

## Oregon artPAC — 2016 Primaries

Contest: **Mayor**

Candidate Name: Sean Davis

Contest: Mayor

Candidate Web Site: [www.seandavisforpdx.com](http://www.seandavisforpdx.com)

Date of Questionnaire Submittal: February 11th

**In a 140-character “tweet” format, tell us why you are running for office.**

People in my community asked me to run and I wanted real people to be have a voice in City Hall.

**How many donors have contributed to your campaign?**

We have twelve donors so far.

**How much money have you raised for your campaign?**

\$945

**What endorsements have you received?**

DarSalam restaurant, Former Special Agent in Charge of Portland Charlie Mathews, Oregon Book Award nominee Lidia Yuknivitch, National Book Award winner Larry Heinemann, and Shango Premium Cannabis.

**What role do the arts and culture play in the life of our region and what do the arts personally mean to you and your family?**

Art saved my life. Since I was a kid growing up in the trailer parks of the Cascade Mountains in poverty I always wrote, drawn, painted, acted. To get out of poverty I joined the military and spent a total of thirteen years in the service. All but two were Army infantry. During that time I served in a revolution in Haiti, a war in Iraq, and down in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. After I left the service I had a hard time transitioning back to civilian life like many combat veterans. I became suicidal, but art saved my life. I started painting and writing again and from that I published my book *The Wax Bullet War*. I dedicated my life to helping other people who were in my situation with art. I facilitated art therapy with combat veterans and got six of them on stage for *The Canticle of the Black Madonna*, an opera about PTSD with the budget of \$350,000 that was performed at the Newmark Theater downtown Portland. I helped produce the Portland segment of *HUMAN* the movie by gathering combat veterans to speak on camera about what it means to be human. The movie premiered in the General Assembly room of the United Nations in New York. I was there. I facilitate a monthly poetry and prose discussion

group at the American Legion Post 134 sponsored by the Oregon Humanities and I've been doing it for the last year. I volunteered as the post commander at the American Legion post and turned it into a hub for literary events. We host 4 monthly series now and we've had authors from all over the country read there. My family and I live in the Alberta Arts District. Art is a way to heal the soul both as an individual and a society. That's what it means to me and my family.

**How will you address the growing affordability crisis in our region for artists, arts organizations, and small arts businesses as it relates to housing and creative space?**

By understanding the problem. Great talent does occur, but rarely. For the most part there are two ways art happens. The first way is that a person has all their needs met and because of that they become an artist. The second way is that a person does not have all their needs met and despite of that they become an artist.

Great art can be created by both groups but it's the second group that is the most important in Portland. The struggle of that group creates character. The struggle of that group creates camaraderie. If you take art and add character and camaraderie you have community.

The greatness of Portland comes from these communities that second group of artists created. Once it's created others can join in, help form the community, help guide it. These artists, they create art in everything they do. They think differently. They chose their art over money so many have jobs in coffee houses, bars, bike shops, security companies, warehouses. They make enough money to get by, but that's all they need. Money is not their motivation, but because art is in all they do this town went to the top of all the national top ten lists. People from all over moved here for the art, the character, the community. People flooded in and since the politicians we elected don't understand the importance of the artist they care more about the money from the potential residents than the livability of the people who made Portland this incredible artistic community.

Now the people who made this city so amazing can't afford to live in the city they made amazing. They either leave or they are forced to choose money over their art. Either way the character, camaraderie, and community disappears. I've been experiencing this firsthand on Alberta Street for the last seven years.

We need to understand that without the artists we're not truly Portland, not the Portland everyone fell in love with. I would ensure that more of the grants given by RACC had the stipulation that the artist had to live in our city. I would recreate the art liaison position in City Hall and more than that, I would be more involved in RACC and other art organizations in Portland. I would give incentives to business owners to create more housing units like the Falcon Art Community and to small businesses like PoBoy Art, and I would make sure that a larger percentage of the art tax goes to these incentives.

**How will you foster the growth of the creative economy in our region?**

The easy answer is to pay our workers a living wage. It's an oversimplification to believe that the problems of Portland are not connected. In 2008, Development Services had 330 employees and within three years they had 160. These employees helped developers through the planning and development, permitting, and inspection stages of building houses. We never hired these employees back and we're in a boom. Because of this building a new property takes over a year, maybe two. I propose to look through the city's buildable land inventory and pick a few places to create temporary or even permanent housing for the houseless using the 20 million the city has set aside to fight houselessness. A part of the RFP (request for proposals) will be a special priority on this project. This will cut the time of planning, permitting, and inspecting. In this way the developers would make money. In return we are going to put a small cost attached to the projects. This cost will be dedicated to hiring more people in the Development Services Bureau. The more employees we have the faster the process is for other developers. Last year, with a limited staff at Bureau of Development Services we still built 15,000 units. Each single family unit makes the city approximately 20-30 thousand dollars. Multi family houses can make 40-50 thousand dollars. Imagine if Portland can create 30,000 units or 50,000 a year. The money we make with those additional units we dedicate to subsidizing small businesses for a \$15 dollar an hour minimum wage. We need to do this because if we raise the minimum wage without the subsidize we may end up shutting them down because while big business can absorb the cost, small businesses cannot. If people complain about subsidizing small businesses I'd argue the alternative, having the small business money leave the local economy and paying unemployment would be more expensive than the subsidize by far. Once we are paying our workers a livable wage they will go back to creating art. That is all the artists want. When the art is being created the art economy will grow. I would also try to improve the infrastructure for our film industry and work with legislature to increase the filming incentive so we can be competitive with Vancouver BC.

**How will you enhance the delivery of and support for arts education in school and neighborhood settings?**

The number one problem I hear about the art tax is that it is hard for people to pay. Even people who want to pay it have difficulty. While I understand we cannot add it to an existing bill because we tax individuals and not households, I do believe we can make it easier to pay. We need to have accountability to where the money from the art tax is going and make sure that it is getting in the schools. This way we can continue to hire more art and music teachers like the 70 that were hired in 2012. Other than the money, we need to make art a priority in our city's development. We need to hold art exhibits from different school districts in city buildings. We need to invite bands to play at City Hall. The mayor needs to go out to schools and speak about the importance of art. This is vital because when we put the motivation to create in our children not only do their parents get more involved in our neighborhoods but they grow up to create communities people want to live in.

**How will you further the values of equity and access to the arts and culture? What do you see as the biggest challenges to progress in this area?**

I would move RACC under the mayor and read as many grant proposals as possible. I would suggest creating more grants like RACC's equity grant but for specific groups. I would also allow organizations to submit for them more than once a year. A good idea would be to reach out to MAA (mutual assistance associations) like the New Portlanders or the Iraqi Society of Oregon or the LGBTQ community and provide and encourage fairs and events with matching funds. The biggest challenge would be create a safe place where people in minority groups feel like their voice will be heard. Finding money for the programs will be difficult as well, but I believe we can find it if we partner with county, state, and federal programs.

**What other public policies would you pursue to strengthen the creative capacity of our region?**

I would bring back the mayor's ball and make it a celebration of the arts. This would be an annual event to recognize art teachers, local artists of all mediums, and community leaders. I would like to make the mural process faster and less expensive, but maintain standards. I would also open up communication with our sister cities and invite them to show us their culture and art with physical works and video communication events. I would appoint a poet laureate, resident writer, and resident artist for our city that comes with grants and responsibilities to represent our city in national conferences.

**The following question is for candidates in City of Portland contests only. Do you support the voter-approved Arts Education and Access Fund and do you commit to maintaining it? What changes, if any, would you make to improve its administration?**

I definitely support it. I would try to make it easier to pay. The biggest complaint I hear about it is that even people who make art a priority and want to pay it have difficulty. I would make the funds more transparent so the residents of our city could feel pride in where the money goes. I would also look into making residents in higher tax brackets pay more than the person waiting tables or working in a warehouse. This cost should be proportional so we all are invested in the programs it creates. Only 63% of the people eligible to for the tax actually paid and more than that, Portland sent out about 40,000 bills to people who weren't legally obliged to pay the tax. If we can improve on this we will save money. I would use this money to start a grassroots campaign to market the art tax as something a Portlander does to work toward our ideal of a better Portland.

**The following question is for candidates in City of Portland, Clackamas County, Multnomah County, or Washington County contests only. Each year, you will have the opportunity to vote to approve a budget for arts funding through the Regional Arts & Culture Council (RACC). Do you commit to maintaining or increasing this budget allocation and funding level?**

Honestly, this depends on the problems we're having each year. We've been pretty steady at around 3.7 billion dollars for our budget and half of that is dedicated money (your garbage bill goes to taking care of the garbage, sewage bill goes to maintaining the sewer system, et cetera), the other half is general funds and out of those funds come taxes to pave our roads which are in terrible disrepair, pay

the salaries of our police which are completely overworked and undermanned. There will be some hard decisions reached very soon as we move toward the city we will become. So I can't say that I will commit to maintaining or increasing RACC's budget, but I will tell you again that art saved my life and art made Portland great. Art will always be a priority in my life no matter what profession I am in. I will do everything in my power to ensure RACC has a stable budget they can count on, but not at the expense of the artists.