



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?

- I grew up listening to Tufts students playing all kinds of music on WMFO, and when I was a teenager I got involved at the radio station, first as a community DJ (at age 15) then, later, as the program director of the station while I was a Tufts undergrad. Having a library of 20,000 recordings at my fingertips was heaven and I listened to everything I could. I went to live music shows as often as possible – and I still do.
- As a teen and young adult, I studied photography and enjoy taking photos to this day, and I have had small exhibitions of my work in galleries and venues over the years. I was the recipient of an LCC grant from the Somerville Arts Council for my photography 20+ years ago.
- My wife, Maria Daniels, and I have always been dedicated to supporting the arts in Medford. She served for six years as the chair of the Medford Arts Council and through her board work I met so many creative members of the community. The level of artistic talent in Medford is impressive. I eat from a bowl thrown by a Medford artist, Earl Howard. I go to concerts to hear my neighbor, jazz bassist Rick McLaughlin, perform in Either/Orchestra, and Jane Kostick's creations traveled with us as gifts to relatives in Italy.
- I enjoy local festivals and events – most recently, the first OnStage concert at the Chevalier Theatre and the excellent music programming at the Mystic River Celebration and Circle the Square. We're just at the start of realizing the amazing cultural resources in our neighborhoods – for example, local Haitian, Brazilian, and Asian artists and performers are not widely known yet, but we can be sure they are working here. We know so much more could be done in the city for the arts, and we've seen first-hand the hard work of volunteers, from the Arts Council to CACHE to West Medford Open Studios to MACI, making our city a better place.

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?
- My principal strategy for increasing the slice of the budget for the arts is the same one I think the city should use for increasing available funds for all worthy new initiatives. We need to broaden our commercial tax base by taking the necessary steps to attract more businesses to undeveloped or underdeveloped areas of the city where commercial enterprises could thrive. We can't embark on many new initiatives with the city budget at its current size, and we should find ways to increase tax revenues without burdening homeowners.
- Yes, I support a yearly line item for the arts in the city budget. The Arts Council is a logical recipient of that funding because of its transparent, established, public process for distributing funds.
- In addition to the line item for arts programming, I think the city should dedicate a modest but significant amount each year specifically to 1) Circle the Square programming for this highly successful street festival or extend its impact in some other way; 2) West Medford Open Studios, for an innovative use, for instance to offer a prize or recognition that would attract more exhibitors or collaborations like the ones happening with the Brooks School; and 3) an unrestricted annual amount to the Chevalier Theatre to help this Medford landmark with priorities including restoration and innovative programming. These three priorities could be boosted tremendously with as little as another \$30,000 or so from the city.
- Additionally, the city can and should be pursuing external sources of funding. For example, while I was a planner in Somerville, I worked with the arts council there to submit a successful Adams Arts Grant to the Massachusetts Cultural Council. We raised \$40,000 in the first year and were recipients on multiple occasions. In Haverhill, as Community Development Director I supported Creative Haverhill when they applied for and received their first Adams Arts Grant; our Medford arts community brought the director of Creative Haverhill, David Zoffoli, to speak at the Royall House a couple of years back about our experiences with the Adams Grant and economic development in Haverhill.

- 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?
- We need to host public discussions about this and related ideas as a first step. I was the first city council candidate to call for councilors to offer regular weekly office hours, back when I announced my candidacy, because I believe so strongly in public input. Questions to answer collaboratively include: what would happen in the dedicated space? Would it be simply an administrative hub, as many cities provide, or something more ambitious (and expensive): a space where the arts were practiced, including performance or screening spaces, art galleries or studios, etc.? Who are the audiences or customers? Who are the private partners who could help realize a larger vision? Where would an art center need to be located to have the most success? Would we do best to build out services in one or more existing spaces for current audiences – the library, the senior center, the Chevalier Theatre – or is a new dedicated space the best way to go? We have lots of models around us – from Somerville’s revitalized Armory building to Mill No. 5 in Lowell, with its shared maker spaces, café and the Luna. Although old mills do not exist here as they do in many of the Merrimack Valley cities, we do have industrial and modern spaces where this may be possible. We need to get a range of ideas out on the table, gauge public appetite, and serve the largest audiences with the clearest paths to success. We need to start small but start somewhere, with big ideas about the future.
- How should the city’s current administrative structure be modified to support the creative community?
Before opening up an office for the arts I’d prioritize hiring a grant writer to bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars, and shore up the community development office with staff that will interact with other city departments to bring the arts to the city through a holistic approach, by integrating it into as many areas of the city as possible. Still, having an office for the arts is a high priority, and the city council can push the new administration to make room for this in the annual budgeting process.

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?
- Again, a broader commercial tax base and a dedicated grant writer are two of the keys to building the city we all envision. My grandfather worked in an auto plant at Assembly Square. Years later I worked on the redevelopment of that area as part of the planning department in Somerville. Today we visit Assembly Row and see how thoughtful planning has transformed a neighborhood, helping

make that area a desirable destination. Vision is important, as well as being able to see long-term project through to fruition. I hope readers will consider my experience, including years of hands-on community building in the communities to which we look for inspiration. I sincerely ask for your vote on Election Day, not only because I have lots of ideas and a commitment to meaningful public participation and input, but because I know how these ideas can become reality working with municipal employees and outside resources.

- 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?
- Medford residents have painstakingly rehabilitated the Chevalier Theatre over the past few decades, making tremendous progress with scant funding. As I mentioned above, even a small annual investment in the Chevalier Theatre will make a difference, and the capable leaders there will know how best to allocate it. The organ restoration project is just a few thousand dollars short of being fully funded, for example, and with a restored organ the theater can offer a range of new programs. One issue with the theater is its sheer size; delivering programs that can fill 1800 seats is a challenge. Dedicated community members have already blazed a path forward with the OnStage concerts; as I mentioned, I was happy to attend the first one and see this successful concept in action. More such creative programming will build audiences and visibility for the theater in the local community and in greater Boston. The city can also provide low- or no-cost boosts like helping subsidize middle or high school performances at the Chevalier, ensuring as many city dollars for auditorium rental go to the Chevalier as possible.
- With a prospective programming schedule, the Chevalier would be an excellent candidate for funding through the Cultural Facilities Fund, a dedicated state program to help large scale arts venues with gap funding to meet a goal typically unobtainable from other means. In this case, installation of air conditioning may be a key project for this funding. A few years back, I authored a CFF grant for a school auditorium space in Waltham that was also a prime candidate for funding. We did not receive the grant because the programming of the space was nearly nonexistent; with programming, the state looks favorably upon these venues.
- 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?
- We have to be honest with ourselves and see that these efforts can't be sustained on wishes, volunteer labor, and modest government subsidies. Naming a privately-owned building for use as a desired arts complex would be

- inappropriate for the government to do; however, the city should have an up to date inventory of its own available property and space, and that inventoried space could be utilized for either temporary or permanent art purposes.
- The new MACI space in the Meadow Glen Mall is a perfect example of a private partnership that could be replicated elsewhere.
 - I am also a big proponent of “pop-up” stores as temporary arts venues; I attended a couple of these “openings” in Haverhill, and they were very successful.
 - The city can’t force any art studio, gallery, performance space, or other enterprise to remain open, of course, but it can create a welcoming environment, just as it should for our business community. The focus should be on increased maintenance, adequate parking, pedestrian mobility and redevelopment to make Medford beautiful again; transportation that will bring audiences to our commercial districts, and affordable housing that will enable working artists (and others) to call Medford home.

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’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?
- 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?
- While a Planner in Somerville, I devised a program in the first ever Adams Grant awarded to the city that hired local artisans to design street furniture for the Union Square plaza. The idea was to make the area an outdoor, functional sculpture garden. The other goal of the program was to hire and pay artisans to make what the city would have ordered from a catalogue anyway.
- A very specific goal for Medford should involve the creation of a regular program that features live music in an outdoor space. As of now, the area of the bus

depot in Medford Square, next to the cemetery, has functioned temporarily as this space. However, the city should plan and implement a dedicated space for performers in Medford Square, as this is one of the most popular aspects of Circle the Square and, given the number, variety, and quality of musicians who call Medford home, should be a priority.

- As someone who worked as a team member on creating arts overlay zoning in Union Square, Somerville, I know firsthand what goes into making developments “artist friendly.” What should not happen is geographically splintered little spaces across the city that no one will see and only serve to satisfy a developer’s requirements vis-à-vis zoning code. I would wholeheartedly support the inclusion of some form of arts space incorporated into the public realm of any development if it can be a functional, working space. We have just such an opportunity in a redesigned and planned Medford Square of the future, where new development could be allowed, with the appropriate zoning controls and allowances, to build closer to the Mystic River. By allowing this redevelopment, the city would receive an easement across a space designated to remain public and public works of art could be prominently displayed, curated by the Arts Council, and paid for by a fund specifically set up through the development process.