Questions for the Mayoral Candidates

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?

Boston’s arts, cultural and creative community have been adding exponentially to Boston’s economy and strengthening the social fabric of the city and individual neighborhoods for decades. These contributions have largely been from the ground up or driven by private and non-profit sectors, with the city itself playing an important but more limited role, particularly when compared with other cities. The return on investments in the arts, however, is nothing short of spectacular. It’s estimated that for every one public dollar invested in the arts, there is a $7 private sector investment return.

But the arts also make Boston a much more livable and workable city. Artists have traditionally been in the vanguard transforming and stabilizing marginal neighborhoods, including dramatic reductions in crime and blight. They provide a multitude of jobs, often function as small businesses and create spin-off economic activities and benefits too numerous to list, but certainly including retail, galleries, festivals, and live performance spaces. Their individual and collective contributions add to Boston’s allure as a tourist destination, with the communities themselves often becoming major draws.

Finally, the arts have long provided outlets for individuals looking to express their vision, their hopes, their dreams, their frustrations, and their politics. The arts are a powerful tool for social change on a large scale and on an individual scale as they are an accessible career and lifestyle path for people from any background and walk of life.

For all of these reasons, as mayor, I am committed to linking local artists into Boston’s public and private development, (housing, business, and entrepreneurial opportunities) to benefit the artist, the community, and to spur added economic spinoffs. I’ll support artist housing and make that space permanent through deed restrictions and other legal mechanisms. This housing will be located strategically, in areas that would be less suitable for traditional family housing. I’ll seek to find and create live and work space for artists (or work only space) that is affordable and benefits city residents. In addition, I will look to the artist community for new ideas and advice on maintaining and increasing Boston’s allure for tourism and hospitality.

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’ll actually share two. The first came years ago, the first time I saw a live performance at the Riverside Theatre in Hyde Park. The Theatre was founded in the early 1980s and over the decades has introduced hundreds of children to live performance theatre, and thousands of residents to it as well. Seeing some of my own neighbors and my neighbor’s children on stage was absolutely thrilling.

This past year, I had another impactful experience, but this time I experienced through the eyes of my son. Coming out of his sophomore year in high school he had a number of electives to choose from. A teacher whom my son admired urged him to choose classes dedicated to the arts. This particular elective is under-attended as male students especially, at least among my son’s peers, did not consider the arts to be very cool.

My son just completed his junior year and this arts class was his favorite class in all four years in high school. His teacher was inspirational and through the arts, my son not only began to think and see things more creatively, but he also began to think in a more disciplined and linear fashion, something he certainly didn’t expect, but positively noticed. Going into his senior year, not only is he continuing with his arts electives but a number of his friends have decided to join him.

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”?

Classroom time is precious and a strong focus on core subjects is absolutely essential. That said, the fact is that arts education and improved learning in subjects like math are not mutually exclusive. In fact, a wealth of studies show just the opposite to be true; that arts education improves learning in other core subjects. In fact, some studies have shown that teachers who integrate arts into subjects like math see greater learning, particularly among students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. As part of my education agenda, I am committed to lifting the cap on charter schools, extending the school day, and giving much greater autonomy to individual school communities of parents, principals and teachers. This model will not allow any school to ignore critical learning essentials and I absolutely believe in accountability, but the model I propose absolutely allows for greater flexibility in how students are taught, how they learn, and the path that is charted for their success. Lifting the cap opens the door for schools with a stronger focus on the arts and arts-integration into traditional learning. In addition, the extended learning time opens up a wealth of opportunities to integrate arts education into our children’s school lives.
A 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?

One of the first things I would plan to do as mayor is a top to bottom review of the city’s budget and spending. In advance of that level of review I can’t yet say with certainty which revenue sources I would use or create. Understanding that there is a 7:1 ratio return on public investment in the arts, however, I absolutely view arts funding and support for the creative community as sound public investments both for their economic and social benefits. In addition, as the only candidate for mayor who has run a large, complex organizations, I would look carefully at how my administration is structured and would certainly look to the arts community for advice and ideas as to how best to position city government so that the relationship is productive and mutually supportive. The same goes for establishing program priorities that extend beyond my strong commitments to added arts education in our schools and support for artist housing and work space. Finally, I intend to file and push hard for legislation on Beacon Hill to secure greater local control over Boston’s revenues. Our city is over-reliant on the property tax and needs greater flexibility to chart its own fiscal course. While every mayor before me has made this pitch, my argument will not be based on fairness, but on jobs creation. Simply put, giving Boston’s mayor more control over the finances of the city opens up opportunities for jobs and economic development that Beacon Hill can’t realize. As a major jobs creator, and a community with a shared interest in seeing the city gain more fiscal flexibility, I plan to enlist the creative community in this effort.

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?

I’ll support artist housing and make that space permanent through deed restrictions and other legal mechanisms. This housing will be located strategically, in areas that would be less suitable for traditional family housing. I’ll seek to find and create artist live and work space (or work only space) that is affordable and benefits city residents. This housing location and assistance
builds the physical creative communities which artists populate. In addition, I will look to the artist community for new ideas and advice on maintaining and increasing Boston’s allure for tourism and hospitality.

I also see the arts community as playing a much more prominent role in the economic revitalization of individual neighborhoods. In Hyde Park for example, the Riverside Theatre is a significant presence and should be used to drive further economic growth and investment. There have long been plans to make Fairmount Avenue Hyde Park’s avenue of the arts, but progress has been halting. As mayor, I will look to reenergize this type of integrated development not only in Hyde Park, but downtown and in every neighborhood so that the arts and creative communities are fully involved and invested and add to the cultural, social and economic fabric of each and every neighborhood.

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?

In 2009 Forbes magazine listed Boston as number 4 in America as an arts and cultural destination, and credited Boston as home to 456 cultural institutions that drew in nearly 19 million visitors. Our concentration of historic sites, educational institutions, and major cultural institutions like the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Symphony Orchestra and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum attract a great deal of attention. As mayor, I want to do everything that I can to create a unifying vision and launch a marketing campaign, both in-state, nationally and internationally, highlighting less well known and smaller institutions who add so much to the vibrancy of the city. I want to incorporate these institutions and artists into economic plans in order to create new destination areas that combine the visual, performing and even culinary arts. This means bringing our creative communities into closer partnership with public and private development and strengthening the partnership with the hospitality and tourism industries.

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?

I will convene a symposium on the state of the arts in Boston and ask for policy recommendations that range from the administrative support structures in city government to recommendations for the make-up of various boards and commissions, from arts in education to arts funding, from engaging more young people in the arts to citywide programs to create and showcase public art; and from artist housing to better ways to integrate the local arts
community into everything from public and private commercial development to marketing to new events to showcase and bring more Boston residents and visitors to the arts community. Finally, I will file legislation on Beacon Hill to secure greater local control over Boston’s revenues. Our city is over-reliant on the property tax and needs greater flexibility to chart its own fiscal course. While every mayor before me has made this pitch, my argument will not be based on fairness, but on jobs creation. Simply put, giving Boston’s mayor more control over the finances of the city opens up opportunities for jobs and economic development that Beacon Hill can’t realize. As a major jobs creator, and a community with a shared interest in seeing the city gain more fiscal flexibility, I plan to enlist the creative community in this effort.