



Walsh On The Arts: 'It Starts At The Top In Any Change That's Going To Happen'

words

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"I think the arts community has been and has a feeling of being neglected for so long. People are very anxious about the fact of making sure of that I follow through on what I promised," state representative and Boston mayoral candidate Marty Walsh said when we spoke on Oct 28 about his plans for arts and culture in the city.

These promises include creating a cabinet-level commissioner for the arts via the creation of a new Boston Office of Cultural Affairs—separate from tourism. His "Artists First Initiative" would address artists' occupational health needs, professional development, affordable artist space, fair trade, and compensation. He also plans increased support for mid- to late-career artists. He'd promote Boston art and artists on the city's website and via relationships with sister cities and embassies and consulates around Boston.

Walsh's platform calls for more cultural spending, beginning with matching the Massachusetts Cultural Council's funding of the Boston Cultural Council. His plan calls for new revenues coming, in part, from establishing a Percent for Art Program, in which a fee on large development projects would go toward public art, and hiring chief development officer for the city. He supports arts education in the Boston public schools and increased arts programming for teens. He aims to streamline the permitting process for arts events and foster historic preservation. (Also read our [interview with mayoral candidate John Connolly about the arts](#) and our [overview of the ideas and issues percolating through the city's cultural community during the campaign.](#))

Below Walsh speaks about his plans for arts and culture in the city:

- "The first major



Marty Walsh speaks at the Create the Vote forum at Boston's Paramount Theatre on Sept. 9. (Kat Waterman/MassCreative)



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announcement we made was creating the cabinet level position in the arts. That's the first major decision we made as a candidate. ... So right first and foremost it's going to fit in with all the cabinet level positions in the city. There's going to be a lot of crossover there. We want to be a partner in all our creative economies. Tourism is certainly part of that as well, but we're going to separate the two. We're going to put tourism under economic development because it makes more sense there when we're talking about attracting dollars and being able to capitalize on people coming to our city."



Marty Walsh speaks at a Create the Vote forum moderated by Joyce Kulhawik at the African Meeting House of the Museum of African American History in Boston on Oct. 18. (Drew Esposito/MassCreative)

- "I think it goes to the leadership. We have a very culturally diverse city. I think that it's bringing a new style of leadership to City Hall. That's what the difference is. It starts at the top in any change that's going to happen. It's more of an embracing of the arts than a change in the arts."
- "People are going to see a lot more public art, year-round programming in Boston. That's one of the first things people are going to see and understand. The mayor's been talking a lot about creating a park of statues in Boston. ... The youth engagement in schools, in free art programs around the city. Hopefully getting our colleges and universities to partner with us. People are going to see a lot more there. We have an initiative called Artists First initiative. It's going to address the occupational health needs of artists, professional development, creating more affordable arts space, and fair trade and artist compensation. Right there the artist community is going to feel an impact, maybe not the first month of the administration, but within the first 90 to 180 days, where they're actually going to feel that there's actually somebody in their corner advocating on their behalf. It's kind of all those little pieces which add up to what people see in the streets. We're using the city archives to promote programs and using the city webpage. We're going to revamp the webpage. There's going to be a lot more, people are going to see it and be invited into the arts community a lot more than they have been today. Just helping the artists with marketing."
- "Everyone keeps talking about what the difference [between the candidates] is. I think one difference was my commitment to the arts

was very early on the campaign. Once I made that commitment about it a lot of other candidates started talking about it.”

- “I’m talking about having Boston be a livelier city for young people. That certainly hasn’t been discussed in 20 years. We have the World Series going on right now. We have places of entertainment in Boston that have to stop taking people in at the fifth inning. Meanwhile when you’re in other cities, when you’re in New York City, the bars, the restaurants aren’t shutting down in the fifth inning. Think about that. The fact that we are a younger city, we have another opportunity to really capitalize on the success of the arts, but we have to make that investment.”
- “I have some of the people that have been working on the issues for a long time and are very, very, very passionate about it. And I think that’s where the main difference is [between me and Connolly]. As mayor of the city of Boston, I certainly am not going to run every department. Who am I going to be putting into place to be able to do stuff?” His top arts and culture advisors are Joyce Linehan, an arts promoter and political operator, and Kathleen Bitetti, an artist, curator, and public policy advocate. “They pushed. ... When I’m at a forum during the primary, if I didn’t talk about the arts, I’d hear about it. And the same will be said when I’m the mayor of the city of Boston. They’re not shy. They’ll make sure that I’ll follow through on what my commitment has been.”
- Funding: “Some of it’s going to come from the budget and realigning a lot of things. In every budget, there’s money to be found for different programs. And the fact that the investment and the money that can be made off it pays for it. For every dollar we put into the arts allegedly we get six back. Let’s say we three back. We’ve just tripled out income for the city of Boston. So it’s a very positive investment. I think a lot of times what happens in government is people don’t realize the net return on investment. ... When we invest in substance abuse services, there’s a reinvestment back into society. We have to look at that. And we can track it and see if by actually spending the money up front we’re getting the money back. That’s a key piece here. You have to take a little bit of business sense to running City Hall. That’s an important aspect that a lot of people don’t understand. We’re not just simply spending money, we’re actually getting money reinvested back into the economy.”
- In February, at the urging of Joyce Linehan, Walsh filed a bill to make Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers’ tune “Roadrunner” the state’s official rock song: “That’s where we’re different, right there, that ‘Roadrunner.’ ‘Roadrunner’ was filed long before I ran for mayor. When I filed the bill, my God, the attention that was given to the bill. I was criticized in one of the newspapers about filing that, saying there’s more important issues out there. You know something,

making sure we close the poverty gap is certainly important and one of the top priorities of my administration. But for a lot of people working in the arts community, funding for the arts is the most important issue for them. Making sure that we have artists housing, making sure that there's appropriate workspace. Again it's a revenue generator. You've got to look at it kind of like that as a mayor. It also tells a story about our city. I think that that's a big piece."

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