MASSCreative Meets with Boston Mayoral Candidate state Rep. Marty Walsh

Candidate pledges to create cabinet-level administration position dedicated to arts, culture, and tourism, but support for PILOT program raises caution

BOSTON, August 21, 2013—MASSCreative announces today that Boston mayoral candidate state Rep. Marty Walsh met with the Create the Vote Coalition Aug. 13 to talk about his vision for the arts in Boston.

The Create the Vote Coalition is a collaboration of Boston arts, cultural, and creative institutions convened by MASSCreative. Create the Vote is working to ensure that the candidates for Mayor develop strong platforms to support the sector. Ultimately, Create the Vote aims to bring public attention to the issues of the arts sector and its fundamental importance to the city and state’s overall quality of life.

Walsh was the second candidate to meet with the coalition. Representatives from the Boston Symphony Orchestra, ArtsBoston, the Boston Children’s Museum, Boston Children’s Chorus, Discover Roxbury, The Lyric Opera, and BostonAPP/Lab: Art in Public Places, questioned the candidate about his vision for the arts in Boston.

“We were pleased with Rep. Walsh’s pledge to create a cabinet-level position dedicated to the arts. It shows a commitment to the importance of the role cultural activities play in education, economic development, and public safety,” said MASSCreative Executive Director Matt Wilson. “But we question the wisdom of merging tourism concerns with those of arts and culture, and we would like to see more specifics about how Rep. Walsh, as mayor, would be a champion of the arts in Boston.”

Members of the Coalition also expressed caution about Rep. Walsh’s support of the city’s Payment In Lieu of Taxes program, commonly known as PILOT, in which the city bills nonprofit organizations exempt from real estate taxes for municipal contributions. In most major cities, arts and cultural institutions that contribute to the economic, educational, and civic health of the community receive public funding from the municipality.

“We need a Mayor who understands the value of public support of the arts. Those investments reap tangible rewards in increased economic activity, educational opportunities for young people, and building strong communities,” said Wilson. “We would like to see that sort of commitment from the next mayor of Boston.”
Rep. Walsh said that the three big issues in the mayoral campaign were “education, the economy, and crime” and that each intersected with the arts in key ways. He noted the role that the arts can play in reducing youth violence. Citing the Medicine Wheel Youth Program in South Boston, which has been recognized by the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center for its role in promoting peace, Rep. Walsh said, “What we have been doing in Boston regarding crime and youth violence hasn’t been working.” If the arts can foster peace, then that should be encouraged, he said.

Rep. Walsh also said that a thriving arts and cultural community was a key to the region’s overall health. “We should be able to fill our theaters in Boston,” Rep. Walsh said. “That’s what’s going to make us a world class city.”

Rep. Walsh said that he saw the need for additional arts funding and said he would look for additional public funding for cultural activities in the state budget. He added that he thought there were ways to cultivate additional private and corporate support for arts and cultural activities in Boston.

“We are pleased with Rep. Walsh’s basic understanding of the role arts and cultural activities can play in the lives of young people,” said Wilson. “But creativity is powerful and it intersects with every sector of life in Boston. We are looking for an arts champion in our next mayor who will implement a bold vision for the arts in the years ahead that will enrich the lives of generations to come.”

On September 9, Create the Vote will host the Boston Mayoral Candidate Forum on Arts, Culture, and Creativity. Moderated by arts critic Joyce Kulhawik, the forum will foster discussion of mayoral candidates’ vision for the arts in Boston. The forum will take place at the Paramount Theatre on Washington Street from 6-7:30pm. All members of the public are invited to attend.

The Create the Vote Coalition will continue to meet with candidates and share with the public what they learn. The Coalition looks forward to learning more details from candidates, including those they have already met with, about how their ideas and initiatives for the arts will be implemented from a policy and funding perspective. For more information about the coalition and the Create the Vote campaign, visit Mass-Creative.org.

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