



MEDFORD ARTS COUNCIL

September 2015

Medford, Massachusetts

Questions to our candidates for Mayor and City Council, concerning arts, culture, and the creative economy.

Your Personal Connection

We've all had defining moments in our lives. What personal experiences with the arts, the humanities, or creativity have had an impact on your life and your view of the role of the arts and culture in our shared civic life? *When I think back on my childhood, I often reflect on the sacrifice my parents made by enabling my brother and I to have piano lessons on a weekly basis. My parents were blue collar individuals but understood the value of exposing their children to the performing and visual arts. For those children that may not have the opportunity, we need to integrate the visual and performing arts into the curriculum and into citywide programming.*

The New Administration's Role in the Creative Community

The City of Medford's recent decision to allocate \$30,000 to the 2016 budget for the Medford Arts Council is an important step toward restoring a level of cultural funding that we have not seen in Medford since 2002. Even with this investment, there will likely remain a significant shortfall in our ability to fulfill grant requests and to sponsor new public art initiatives that are much in demand. Beyond the Medford Arts Council, there are numerous unrealized opportunities and unmet needs in the areas of revitalization, education, cultural planning, community development, and support for our creative community.

- Do you support the inclusion of a yearly line item for the Medford Arts Council in the city budget? What strategies would you use to grow the arts and culture budget for Medford? *Yes, I support the annual line item for the Medford Arts Council. The City should explore aggregating the various cultural opportunities under one department. Whereby, resources could be shared for economies of scale. In addition, several grant opportunities exist for cultural activities, including library services. Funding should be explored for a grant writer position which would produce added revenue. A decision on a City yearly line item would not be done in a vacuum but in collaboration with the programming of the Medford Arts Council as a recipient of MCC funds.*
- Members of the City Council have publicly called for a "home for the arts" in Medford—do you agree that a dedicated space is needed, and if so, what kinds

of resources would you marshal to make this space available? *While on the City Council, I offered an amendment to the Medford Square Master Plan to incorporate a permanent home for the art community. This would be part and parcel of the Request for Proposal for a Master Developer of the City owned parcels in Medford Square.*

- How should the city's current administrative structure be modified to support the creative community? *The structure should be modified to include it as a division of the Office of Community Development.*

A Destination for Creators, Performers, and Audiences

- The robust example of Somerville next door often leads to questions such as "Why can't we do more of that here in Medford?" (Consider that, for FY16, they are allocating nearly \$400,000 to their dedicated cultural affairs office.) What kinds of initiatives, incentives, or investments would you support to make Medford a more desirable destination for artists, audiences, and small businesses in the creative sector? *The dedication of a public space in Medford Square is one element of investment by the City. Further, I have looked into best practices of our communities and find that "The Salem Partnership" could be a viable way of promoting and incorporating artists, audiences and small businesses in the creative sector. Perhaps a collaboration between the future "Medford Partnership" and Mass. College of Art could move this initiative forward on a larger scale.*
- Some members of the creative community view the Chevalier Theatre as a special asset that is underutilized and in dire need of essential upgrades and investment that will build on recent efforts to improve its situation. How should the new administration lead in supporting this institution, and what specific resources should be provided to help realize its amazing potential? *The City and the Chevalier Theatre Commission should produce a Request for Proposal for a professional event company to run the theatre. This Jewel should be a hub of activity and a destination for our residents and outsiders alike. By working with our state and federal partners, I feel confident that resources can be garnered to upgrade this venue with air conditioning and façade improvements. I would also commit the resources of the City to participate in the Mayors' Institute on City Design which is a leadership initiative of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. With the closing of Springstep in 2012 and the Mystic Art Gallery in 2014, two important venues were eliminated from our city's small inventory of exhibition and performance spaces. What specific sites, buildings, infrastructure, or other places can you envision as being made available to the creative community to provide much-needed space for new work to be created and shared with the Medford public? In concert with area businesses, Medford City Hall, a gem of WPA architecture, could play host to monthly art exhibits in the Alden Chambers. It could also be a venue for smaller productions. Also, the City could determine the location of the current bus shelter in Medford to be "surplus property" and available for mixed uses.*

Creative Placemaking

Throughout Massachusetts, cities are experimenting successfully with revitalization, development, and social resiliency efforts that incorporate the creative use of public space—this is sometimes described as “creative placemaking.” A 2010 white paper for The Mayors’ Institute for City Design describes this strategy as one in which: “[Partners] from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.”

- What kinds of creative placemaking initiatives can you envision as being introduced or expanded to promote Medford’s livability, economic development, and distinctive cultural character? *The City should be a partner with the public to gather relevant data and provide active participation and workshops to survey public needs. Designers would then incorporate the public input into the design that meets local needs. With our senior population, I would love to introduce creative placemaking for gathering spots. This could include checker and chess tables and bocce courts. Also, attractive and durable benches should be placed around the city to support walkers and transit users.*
- The City’s 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan calls for the “Inclusion of public art in the city’s parks and open spaces”—and many residents support this recommendation. Would you support efforts to introduce new temporary or permanent public art into our parks, playgrounds, and open spaces? *Yes, I would support these efforts as people love where they live because of art and cultural opportunities.*
- What is your view of the role of the city administration in partnering with real estate developers to ensure that new construction incorporates appropriate elements for creative placemaking? *I would aggressively work in concert with developers to meet the public need for placemaking. An example of best practice is the Rivers Edge development where public space is pronounced in the landscape surrounding the commercial/residential project.*