

Dane County Democratic Party Candidate Questionnaire

Keith Furman
District 19 Alder, City of Madison
www.keithfurman.com

Professional Experience:

I worked as a technology professional for over 20 years prior to serving on the Madison Common Council. I began my career running the IT department of a translation company. After a few years, I became a partner at an IT consulting firm supporting small and medium-sized companies in the New York City area. During my 15 years in that position, I worked with a large variety of vendors and clients. I was exposed to a wide range of industries and built strong partnerships with clients. When I moved to Madison, I joined a healthcare startup as their Chief Technology and Chief Strategy Officer. The experience of leading a small business required the maximization of limited resources and has been formative to the solution-based approach I bring to the council.

Political/Service Experience:

Prior to moving to Madison, I lived in Hoboken, NJ where I became invested in a grassroots effort to improve the city's park space. This initiative transformed the way I thought about my role and responsibility as a part of my community and catapulted me into increased involvement in local government. My drive to play a role in the improvement of my community led me to volunteer for [now former] Mayor Dawn Zimmer in a city council race, as well as her two successful campaigns for Mayor. I was later appointed to

the city's planning board (a volunteer position), where I eventually became Chairman. In this role, I led and helped facilitate the implementation of sound city planning initiatives, including a re-examination of the City's Master Plan for Zoning and Development.

Upon selling my share of the healthcare startup, I committed myself to my larger responsibility to my community. I have served for over two years on the Madison Common Council and am driven to continue improving the well-being of the Madison community through just and thoughtful policies.

Why Are You Running In This Election?

Like our country at large, Madison is a great city that needs to do a lot more to be truly great for everyone and to ensure it's long-term health in face of climate change. We are facing a long-overdue reckoning with the deep inequities in our city and the differing impact of police and public safety. This past year was tied for the hottest year ever, underscoring the increasing urgency of our efforts to mitigate climate change and prevent further damage to our planet. We must tackle the impact of COVID-19 on our community and city budget and as our city grows, we must meet the growth with a long-term vision for smart transportation and infrastructure planning. While these challenging times offer uncertainty, they also offer an opportunity to deeply transform our city for a more equitable, safe, and green future. I believe this moment requires experienced and proven leadership. My experience on the council has given me a deep understanding of what is possible through local policy and defines my solution-based approach. I am running for re-election because I believe in the power of local government to truly affect and improve lives and am galvanized by the unfinished business at this important time for the city.

What Are The Three Most Important Issues In Your Race?

1. Engagement. The heart of my job is ensuring residents are kept informed and, more importantly, have opportunities to provide input. Local government is most effective in improving the lives of residents because we serve our neighbors and are closest to the issues that affect our community. However, this proximity to our communities requires effort. I make myself available via regular office hours, phone, and email. I am direct and transparent about my position and I never back down from hard conversations. I'm also committed to expanding resident access to city policies and conversations across the city. I championed efforts to make our Boards, Commissions, and Committees more accessible and equitable while also chairing the implementation of the Task Force on Government Structure. When COVID-19 struck, I used my professional background in IT to help the City transition to virtual meetings that meet public access requirements.

2. Fair and Equitable Madison. The COVID-19 pandemic and high-profile deaths at the hands of police brought to the forefront the overdue need to respond to racial inequality in our city. Even at the best of times, Madison has not been a community in which everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive. The solution to the deep inequities in our city is not straightforward or simple. However, making this city just and safe for all of us will require a shift in how we invest our resources. By investing in alternative public safety interventions and providing community resources, we can improve public safety and make Madison a safe place for all of us. I don't have all the answers, so I commit to listening to the voices of those most impacted, questioning who benefits from policy changes, considering possible unintended consequences, and making decisions that move us towards greater equity.

3. Climate Change. With each passing year, the consequences of climate change grow larger and require bolder and more urgent policies. In District 19, we've seen the consequence of climate change firsthand with increased and destructive flooding. The climate change crisis requires a two-pronged approach in which we both mitigate current consequences and proactively rethink our systems and infrastructure to make Madison a more sustainable city.

What Are The Largest Environmental Concerns You Aim To Deal With In Office?

Our response as a city has to be two pronged: we must mitigate and adapt to the current consequences of our warming planet while striving to create a dramatically more sustainable city. To address mitigation, I will continue to support efforts and policies that make the city more resilient, including the City's Watershed studies. I will work with key stakeholders in our community to ensure that as we grow, we're investing in infrastructure and require developments that support an increasing resilience to climate change. I'm committed to continuing to support the city's efforts to make its operations 100% Renewable Energy and Zero Net Carbon by 2030. I am also driven to give our city's residents more opportunities to make green choices, by strongly supporting public transit, regulating new developments, and investing in green energy at a city-wide level.

How Will You Use Your Position To Create More Equitable Opportunities And Help Those Living In Poverty?

Poverty is a result of many policy failures and therefore there are many policy solutions that have the potential to alleviate the multiple facets of poverty. At the city level, however, we are limited in our policy options. The areas where we can help alleviate

poverty are by supporting affordable housing, increasing accessibility to healthy and affordable food throughout the city, and investing in programming that aims to alleviate the consequences of poverty on children.

I strongly support policies like increasing the minimum wage, addressing the high cost of health insurance, and strengthening our unions and encourage my colleagues in the state legislature to pursue these solutions.

How Do We Address Racial Inequality?

We address racial inequality by taking an equity lens to every decision we make as policymakers. Historically, those with decision-making power both unintentionally and intentionally caused harm to marginalized communities through policies. Whether through red lining the housing market, tying property taxes to education funding, or destroying the environment and water in marginalized communities, local governments have often caused harm. With every decision that comes before me, I commit to listen to the voices of those most impacted, ask the question of who benefits from the changes, consider the impacts (both intended and unintended) of the proposed change, and make decisions that move us towards greater equity. Only by making decisions with full intentionality towards equity can we begin to undo the racial inequality in our city. I want change that lasts, and I'm committed to doing my part in the fight to make this city one where everyone can thrive.

How will you promote restorative justice and address abusive and racist practices by the police force?

As Alder, I have heard from people in our District who think that reduced funding for the police is the worst thing we could do right now. I've also heard from people who have never felt protected by police presence, who fear that their family might not make it home because of targeting from the same police force that others feel protected by. I believe that we are asking far too much of our police officers; situations related to mental health, crisis response, and the consequences of poverty require special skills that we are currently asking our police force to deliver without properly equipping them with the tools needed to do so. Without significant restructuring of how the city meets the public safety needs of its residents, people of color will continue to suffer more than others, and that is unacceptable. Making this city healthier and safer for all of us will require a shift in how we invest our resources. Some investments I will be championing include: improving mental health services, utilizing professionals trained in evidence-based crisis response, increasing affordable housing, improving public transit that makes it possible for people to keep employment, investing in organizations who strengthen community bonds, and addressing retention issues within the Madison Police Department. Only through a full re-evaluation of our concept of public safety and who benefits can we begin to promote restorative justice and address the disparate impact our police department has had on our community.

Due to the ongoing economic impact of Coronavirus, many local governments are expecting unprecedented budget shortfalls. What would you prioritize in the budget? Where would you make cuts?

So far, we have been incredibly fortunate in Madison. We were able to use money from our rainy-day fund to make up for the budget shortfalls COVID has caused so far. I think many people have a false impression that there is a ton of inefficiencies or "fat"

in government budgets. That may be the case in the federal budget or possibly the state budget, but the City of Madison's budget is fairly efficient. State laws make it incredibly difficult for us to increase spending or raise taxes. The City has had to make difficult choices every year with its budget due to a continued increase of cost of City services without proportionate increases in revenue. The overwhelming majority of the City's budget goes towards salaries for staff and debt payment. If cuts were necessary, I would prioritize spending that helps those in the community that need our assistance the most (i.e. spending by the Community Development Division and public transit). Many of Madison's services are considered platinum-level and if necessary, I would support downgrading the level of service we provide residents (i.e. trash pickup, snow removal, leaf pickup). I don't say that lightly – I know residents value those services. But I do think that we have to act collectively to ensure equity, so I would look for changes that do not lead to increases in poverty for our most vulnerable.

How have you elevated diverse voices in government and public discourse? How would you continue to do so if elected to this office?

At the heart of my desire to make our policymaking process more equitable is the inclusion of diverse voices from historically marginalized communities.

Through my engagement activities, which include open office hours, Task Force for Government Structure participation, and regular interaction with residents in my district and throughout the City, I've focused an enormous amount of time and energy listening and providing ways for diverse voices to be heard.

Three brief examples:

When I first became Alder, there was a new residential building with close to 100 apartment units being proposed on the border of

my district. The proposal included affordable workforce housing and housing for homeless veterans. I held a neighborhood meeting with the neighboring Alder and we had close to 190 people show up. I'd estimate close to 90% of the audience was against the proposal. There was a general message that affordable housing was OK, but not so close to so many single-family homes. Towards the end of the meeting, a resident raised their hand and asked if the proposal would be ended because of how many people were against it at the meeting. The idea that a room filled with residents who wouldn't benefit from additional desperately affordable housing could end a project was absurd. We recognized that people who attended the meeting were concerned with public safety, traffic and school capacity related to the new building that were easy to address. We had a follow-up meeting with stakeholders from each of those areas of concern and the project ended up being successfully approved without any further protest.

In early 2019, a City project focused on Housing First, an innovative concept that provided housing for homeless, was struggling. The building did not have enough needed support services and neighbors of the project were vocal about their unhappiness. Mayor Soglin proposed adding additional security guards at the building in an attempt to help solve the problems at the building. The building always had 1 guard on duty and the proposal was to add another one. I successfully spearheaded an effort to provide funding for a professional trained in trauma-informed care and de-escalation. It was essential to me that individuals working to leave homelessness not feel like they were in a prison in their own home. I also supported additional funding for services at the building.

When a proposal to limit the distribution of straws was being

distributed for comment, I realized very quickly that it didn't reflect the views or concerns of the disabled community enough. I lobbied and worked hard to make sure representatives on the City's Disability Rights Commission were able to provide necessary feedback so the legislation reflected the serious concerns of the disability rights community.

What Are The Largest Transportation Issues You Wish To Work On And How Will You Address Them?

As our city has grown and developed, our roads and transportation systems have become increasingly overburdened. We know that Madison is only going to continue to grow, necessitating proactive and sustainable management of our transportation systems. One specific project I will continue to support is the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, which will have the multifaceted impact of decreasing congestion on our busiest roads, opening up increased economic opportunity, and decreasing carbon emissions from personal vehicles. The BRT will add high-frequency, limited stop service provided by large buses. Additionally, the system would include frequent all-day service, transit signal priority, dedicated bus lanes, and off-board fare payments.

Any Other Issues/Topics You Wish To Discuss?

My campaign's 4 priorities are the priorities I've heard from residents in the district: engagement, transportation, climate change & flood mitigation and fair and equitable Madison. I've discussed all of those above.