

## **Oregon artPAC — 2016 Primaries**

**Contest:** **Multnomah County Commission, District 1**

**Candidate Name:** Sharon Meieran

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

**Date of Questionnaire Submittal:** February 12, 2016

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

As ER doc, advocate & mom, I want every family to be safe & healthy. As MultCo Commish, I'll fight 4 healthcare, housing & environment!

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

85

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

More than \$30,000, as of 2/12/16. For future contributions, please visit the state's campaign transparency system (ORESTAR).

**What endorsements have you received?**

State Senator Diane Rosenbaum, District 21  
State Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, District 17  
State Representative Mitch Greenlick, District 33  
State Representative Barbara Smith Warner, District 45  
Multnomah County Commissioner Judy Shiprack, District 3  
Metro Councilor Shirley Craddick, District 1  
City Commissioner Amanda Fritz  
City Commissioner Steve Novick  
Beverly Stein, Former Chair of the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners and State Representative  
And numerous community supporters

**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?**

The arts and culture are integrally important to the region and have played a tremendous formative role for me personally and for my family. As a physician, I believe that everyone deserves to

be safe and healthy, and I have dedicated my life's work toward this end. However, my definition of health is holistic, in line with the World Health Organization's definition as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being rather than merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Dance, music, art, drama, creative writing – all of these things are critical components of who we are as complete human beings, and how we are able to express ourselves. The arts are a means to give voice to alternative viewpoints, a vehicle for social justice and activism and a tool for building community and connection with one another. The arts are also critical to the creation and development of new ideas, technology and devising answers to the many critical issues facing our communities.

Basically, when we talk of healthy people and healthy communities, we must talk of art. Part of what makes our region so special is this commitment to the arts, to a progressive ethic that is open to new ideas and accepting people of all backgrounds.

The arts were of huge importance in my family growing up. My mother is a retired professional artist, and I still remember when she first decided to take "clay class", and would bring me to classes when I was little, or work on projects at home. Since then she developed her own voice, creating sculptured wall plaques that she called "Castles of the Mind" that were intricate and based on villages of ancient civilizations. My father is a scientist, but the arts played and continued to play a core role in his life. He was in the band at Purdue University, and was honored as Band Alumnus of the Year. He plays the flute and played in a local symphony group when I was growing up. Music and art were constant presences in my home growing up, and I studied piano from age 6 to 18. My husband was a music major and professional musician before attending medical school, and he still plays with a band. My son plays drums. My daughter is a gifted artist, and thrives when she is drawing or painting. Both my children took classes at NW Children's Theater when they were younger, and my daughter continues to take classes at Oregon College of Arts and Craft, which has been a true gift.

I cannot overstate the importance of accessibility to art both as performance and also to participate for all people, of all ages. I recognize how privileged I have been in my own exposure to the arts growing up, and what I am able to provide for my children, and I am dedicated to ensuring accessibility to the arts for ALL members of our community.

**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?**

The housing emergency is complex, involving not just individuals without any form of home or shelter, but also individuals in transition, individuals who are renting but are at daily risk of losing their housing, and those who need transitional housing due to medical illness, mental illness, recent release from prison and other issues. Artists, arts organizations and small arts businesses are caught in this crisis, and need support.

In general, I support a comprehensive plan to address housing and homeless issues that includes

increased shelter options, short term rent assistance to get individuals into housing quickly, and funding for capital construction of new affordable units. I believe Multnomah County, along with the City of Portland and City of Gresham, need to continue to work closely together through the “A Home for Everyone” community plan. I also believe the county should continue to work closely with the City of Portland to enhance renter protections and streamline shelter siting options. Unfortunately, there is no one strategy that will solve this issue, but there are good efforts underway, and I would want to build on these efforts.

As I mentioned above, I believe that the arts are an essential component to holistic health, and public health falls under the purview of the County. Accordingly, I would collaborate with individuals, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and all levels of government to ensure we meet the needs of all our community members, including artists, organizations and businesses related to the arts.

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

Again, this is a complex issue that will require creative and collaborative solutions. One example is the 1% art tax on all major public construction projects, which I support. We have major County-funded construction projects in process or in the coming years like the new County Health Department Building and the new Courthouse.

We also need to consider education and training programs that encourage young people to get training in all kinds of arts – from traditional music, dance and drama to allied, industrial or graphic arts. We then need to find ways to connect them through mentorship programs to advocacy organizations, policy groups, state mandated research and testing commissions or technology companies. This is how we can build and grow our thought leaders throughout our region and the state.

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

As a parent of elementary and middle school age children, I am deeply committed to ensuring the continuation of arts and culture in the schools.

At Rieke Elementary, our science teacher taught our 5th grade classes about the different types of waves in an earthquake. The lesson was multifaceted and included watching an earthquake lesson set to Katy Perry’s “Wide Awake” on YouTube to help focus the children on the terminology. Our science teacher then brainstormed with our dance teacher (who is funded by the Arts Tax) about ways to represent earthquakes through dance. Using the song as inspiration, the dance teacher created a dance routine for the 5th grades that correctly shows the waves and their effects on the rocks around them. The children literally embodied the movements of different types of earthquakes.

Using movement to teach science is a way to engage students who may otherwise be checking out, particularly at-risk students who may feel disconnected to begin with. Movement can be a valuable learning tool to reach students with varied backgrounds, and especially students who may have language processing deficits or cognitive challenges. Our science and dance teachers are now collaborating on a planetary dance, and I suspect our children will remember the information years from now.

Additionally, Rieke has just started participating in the Right Brain Initiative. The 3rd grade is learning how to make a comic, using our Portland history unit as the subject matter. We are focusing on the perspectives of the settlers and the Native Americans when the settlers came to the Portland area. We are trying to add multiple perspectives to our study of Portland, since this is missing in the traditional curriculum. Art thus becomes a tool to recognize and convey multiple perspectives about our history and our community and what makes us a rich, diverse place to live.

These examples show how we can incorporate art as a regular part of our schools' curriculum as a best practice and interdisciplinary approach to learning, and how effectively the arts can enhance our learning of core curriculum. Funding for the arts in our schools must be sustainable and predictable. This is not something that principals and teachers should have to hope for each year on a case by case basis.

One way we can achieve this is by ensuring adequate and consistent funding for the Regional Arts and Culture Council which funds the Right Brain Initiative (RBI). We must ensure that all schools are able to participate in the RBI and are able to share the learnings and ideas across schools. This cross-sharing of information will encourage teacher innovation and build community engagement across neighborhoods that will bring an exchange of different experiences and perspectives from around our region.

We know that 93% of Americans see Arts as vital to a well-rounded education and we must do what we can and support the efforts of elected City officials, school leaders, arts organizations, businesses, families and other groups to accomplish this task. Although public education is not under the direct purview of the County, it behooves all elected officials to collaborate and hold our community accountable for this critical piece to successful learning.

**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?**

As I mentioned above, the arts can be a way to give voice to alternative viewpoints or a tool for social activism, including the many beautiful, wonderful voices that may not always be the loudest or have the most influence. Jennifer H. Pepin, owner of J. Pepin Art Gallery, is a leader in the mental health community for her work in breaking down stigma around mental illness and shattering the silence that all too often surrounds and pervades our response to mental health differences. NAMI Multnomah just honored Ms. Pepin with the first annual Pathfinder Award for "a business that has lit the path to greater

understanding and awareness of mental health in our community.” Ms. Pepin’s art gallery features only the art of artists with mental health issues. Their deeply personal stories are on display next to their pieces. The art in this gallery has a dual impact of both changing people’s views on mental illness but also offers a beacon of hope to those who see themselves so clearly reflected through the art or the stories on the walls. This is the power of art – it challenges us to see everyone in our community and reflects our own shared humanity.

We can see this same power in the Street Roots newspaper, where people can write and share their stories or report on issues from a lens than is not reflected in the mainstream media. And even more, the economic power and dignity that comes to those who sell papers and have opportunity to interact with people and make human connections.

We know the power that comes when people who are trauma survivors participate in writing workshops and use the power of the written word to heal themselves and give hope to others.

For me the first step in equity and access and one of the challenges we face is to be sure all voices are heard, and that we don’t patronize those who are vulnerable or under-represented in a way that continues to marginalize them. When we celebrate and normalize all of our perspectives, we fight the stigma of “other” and find the common ground that is so important to building whole and inclusive communities.

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

As a parent, I am thrilled to see the direct impact the Arts Tax has had on the experience of my children at our neighborhood school. Although this tax may not be the ideal funding mechanism, it has made a tangible difference. I believe that we need to find effective and efficient long-term solutions to funding art in the schools.

As a doctor and public health advocate, I have to also look at the impact that participating in arts and creative expression has on our overall health as a community, and, in particular, groups that have suffered disproportionately from chronic illness and marginalization. Although more extensive research needs to be done, initial studies have shown that creative and artistic engagement can decrease anxiety, stress, and mood disturbances, and can have a significant impact on improving health outcomes.

**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?**

**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?

I absolutely commit to funding the Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC). As I have said in my previous answers, I am a champion for safe and healthy individuals and families, and I believe the arts are an essential component of healthy people and healthy communities. I believe that County funding of the arts and culture is imperative because creativity and imagination leads to healing, promotes understanding and learning, builds community engagement, promotes economic diversity and fosters innovation to meet the challenges of the 21st century.