



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? **My involvement with trying to secure an Art Center at the Swan School was a defining moment in my life. Working with so many dedicated and amazing local artists who had one goal of uniting the community through the art and humanities left me with a lifelong appreciation of what a profound impact the arts can have on improving the quality of life for all in a community.**

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, my resolution before the council led to the budget line item for the Medford Arts Council and I consider it one of my most important accomplishments as an elected official because it continues to touch so many residents throughout our community. The original intent was to establish the first ever line item funding and to increase funding based on need which was clearly demonstrated over the past few years. The current funding level falls short of the mark in addressing grant request and the city must establish a realistic line item budget that makes all public art initiatives attainable.**
- 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? **I am one of the**

council members that recognized a need for a “home for the arts” in Medford. A short term fix would be space at city hall however a long term approach would be to secure an Art Center under its own roof. The Springstep building would be a great addition to the community, its central location and proximity to city hall would be a great fit for our community. I believe strongly that this could become a reality with the support of the administration.

- How should the city’s current administrative structure be modified to support the creative community? The Office of Community Development should be renamed as the Office of Art, Culture and Community Development. This would send a strong message to the entire community the City of Medford supports the Arts and will lead by example by adding an Art/Cultural component when considering new or redevelopment projects.

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? We have a unique opportunity in Medford to use our 23 neighborhood parks as a destination place for the arts. The city of Lowell during their revitalization turned parks into community gathering spaces by creating performance stages, open public art exhibits and community gardens which brought life and excitement back into the neighborhoods at very minimal cost.
- 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? As a current board member of the Friends of Chevalier, I can tell you first hand the city administration needs to provide city funding to help maintain and support future growth. This is a city owned building in which the city pays very little attention to and should be the economic engine in the revitalization of Medford Square. Other communities that have a Theatre play an active role in funding performances and establish a budget line item to pay for essential upgrades.
- 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? As I stated above our 23 parks are underutilized and would serve as a great neighborhood performance space by adding stage, seating and art exhibits. Additionally as a member of the council I offered a resolution to

repurpose the bus shelter on Riverside Ave across from the CVS directly in the middle of the square with limitless potential. We could also look at our public buildings and think of creative ways of dressing up our buildings with new local art work.

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? *I would like to see more creative placemaking which incorporates our rich city history and its diversity throughout our open spaces and local business districts. Additionally I would like to see the yarn bomb in Medford Square expanded to other business districts and art walls that would inspire creativity for all ages.*
- 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, In my opinion the introduction of permanent or temporary public art would rejuvenate many of our open spaces and public buildings and bring back life to areas that need attention.*
- 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? *The Community Development Board should include approved elements of creative placemaking as a condition of approval to ensure the inclusion of creative art initiatives during any city or private development.*