Create the Vote Questionnaire - due July 26
Questions for the Mayoral Candidates
Related to Candidates Arts Forum on September 9

1. Addressing Citywide Issues: Just as any other major city, Boston faces many economic and social issues. Can you provide examples on how you would integrate the arts, culture, and creative community in solving social problems? How would you use our community to drive economic development in the city?

As mayor, I will make support for the arts and culture a priority. The arts enrich our lives, spark our curiosity, bring us together, and make our city a more interesting, welcoming, and vibrant place to live, work and visit. By doing all of that, the arts also strengthen our economy. One of our greatest economic challenges is keeping skilled and talented workers here in the Boston area, and those workers want a city with a thriving artistic and cultural life. If we attract and retain skilled and talented workers, then we’ll also attract the companies that want to hire them.

I will also work to ensure that all Bostonians benefit from the city’s arts and cultural resources, not just downtown but in every neighborhood. I supported the effort by a group of community members to use Bartlett Yard in Roxbury as a community arts space, and I will work to establish a culture at City Hall that works collaboratively to green light more projects like this.

We are fortunate to have incredible arts organizations for young people, like Artists for Humanity, which provides teens with jobs making and selling art; and Zumix, which builds community by teaching young people to play instruments, write songs, and record music, among other things. These programs are helping young people to build self-esteem, giving them the confidence to imagine a positive future for themselves. As mayor, I will do everything I can to support arts organizations working with young people in our neighborhoods, including exploring options to increase direct funding for them.

2. Your Personal Connection: We've all had defining moments in our lives. What personal experience with arts, culture, or creativity has had an impact on your life and your view of the community?

I taught and lived on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the mid-1990s. My students came from Alphabet City, the neighborhood that inspired the musical Rent. Living and working on the Lower East Side gave me the chance to live alongside and experience a thriving arts community, where I caught several bands playing during CBGB’s last days as well as poetry slams and underground comedy shows in and around Ludlow Street. The artists left a lasting impression as so much of their work reflected thoughtful commentary and critique about urban struggles with gentrification and poverty, and quite frankly, why it is cool to live in the city.

3. Arts Education and Programs for our Youth: While the Boston Arts Academy and the BPS Arts Expansion Initiative are providing access to quality arts education, many of our youth are still being left out of the creative community. What will you do as Mayor to champion arts education with our youth both in our schools and in our communities? How will you balance the importance of arts education with the constant pull to “teach to the test”?

Every student in Boston should have regular access to high-quality arts and music education. Boston has one of the shortest school days in urban America, which means we’re leaving potential learning time untapped. I strongly
support extending the school day in order to provide a more well-rounded curriculum, including art and music. Arts education not only makes school more engaging, but research shows that it also helps improve student achievement and graduation outcomes.

As chair of the city council’s education committee, I’ve had the opportunity to closely examine the Boston Public Schools budget every year. We have a central BPS bureaucracy that spends over a billion dollars a year and still can’t provide regular art and music instruction in all of our schools. I will significantly reduce the BPS bureaucracy in order to provide more resources for schools to do great things, including art and music education.

4. The New Administration’s Role in the Creative Community: According to research conducted by Americans for the Arts, Boston consistently ranks among the bottom five of the 30 largest U.S. cities in what it annually invests in the creative community. Some in the creative community are concerned about the city’s administrative capacity to program, support, and promote activities. Describe how you will address these concerns in the following areas:

- What three revenue sources will you create or use to increase the city’s financial investment in the creative community?
- How will you modify or expand the city’s current administrative structure to support the creative community?
- What are your program priorities and where will the funds be allocated?

On our city’s administrative structure, we need to assess whether it makes sense to continue to house tourism and arts in the same office at City Hall. A stand-alone arts office would be able to focus its efforts entirely on cultivating a thriving arts community in Boston. I am concerned that it dilutes the mission of the office when it also includes marketing the city to potential visitors.

On our city’s budget for the arts, we clearly can do better. Boston budgeted just over $130,000 in direct funding for nonprofit arts organizations in 2013. This is less than one-hundredth of one percent of the city’s total annual budget, and well below other cities like Houston, San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland, Oregon, which all provide direct annual funding in the millions of dollars. Meanwhile, the Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC), the state agency that provides direct funding to arts organizations, has experienced significant budget cuts in recent years.

Particularly for small- and mid-sized arts organizations, stable sources of operating funds can be essential to helping them fulfill their missions. As mayor, I will explore opportunities to improve direct funding for arts organizations in the city.

5. The Creative Economy: One of Mayor Menino’s signature accomplishments was the promotion of the Innovation District that supports and promotes the creative economy. As mayor, how would you leverage that success and broaden your administration’s commitment to the creative economy to include arts and culture as well as the innovation district? How will you foster an ecosystem which is reflective of the up and coming independent creative community in Boston?

We can’t limit innovation to a district, and we can’t have a definition of the “creative economy” that excludes working artists and musicians. The arts can make life better in all of Boston’s neighborhoods, from the ArtPlace grant for the Fairmount-Indigo cultural corridor to murals to Paintbox. As mayor, I will work with artists and musicians to help them access opportunities to showcase their work or perform. That includes making it easier for
artists to host events in public places, including simplifying the permitting process. It also means working with landlords who own vacant storefronts to consider making their space available on a temporary basis to artists who wish to host pop-up galleries, just as the Chicago Loop Alliance’s Pop-Up Art Loop does. These types of efforts are critical if we are to make the arts a part of neighborhood revitalization.

Boston’s high cost of housing can make it difficult for working artists and musicians to find places to live and effectively accomplish their work. High housing costs should never force artists, musicians, or graduates of our city’s arts and music colleges to leave Boston. Boston has been a leader in establishing affordable live-work space for artists. As mayor, I will build on the city’s efforts. For example, we should look for opportunities to make city-owned land available for the creation of limited equity coops for artists, like 300 Summer Street. This is a way to give working artists some of the stability and benefits of homeownership while ensuring the properties’ affordability in perpetuity.

6. A World Class Arts Destination: While Boston is known for its hospitals, professional sports, and universities, the city has yet to fully leverage the strength of our arts, culture, and creative community as a means for tourism and branding. How would you utilize our community to market Boston as a world-class cultural destination?

The best thing we can do to utilize the arts to enhance Boston as a world-class destination is simple: We need to make it easier for artists and musicians to share their work with the world. That’s why, as mayor, I will work for increased funding of arts organizations; I will simplify the process for hosting festivals and other events in Boston; and I will appoint a citywide arts liaison to make sure that the city is working collaboratively with artists and arts organizations.

We have a lot of opportunities to give the arts a more prominent role in attracting visitors to Boston. For example, I will work to keep First Night going by increasing the role of local museums and cultural institutions to extend First Night into a mid-winter festival of arts and culture. I will also support festivals and concerts, like Boston Calling and the Boston Independent Film Festival, that create arts events year-round. Boston has a proud tradition of this kind of programming, like the city’s Summerthing in the 1960s and 1970s, but we can do more.

We also need to reinvigorate public art in Boston, including embracing a willingness to see art that challenges us in new ways. We have had temporary sculpture exhibitions on the Greenway, but recently leaders from Boston’s arts community have called for Boston to establish a permanent sculpture garden on the Greenway. And as we develop a long-term vision for the future of City Hall, there is no question that City Hall Plaza would benefit greatly as a venue for public art. I have supported public art before, like the Sleeping Moon statue at the Ashmont MBTA station and the LandWave Sculptural Landscape in the South End, and I will be a champion for public art as mayor.

7. Your Priorities: The start of a Mayor’s tenure often sets the Administration’s tone and priorities. When elected, what actions will you take in your first 100 days to provide support and resources to the creative community?

Cultivating the arts in Boston can’t be a top-down effort driven from City Hall. I believe that the best ideas for cultivating the arts in Boston will come from artists and residents themselves. The arts are both a manifestation and a reflection of our highest democratic deals, so it makes sense to engage Boston’s artists and residents in a citywide cultural planning conversation.
To help facilitate the cultural planning process and serve as a single point of contact for Boston’s arts community, in my first 100 days as mayor I will appoint a citywide arts liaison. I will task the appointee with working with Boston’s arts community to develop a cultural plan, just as Mayor Rahm Emanuel recently did in Chicago, and also to begin the process of reassessing the rules and simplifying the permitting process for artists wishing to host events in city parks and other public places.