



Candidate Responses to Medford Arts Council Questionnaire: October 9, 2015

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 view on arts comes from an admirer of creators and the creative process. I can confess I have limited artistic abilities. Later in life, after meeting my wife, I've had the privilege of getting to know and observe a teacher, and MacArthur Fellow Artist the late John T. Scott. John Scott is my wife's father a highly respected New Orleans artist and Prof. of Art at Xavier University in New Orleans. Coming so close to his work and having the opportunity to talk to him about his work and the work of other artists he loved has opened my eyes wide open of the enormous talents and means of expression artists being into our world. With knowledge gleaned from John Scott such as how art transforms spaces and can change people's moods and perception of the world around them makes me an advocate for investing and developing Medford's cultural identity.

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?

I will provide continued support to the Medford Arts Council ("MAC"). I would suggest the more the general public can regularly come into contact with works of art, no matter the form, the greater the understanding of how powerful art is in our community on many fronts. Art projects must endeavor to educate the public about the value of creative works.

- 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 certainly would like to have a home for the arts. The question becomes how the community pays for that home. We may need to create a trust fund that can grow overtime to eventually purchase or build suitable property in Medford. We can look to

local, state and federal grants for funds that would help pay the lion share of establishing an arts home. Surrounding communities have found ways to fund this type of venue and Medford needs to make a similar investment.

- How should the city's current administrative structure be modified to support the creative community?

I'm not sure that city administration needs restructuring. As civic leaders on the Council we need to promote and encourage the various non-profit arts organizations in and around our city.

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?

Creating a robust arts community anywhere near comparable to Somerville's 400K a year is way beyond our current budget abilities. A potential solution to building support could be a dedicated trust accepting funds from government as well as private entities in order to establish sustainable financing for ongoing cultural affairs.

- 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?

Chevalier is underutilized in the sense that not enough of the community crosses its threshold on a regular basis. The more attractions the building can house, the greater value the building will have in the community. Working proactively with other non-profit to hold events and showcase works will help boost the theatre's utility and value without over-taxing the City's limited resources.

- 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?

Although I know Springstep is a flawed building that is expensive to run, I'm not ready to give up on it as a creative space in our community. The City of Medford should seek opportunities to rehab and reinvent the space to be a valuable venue and resource once more. The owner of the property wants to sell it, and I believe we can work together with a new owner to make it a viable, productive and inviting space to Medford and surrounding communities.

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 believe that we must bring together the many entities that bring the arts and humanities to Medford to let the Council know how we can work alongside the Community Development office to bring an innovative vision to our city. I would ask experts to help define the vision and the Council should be open their guidance.

- 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?

I love the idea of providing thought-provoking, enlightens and uplifting public art throughout our community in as many venues as possible. Let us inventory the space and start taking proposal for free displays and works for hire.

- 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 always want a lighter touch where it comes to government imposing more on private entities. However, it is fair for us to strongly encourage developers to work with artists and architects to think about space with a long-term vision that must include enhancing Medford’s cultural identity.