engh, R. (2017). *More Than Storefronts: Insights into Creative Placemaking and Community Economic Development*. New York, NY: Local Initiative Support Corporation.

are what give them character.

When we moved into the space, it was set up as a café. It had a large serving bar and several pieces of old equipment. Due to its shape, it did not have a single large, open space, but many smaller ones. Rather than try to move the bar, which was essentially part of the foundation, we used it to our advantage. We created several smaller “zones” with different seating and environments. We centered our programming around small groups, rather than large events that required an open space.



Before (left) and after (right) the CultureHouse build out

We used half of the bar to serve (free) coffee and tea, but did not have a use for the other half. We decided to build an elevated stage that used the counter as a bench and created a unique perch for sipping tea or playing a board game.



Our prompt board, a chalkboard on wheels for asking questions and garnering responses, has followed us to every pop-up we've done. At CultureHouse Kendall, we asked questions like “What brought you to Kendall Square today?”, “Why do you love summer in the city?”, and “What do you want in a public space?”. We got a variety of responses, like “dogs!”, “bike repair station”, and “interactive art”.



We used natural materials, plants, and warm lighting to make CultureHouse Kendall feel cozy. By making much of the furniture ourselves, we created a homey ambiance. We used natural, unpainted wood for our tables and chairs and had live plants throughout the space. Incorporating elements of play, like swings and a ping pong table, also made the space feel fun and creative.

“

[CultureHouse] adds some life around here. It's all glass and steel.

- A CultureHouse Kendall visitor

”

The natural and relaxed feeling of the space stood in stark contrast to the surrounding area, made up mostly of sleek glass and sharp angles. Visitors often shared that the pop-up made them feel happy and welcome.

Uses

Only one quarter of CultureHouse Kendall visitors came for an event. The rest came to use the space as they saw fit. The open design of the pop-up space allowed for a diverse array of uses, like meeting a friend, playing a game, or getting work done.

Meetups

More spacious than an apartment but more flexible than a bar or cafe, CultureHouse Kendall was ideal for a meetup. Visitors often told us how grateful they were to have CultureHouse as a place to gather.

Organizations like the Sunrise Movement held meetings at CultureHouse Kendall, taking advantage of the free gathering space and the ability to rearrange furniture to meet their needs. A group came many Saturdays throughout the winter to play the game "Blood on the Clocktower" – sometimes attracting almost fifty people. It had been hard for them to find an appropriate place to play, since the game is group-oriented and often loud. By hosting meetups, we provided a free gathering space for already-existing communities to grow stronger.



Our most consistent and delightful meetup was a group of new mothers from the neighborhood who came weekly with their infants. They sipped coffee, chatted, and exchanged parenting tips while their kids rolled around on the floor or napped in their

strollers. Each week, new mothers would join the group. As the pop-up's closing date approached, the mothers often came up to us to express their appreciation for the space.

“

Local stay-at-home mom Emily Cole heard about the Kendall Square CultureHouse on a local parenting Facebook group, and started a weekly Mommy and Me group that uses the space to connect with other local parents. She says the proximity to a T stop, the free coffee, the couch setup and the warmth made it an easy choice of location. Additionally, because the space isn't overly crowded in the way that many local coffee shops can be, finding space to park strollers isn't a logistical mothering nightmare.

- Excerpt of a *Philadelphia Citizen* article

”

Coworking

During the day, people used CultureHouse Kendall as a coworking space. They hunkered down at our work tables, taking advantage of the free Wi-Fi and coffee. One man, who ran a non-profit and worked remotely, said he was turned off by the high prices of traditional coworking spaces, and became a regular at the pop-up. Another man, who usually worked from home, came in often because his wife worked in Kendall Square. He found our location and the space's casual nature very useful. These two regulars became friends and would often sit at the same table and work together.

Students used the space to study, as we offered a different atmosphere than that of a school library. One regular would come all the way from Brandeis, 10 miles away, to study at CultureHouse Kendall.

In addition to those who stayed for an extended period of time, people often popped in to take a phone call or have a short

meeting. Since there was no expectation to purchase anything, people could come in and out easily when they had time before a meeting or needed a quiet place for a phone call.

Play space for children

Local children were our most enthusiastic supporters. The swing, visible from the outside, was the first thing that told kids that CultureHouse Kendall was different from other places around. It often caused kids to run in, parents following in their wake. Once they discovered the free snacks, kids never wanted to leave.

Kendall Square is often associated with young professionals, but many of those people have young children. We discovered there was a large population of working parents with young children living in the surrounding apartment buildings. With most restaurants in the area geared towards tech workers, there was nowhere for these families to go. CultureHouse Kendall provided a space for them, and many became regular visitors.

“
I like this place. They have a swing inside and free stuff. This is my favorite place ever!
- A kid on the swing
”

One family in the Third Square Apartments could see CultureHouse's door from their window. The father told us that the children would get excited when they saw our lights turn on, because it meant they could come over and play. Kids were always excited to introduce new people to the space. One young girl came in and excitedly told her companion, "This is where they have the crackers and the swing."

Games

We made sure CultureHouse Kendall was

well-stocked with games. The ping pong table in the back was especially popular. Frequently, kayakers or ice skaters who wandered in looking for the bathroom would see the table and stop to play a few rounds with their friends. This opportunity allowed them to extend their outing and spend more time together. It was not uncommon for someone to come back after kayaking or skating for another game.



Games provide a framework for gathering – giving people something to focus their attention on, together. Occasionally ping pong, or another game, would provide an opportunity for people who didn't know each other to play together.

Drop-in

While the majority of CultureHouse Kendall visitors stayed for longer than an hour, around 20% of visitors were there for less than five minutes. People who were curious about the space, needed a brief reprieve from the wind, or wanted directions would stop in for a short period of time. These passersby still engaged with our space in their own ways: looking at art, asking questions, or taking shelter.

Bathroom

Especially during the kayaking season, people made use of our free restroom. Because of its location, visitors had to walk through the entire space to get to the bathroom. They were forced to see and

interact with CultureHouse Kendall. Many people who went to the bathroom either stayed or came back later.

Lunch

With the high concentration of office buildings in the area, lunch was always a busy time on Kendall Street. People would often go out to buy lunch and come to CultureHouse Kendall to eat it with their coworkers, especially once the weather got colder.

Hanging out

Though some people came with an activity in mind, others came to CultureHouse Kendall just to hang out. Groups of people would sit on the couches and talk. Individuals would read books or scroll on their phones. While the ability to hang out was helpful to all visitors, it was especially important for low-income visitors who don't have many places where they can "just be" without being questioned or asked to leave.

“

Being a middle aged man with limited income, there's not many places to go to warm up and relax and have a free cup of coffee or tea.

- A CultureHouse Kendall visitor

”

One weekend, a woman came into CultureHouse Kendall to ask us questions about local arts programs. She had just moved to Cambridge with her two children and didn't know how to get connected to the community – especially on a limited income. She returned later that day with her kids. She told us she was having a hard time getting them to leave the apartment, but was able to convince them to come play ping pong. They stayed for hours. On the way out the woman told us, "This afternoon has been a blessing."



Highlight

Ken was one of our most frequent visitors in the winter and spring. He was between jobs and staying at a boarding house, so was in need of a space to spend time during the day. Coffee shops had limits, requiring him to constantly spend money on drinks. While at coffee shops he often felt as if he was taking space from customers, at CultureHouse Kendall he had permission to linger. He told us he felt we saw him as a person, not judging him in the way he often was at commercial establishments. Ken was a very positive presence in the space, always respectful of others and willing to start up a friendly conversation.

Programming

Over the course of the nine months CultureHouse Kendall was open, we hosted 125 events and displayed five art exhibits. Approximately a quarter of all visits to CultureHouse Kendall were for an event. Though we ran many events ourselves, our best were collaborations. We hosted 73 collaborative events, making up 58% of all CultureHouse Kendall programs. We offered CultureHouse Kendall as a free place for community members or organizations to hold an event, as long as it was in line with our mission. These partnerships brought new people to the space and expanded our collaborators' audiences.

With 94% of all programming occurring on evenings or weekends, our events created activity on Kendall Street when the area was least active. Nearly a third of events were on Saturday, our busiest day of the week by foot traffic.

Open Kitchens Project

The Open Kitchens Project hosted seven

dinners at CultureHouse Kendall over the course of four months. One of our strongest and longest-lasting partnerships, Open Kitchens Projects dinners provided an opportunity for formal gathering at CultureHouse Kendall.



The Open Kitchens Project coaches immigrant chefs to launch their own food startups and invites innovative artists, writers, activists, leaders, and entrepreneurs to ask meaningful questions to spark discussion. At their dinners, they pair chefs and curators for thought-provoking three-hour community dinners. Themes for Open Kitchens Project dinners at CultureHouse Kendall included “Immigrant Stories”, “Climate Resiliency”, and “Black History Month”.

“

One reason why we so love Cambridge: for the opportunity to meet – and even have dinner with – extraordinary yet so refreshingly ordinary fellow human beings in cool places such as CultureHouse.

- Michel, an Open Kitchens Project attendee

”

Culturepalooza

Culturepalooza was CultureHouse’s take on a music festival – small, chill, and cozy. It featured eight local artists over four Saturdays in October. Musicians were paid

to perform thirty minute acoustic sets. Their styles included folk, r&b, rap, classic rock, and even Balkan dance! Culturepalooza attracted over 80 attendees to see free live music and to support local artists.

“

“I’ve always wanted to play at a place like this. This is a welcoming place... it got very lively.

- Agostino, a Culturepalooza performer

”

Film Fridays



We hosted 26 movie nights over the course of our nine months in Kendall Square. Film Fridays were consistently well-attended and brought people of all ages together. One older man consistently came to movie nights for the community that it fostered. We showed all genres of film: documentaries like *Citizen Jane*, children’s movies like *Coco*, cult classics like *The Room*, and recent hits like *Moonlight*.

Chinese Tea Workshops

Xue Song is a certified Chinese Tea expert who lived nearby CultureHouse Kendall. A lecturer at Boston College, she wanted to use her teaching skills to share knowledge, stories and good Chinese tea. She hosted three tea workshops – all of which sold out! Snow shared that “CultureHouse is definitely

a great venue for my tea workshops! It's inclusive and cozy, the staff that I worked with are all very considerate and welcoming."



Bike Workshop

We hosted two bike workshops with the Somerville Bike Kitchen. SBK is a volunteer-led bicycle repair cooperative where members of the community can repair their own bikes, learn about bike repair and attend bike events. Attendees learned the basics of bicycle maintenance and got advice on their bike problems. It was so popular that the bike racks on Kendall Street were completely full.



Sidewalk Labs Talk

Our largest event was a discussion on vacant storefronts held in collaboration with *City of the Future*, a podcast from Sidewalk Labs. *City of the Future* co-host Vanessa Quirke

previewed a new episode of the podcast about vacant storefronts, and spoke about the issues and stories she encountered in reporting the story. Vanessa then led a panel discussion with Carrie Denning Jackson from Sidewalk Labs, Kai Grant from Black Market Dudley, and Allie Girouard from CultureHouse. With 100 attendees, the event was sold out.

Freedom Through Art Collective

From July through September, CultureHouse Kendall hosted an exhibit by members of the Freedom Through Art Collective. The collective consists of 26 incarcerated artists across the United States. This exhibit was curated in direct response to the artists' desire to show their work to the public and form a connection with a new audience.



The FTA Collective exhibit showcased the work of 14 different artists, and facilitated at least four sales of artwork. The exhibit was supplemented by an exhibit-opening discussion and a screening of the documentary *13th*. After getting connected through CultureHouse Kendall, the FTA Collective facilitated an Open Kitchens Project dinner in our space.

Lloyd Williams Exhibit

After selling his work at the South Plaza Farmers Market, Lloyd stopped in and asked about displaying his art at CultureHouse Kendall. We were able to host two exhibits

of Lloyd's work: his Muses series and a set of paintings of Cambridge and Boston landmarks. We loved his vibrant portrayals of the urban environment so much that we chose his work to be featured during the first month of CultureHouse Harvard!

Visitors

CultureHouse Kendall saw 7,057 visits over the course of the pop-up. We met people who had lived in Cambridge their whole lives, people who had just moved to the area, and others who were traveling from across the world.

Traffic

CultureHouse Kendall increased traffic in the area by providing a destination and a reason to stay in the Canal District. During weekdays, we saw a doubling in the number of people staying in the area while we were open. Weekends were the busiest time at CultureHouse Kendall, despite being the lowest traffic days before we opened. Overall, our busiest day of the week was Saturday, though during the summer Sunday saw the most visitors. When the pop-up opened, we saw an eight-fold increase in the number of people coming to the area on weekends. On our busiest day, Saturday, September 28th, 152 people came into the pop-up.



By the numbers

8x – weekend traffic increase

152 – visitors on busiest day

6pm-8pm – busiest time of day

52% – stayed for more an hour

The busiest time of day at CultureHouse Kendall was 6pm-8pm, despite it being a normally quiet time of day in the neighborhood. These figures are not an accident – we specifically targeted our programming to take place during evenings

and weekends as a way to bring more people to the Canal District during off-peak hours.

We designed CultureHouse Kendall for long interactions. The longer someone stays in the space, the more likely they are to form a community connection and support the local economy. Our efforts paid off, with the majority of visitors to CultureHouse Kendall staying for over an hour.

Demographics

A diverse population visited CultureHouse Kendall. 45% of visitors were people of color, compared to only 28% representation in pre-opening observations, and 33% city-wide. We also saw an equal gender split at CultureHouse Kendall, despite women making up only 40% of passersby pre-opening.



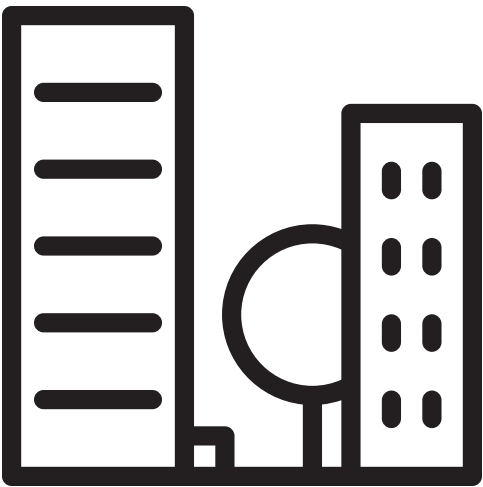
Increase in representation at CultureHouse Kendall from pre-opening observations

+61% – People of color

+35% – Women

Before we opened, the only people we saw in the neighborhood were those who worked in the office buildings. When we opened, it was fascinating to see so many other people come out and live more in the public sphere. It goes to show that you can't always tell who is in an area by observing who you see. Though there were many people who work in the area passing by each day, we weren't focused on capturing that foot traffic – we were looking to add to it by inviting the whole neighborhood in.





Impacts

Impacts

Stickiness in the Canal District



Kendall Street is primarily a thoroughfare. It does not have the evening and weekend activation required to be vibrant and mixed-use. By creating diverse programming, offering services like free Wi-Fi and coffee, and allowing for different activities, CultureHouse Kendall created a reason to come and a reason to stay in the area.

The vast majority of our programming was on nights and weekends. Despite these being low-traffic times in the Canal District, we were able to attract people to the area by providing activities that drew them in. Unlike office buildings and restaurants, spaces for gathering and cultural activities provide a mix of uses that attract people at all times of the day.

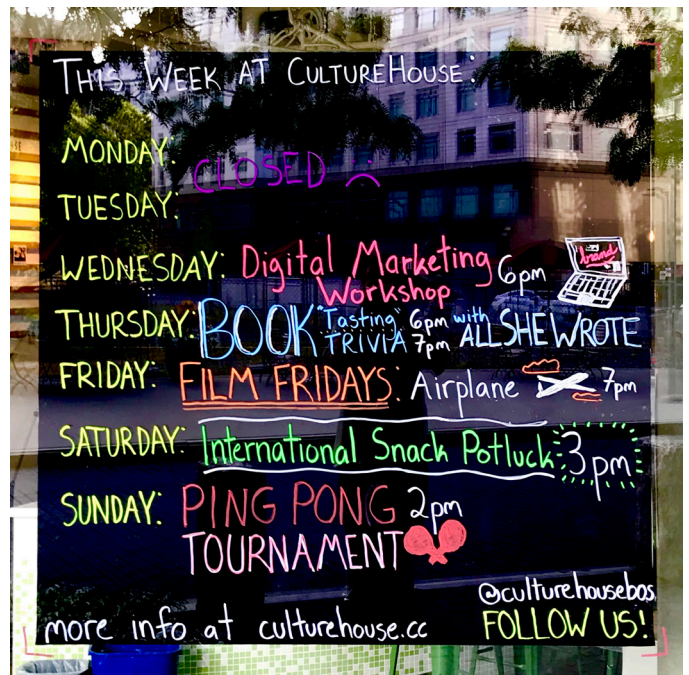
Our community living room captured people who were already in the Canal District for activities like kayaking and ice skating. This staying power compounds the positive impact these activities have on the neighborhood by creating an integrated

experience for visitors that encourages them to return.

CultureHouse Kendall encouraged long-term interactions, with 52% of visitors staying for over an hour. Spending time in spaces like CultureHouse benefits personal health,¹ strengthens community networks, and supports the local economy.²

Opportunities

Providing opportunities to sit and stay year-round creates vibrant streets and fosters a strong local economy. Simply leaving out the existing seating in the winter would go a long way. Adding blankets and heat lamps can make sitting outside pleasant in even the coldest and darkest of winters. Implementing access to free Wi-Fi in outdoor spaces also creates more staying power.



The Canal District can harness the popularity of kayaking and skating to create more "stickiness" in the area. Providing activities

¹ *How Urban Design Can Impact Mental Health*. (n.d.) The Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health.

² Walker, C., Nicodemus, A. G., & Engh, R. (2017). *More Than Storefronts: Insights into Creative Placemaking and Community Economic Development*. New York, NY: Local Initiative Support Corporation

to do before and after, like an outdoor ping pong table, or a hot chocolate stand, creates a reason to stay. More eating options on the weekend would also create additional opportunities to spend time in the District.

Increasing programming on nights and weekends is a great way to attract people to the area outside the work day. Whether it's live music, lawn games, community gatherings, or talks from experts, offering a diverse array of programming will attract a diverse group of people.

Designing for vibrancy

We consistently heard from visitors that CultureHouse Kendall was cozy, colorful, and welcoming. In both subtle and overt ways, design communicates how a space should be used and who should use it. By designing a space that was open and familiar, we communicated that CultureHouse Kendall was a place for all.



Though the building we were in did not seem warm and welcoming before we moved in, we created visual changes that were low cost but high impact. Activating the street with colorful chairs, window writing, and interactive voting introduced vibrancy to the street. We frequently wrote on the sidewalk with chalk, and put messages on our sandwich board.

While over-use of materials and colors

can be too stimulating, the use of natural materials and plants can create a sense of calm. We used soft seating in the space to further the welcoming and homey ambiance. The glow from inside CultureHouse Kendall, especially when it was dark outside, exuded warmth and comfort – a feeling that we all gravitate towards.

Opportunities

There is room for diversity in design in Kendall Square. Diverse design is needed to reflect the spectrum of people who live, work, and visit the area. The Canal District's public art projects, focus on local business, and commitment to community organizations is a promising start. Continuing this strategy will bring increased vibrancy to the area. Adding warm lighting and clear wayfinding would also help create a sense of place.



Creating an indoor public space, like what CultureHouse Kendall offered, brings people together and promotes public life. Initial designs for 585 Third Street include a similar community space that will be an invaluable addition to the neighborhood. A strong co-design process will be critical to making this space succeed. Meaningful engagement with residents will produce a space that meets the needs of the community.

Spaces for families

We did not see a single person under 20 on Kendall Street during our pre-opening weekday observations, despite people under 20 making up 15% of the neighborhood population. In business-oriented areas, there is often little social infrastructure that serves families. However, the assumption that Kendall Square is a place to work, not to live, is outdated. The number of dwelling units in Area 1 has doubled from 1990 to 2017, and the population has risen by 4,556 residents. The rest of the physical environment has lagged behind.



Opportunities

The Canal District already appeals to families through seasonal kayaking and ice skating. Future plans should also take into account families with young children. Providing a space that is play-friendly and offers activities for parents will get families out of the house and into the community. While structured programs are great for families with older children, young kids often do better with unstructured play time facilitated by well-designed spaces.



Families who visited CultureHouse Kendall often expressed surprise, alongside excitement, upon discovering the spot. They shared that, without a playground or kid-friendly businesses nearby, there were few places to bring their families. While children under the age of five represent 5.2% of Area 1 residents, they represented 14.5% of our visitors. Especially on weekends, parents would come to CultureHouse Kendall to sip coffee and talk to a friend while their children used the swings, played with toys, or ran around.



Looking for a place to hangout w/ your friends? ?
Come to CultureHouse

Looking for a place to WATCH ALEX MORGAN SCORE GOALS? ?
Come to CultureHouse

Looking for a place to meet your neighbors? ?
Come to CultureHouse

