

## Dane County Democratic Party Candidate Questionnaire

Regina Hirsch  
Alderperson  
N/A

### **Professional Experience:**

Associate Scientist for UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, and Vice-President of Operations for family engineering small business; Environmental Educator and Consultant; Yoga Instructor

### **Political/Service Experience:**

Council President, 2020-present; Vice-President of Council 2018-2019. While Chair of Parks and Rec Committee (2016-2020), passed new Integrated Pest Management (IPM) policy for all parks and green spaces, extended trail system, solar powered new park shelter, created city-wide bike routes, and working to build a whitewater park on the Yahara River. Redevelopment Authority (RDA) committee member work with city staff, council, and developers to ensure that new and renovated buildings use “green” materials and designs, promote renewable energy, and create opportunity for diversity. Member of Community Affairs & Council Policy (CA/CP) and Utilities Committees which are working to identify renewable energy targets and next steps to achieving these target goals. CA/CP committee we successfully passed resolution to create Indigenous People’s Day to be celebrated each October. Work to ensure budgets and borrowing are fiscally responsible. Other City committees served on: Finance, Public Safety, Rivers and Trails Task Force

## **Why Are You Running In This Election?**

I am running for re-election as I enjoy working and developing sound policies that benefit the whole community. I believe in strategic and sustainable growth that balances the need for more housing options with high quality public safety services (police, fire, EMS, public works-roads) and fiscally responsible budgets. Sustainable growth also means increasing parks and trails, skilled labor jobs, and transportation options within our city and commuting to Madison. I look forward to continuing to work with city staff, community, and council to see projects through to fruition (e.g., Riverfront development, Whitewater Park, and Safety of Hwy 51 at key intersections). One new project I am excited about is assessing city's policies to weed out any inherent racism and discrimination, and work with our community to develop a more inclusive and welcoming community for BIPOC and LGBTQ people and people with disabilities.

## **What Are The Three Most Important Issues In Your Race?**

These are the following projects I would like to complete during this new term on council.

2. Aggressively pursue DOT and City to improve HWY 51 from town to HWY B to reduce the number and severity of accidents along that stretch of road.
2. Continue to develop an environmentally sound and family friendly Yahara River Park and Redevelopment area that incorporates the community's vision of greenspace and community gathering spaces with renewable and energy efficient housing, which create ample revenue for the city and benefits our downtown businesses.
4. Begin to assess city's policies to weed out any inherent racism and discrimination, and work with our community to

develop a more inclusive and welcoming community for BIPOC, LGBTQ and people with disabilities.

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

The biggest environmental concern I aim to deal with is the Yahara River water quality in our stretch of the river and associated dam. Based on a sediment sampling study the dam is holding back decades of toxins in our Millpond, a place where community members fish and aquatic birds congregate and feed. We have been working with the DNR and other experts on plans to take out the dam, cap the sediments in place so they do not move downstream, and create whitewater features that not only increase water recreation but also create fish ladders so fish can once again move up and down river. This project will also include fixing our eroding shoreline and planting native plants to increase wildlife and fish habitat, plus create river viewing and fishing areas, and extend our multi-use trails along the river. Overall this project will increase: water quality, bank stabilization, wildlife and fish habitat, water recreation, biking/walking, tourism, and downtown business revenue.

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

The pandemic has created a horrible situation for many communities from loss of jobs, sickness, and loss of family members and/or friends. At the city level and through the utilities committee we have been extending the time for community members to pay their utilities. The city also continues to stock our city food pantry and offer a local affordable taxi service for residents. Of a great concern for me is that our community still has over 600 homes that have lead laterals and pipes leading into their homes, I have repeatedly pushed for a plan to replace lead

pipes throughout the community to no avail. Currently, it has been encouraged for community members to replace their lead pipes during the year when street repair and stormwater or sewer upgrades were being done in their street. Unfortunately, this meant the homeowner would have to find extra money to replace said pipes but also find money for their portion of new sidewalks and driveway aprons, thus making it cost prohibited for the majority of our community. This year the DNR announced it is offering community grants to replace all the lead pipes on the private side free of charge, thereby ensuring all our community members no matter their income level will have their lead pipes replaced. I am happy to say our Utilities staff has applied for this grant and as of January 21 we are still waiting to hear whether or not we will be awarded these monies.

### **How Do We Address Racial Inequality?**

To address racial inequality in our community, we first need to identify if and where racial inequality is occurring. Our Community Affairs & Council Policy committee (which I am a member) is currently organizing listening sessions for our community to voice their concerns, offer ideas, and generally discuss the areas where the city can improve with respects to equity, racism, and discrimination. It is from these meetings we hope to fully understand where we are lacking and develop an essential plan to move us forward as a city and community to address these inequalities.

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

I think the first step is to determine if in fact there has been abusive and racist practices by our police force. Just assuming all

communities and all police are abusive and/or racist does a great disservice to our community and the dedicated and equality minded police officers. As stated previously, our Community Affairs & Council Policy committee (which I am a member) is currently organizing listening sessions for our community to voice their concerns, offer ideas, and generally discuss the areas where the city can improve with respects to equity, racism, and discrimination. It is from these meetings we hope to fully understand where we are lacking and develop an essential plan to move us forward as a city and community to address these inequalities, discrimination, and/or racist acts. If during these sessions or through other communications with our community members it is identified that we have one or more officers that have been abusive or engaged in racist practices, we will develop a plan of action for said individuals developed most likely involving input from the Personnel Committee, the Police and Fire Commission along with the police chief, mayor, and city council. I personally would take any allegations very seriously and will work to find the best solution to ensure our police force is not abusive or racist, but serves the whole community with respect and professionalism.

**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?**

It all depends on how severe our budget shortfall is. If not too drastic, I would prioritize keeping our staff employed, but not hire any new employees unless they are replacing an essential position. Another way to reduce cost is to reduce capital expenditures via borrowing, therefore I would post-pone non-essential projects, new vehicle purchases, etc. I would also look for areas to become more efficient that can reduce

expenditures, and any contract work that can be postponed or work reduced.

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

As a teacher and through many committee meetings while on City Council I have always tried to engage all students or committee members to speak during classes/meetings. I will continue to listen to all thoughts and ideas from both community members and other council members and actively engage members that are reticent to speak.

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

There has been a considerable number of accidents on HWY 51 between the City of Stoughton and County HWY B, one recently that was fatal. Although, the DOT has a plan to widen this stretch of highway and put in a round-about at highway B that work is not anticipated to be completed until late 2027 or later. To me this is a public safety hazard, therefore I will work with other council members and mayor to continue to request DOT to come up with a temporary fix for Highway B until full work is completed.

**Any Other Issues/Topics You Wish To Discuss?**

A topic I would like to discuss with you and from your experience, how best to deal with fake news being propagated both from community members and alderpersons?