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2014 Washtenaw County Candidates Survey Response

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Office Candidate Seeks: Ann Arbor City Council

District/Ward: Ward 2

Candidate's Full Name: Kirk Westphal

Party Affiliation (if applicable): Democrat

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1. In regards to arts, culture and heritage, do you consider yourself any of the following:

I believe that availability and access to arts, cultural and heritage offerings in our community make our community a great place to create, live, work, play, learn and visit.

I am a consumer of arts, culture and/or heritage products and programs.

I am personally a donor to arts, cultural and/or heritage organizations.

2. What arts, cultural or heritage activities have you and/or your family members attended, participated in or supported in the past year?

As my wife, Cynthia, is a professor in UM's musical theater department, we're totally immersed in their outstanding performances (Les Miserables, Dance With Me, A Little Night Music). The family was also fortunate to accompany her to New York for her music direction role in A Christmas Story. We've also been to local recitals of musician friends and a YPT performance of The Wizard of Oz. Museum visits have included the Hall of Science in New York to the Henry Ford to UMMA.

3. Thinking back to your own K-12 education, what arts or cultural classes, programs or activities did you participate in? In what way, if any, do you believe your participation influenced or still influences you?

I was a singer for years in my public high school, both in choir as well as in a madrigal group. I studied piano privately for years. These instilled in me a deep appreciation for music--a gift that I'm passing along to my children.

4. What role do you think arts, culture, and the creative sector can play in supporting key education priorities such as closing the achievement gap, reducing the dropout rate, and preparing more students for college enrollment and the 21st century workforce?

While our test-driven culture attempts to marginalize the arts into the "nice to have" category, we have to step back and look at the facts. Studies show that an emphasis on the arts has a positive influence on academic performance in other subjects and graduation rates. I think this makes sense on many levels. Children who have a sense of pride in creating something unique at school want to be there. I see it in my children, and I can still remember performances I was a part of in high school. In fact, politician or not, I plan to participate personally in efforts to bring more visual arts options to high school students.

5. What role can arts, culture, and the creative sector play in Washtenaw's economic growth and vitality?

Without the creative sector, we may have growth, but we won't have vitality. Can anyone think of a vital place they've visited that didn't have an obvious creative influence? By being purposeful about their support of arts and cultural organizations, I think the public sector, private sector and community leaders should set the tone for others to follow. We have to instill advancement of artists and the creative fields at the grassroots level and have fertile ground for them to thrive. Our future depends on it.

6. Do you support public investment in the creative economy? This includes arts, culture, heritage organizations and creative individuals.

Yes

Please explain your answer:

I believe it is critical to build a creative economy that allows local artists the opportunity to earn a living here and that will attract new artists from outside to move here. Equally important is to recognize that artists come in all stripes. There are artists who are painters and sculptors and artists who practice in public places like urban planners, architects, and landscape designers. The common thread to all of this activity is creativity. Ann Arbor is seen as the creative engine of our region. As an urban planner, I know that communities who invest in their creative sector are investing in their future. Artists need to be major players in reinventing Michigan and model how art--of all kinds--creates actual financial value in cities. They can do this by first demonstrating civic leadership that is inclusive and promotes creativity in our neighborhoods.

7. If elected, what measureable action(s) will you take during your term to support public investment in our community's creative economy and support arts, culture, heritage organizations and businesses and creative individuals?

I know that community is built from the ground up not the top down. I want to listen first before I recommend concrete actions. However, as a planner, I would recommend that the community create a shared "master plan" for how we invest in arts and culture. It needs to be custom built for our town. We need to listen to all stakeholders. We have a community with a range of provincial and progressive tastes in public art, and our plan would need to address everyone's needs.

8. What is your position on public funding for arts and culture and, if elected, how will your position be reflected during the budget/planning process?

The new "baked in" art process seems to be an improvement, but I want to make sure it is inclusive of all tastes. Like anything new, we need time to see if this process is working, how it is being implemented, and how to improve it. If elected, I will bring together residents who are willing to demonstrate civic leadership and help create a master art plan. I look forward to listening to the conversation that evolves.

9. If you support public funding for arts and culture, what do you think are the best means of allocating funds?

Line item appropriations
Appropriations distributed via grant programs
Crowd-sourcing, ongoing evaluation of "baked in" art

10. If elected, would you accept an invitation to become a member in an arts, culture and heritage caucus?

Yes

If yes, from which caucus would you accept an invitation?

Washtenaw County Caucus