

Dane County Democratic Party Candidate Questionnaire

Tag Evers
District 13 Alder - City of Madison
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Professional Experience:

Small business owner, concert promoter, event organizer, activist

Political/Service Experience:

Elected as D13 Alder in April 2019

Why Are You Running In This Election?

I ran for office two years committed to progressive values centered in racial equity, environmental justice and sustainability. Once elected, I focused on two major development projects in the district, Truman Olson and Bayview, both prioritizing low-income families by expanding affordable housing. I sponsored two amendments that increased the City's affordable housing fund by \$1 million annually. The first of these amendments was the first time the fund had been increased since its inception in 2014. Moreover, this amendment uncoupled the fund from reliance upon federal tax credits; not only did I help substantially increase the fund but this change made the fund much more flexible and available for cooperatives and non-profits. I worked with colleagues to fund eviction prevention and assistance for first-time home-buyers. I opposed mandatory furloughs of city workers. I'm engaged in multiple efforts to address the climate crisis by focusing on the built environment. I opposed the F-35s, the only alder west of the isthmus to do so. I started the District 13 Alliance

to increase communication and cooperation among my district's neighborhood associations. I prevented the Monroe Street Library from being closed and resisted efforts to build a football stadium in a traditional residential neighborhood. I've worked closely with residents to increase safe bicycle and pedestrian access on Vilas Park Drive and within the Triangle.

Affordability, sustainability and representing the interests of the residents of District 13 as we take on the broader challenges facing the City remain my priorities. I'm running for reelection to continue the work I started.

What Are The Three Most Important Issues In Your Race?

- Racial Equity
- Climate Justice
- Affordable Housing

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

- I serve on the Sustainable Madison Committee (SMC). We are in the process of updating the City's Sustainability Plan to be an actionable document to accelerate progress toward our 2030 goals of 100% renewables and net zero carbon emissions for city vehicles and infrastructure. The City also has set the goal of being a net carbon neutral city as a whole by 2050; updating our Sustainability Plan as an actionable document is critical to achieve this goal.
- Scientists tell us we need to cut global emissions in half by 2030 in order to avoid catastrophic impacts from climate change. I am part of a working group of fellow Alders, SMC members, and members of the Plan Commission to address sustainability in the context of our built environment. 48% of the city's emissions are from its commercial and residential building stock. The private sector resists change as there's every incentive in a competitive

market environment to not internalize the social and environment costs inherent in design choices that determine our building stock. Instead, these costs get shifted onto future generations. To get to where we need to be will require innovative policy and programmatic action. Most of the buildings we have today will be here in 2050, and new buildings as the city grows will last for 50-100 years. We need to build for a sustainable future, one in which our social habits have conformed to ecological necessity. We have the resources as city to be a climate leader, and it's my intention to keep pushing us to the top.

- I was the only Alder west of the isthmus to oppose the F-35s. The disparate impacts of increased noise pollution would fall on low-income families on Madison's east side, which is a matter of environmental justice. PFAS contamination of the soils at Truax has spread to our lakes and poses a threat to our drinking water. I drafted the resolution opposing the F-35s that was passed unanimously by the SMC and I sit on the Board of Public Works where I am committed to work with City Engineering to make certain that no soils are disturbed in future construction at the airbase without DNR-mandated remediation.

- Our lakes define us as a city. I remain committed to protecting our lakes, focusing on Monona Bay and Lake Wingra, the two large bodies of water in District 13. I work closely with the Friends of Lake Wingra to amplify their efforts to keep leaves out of our streets and reduce sodium chloride contaminants due to road salt and inefficient water softeners.

- The city is committed to fleet electrification, and I was a co-sponsor of Alder Syed's EV Charging Station ordinance. But we need to also look at reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMTs), the primary goal behind Traffic Demand Management (TDM), the approach the city is beginning to embrace and one I fully support and intend to advance in my second term.

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

- Upon being elected two years ago, I focused my attention on what I considered to be the number one issue in the district and that was preventing a gap in grocery services in South Madison. It was a team effort and I'm pleased to say we're now on pace to break ground in the spring for a new full-service grocery store and 150 units of affordable housing at the Truman Olson site at 1402 S. Park.
- I've also focused heavily on the Triangle, the part of the district demarcated by Regent, West Washington Ave, and South Park St and home to many of our most vulnerable residents. I am committed to elevating the voices and needs of Bayview and CDA Apartment residents. This has included coordinating a mutual aid network in response to Covid to meet basic needs through food and essentials drives, to organizing the D13 Mask Brigade with residents sewing masks to make sure everyone on the Triangle was protected. (Similar outreach was organized for CDA residents at Romnes.) Bayview's very exciting redevelopment project is slated to break ground this spring and through my service on Bayview's Board of Directors, I've worked diligently to ensure this project's success. I also serve on the Board of the Community Development Authority (CDA) and have pushed to expand our inventory of public housing.
- I've made affordable housing a priority. During my first term, I introduced budget amendments that increased our Affordable Housing Fund by \$1 million annually and made the fund more flexible in the process. I meet with city staff in the Community Development Division on a weekly basis to explore housing initiatives, including in recent months emergency strategies to prevent evictions and deal with increased homelessness. I'm part of a subset of Alders who have pushed for a revamping of the City's Land Banking Strategy to take more parcels out of the

speculative real estate market, targeting locations in high-opportunity areas featuring access to transit, jobs and healthy food.

- Assistance for first-time homebuyers, including financial literacy classes, is an important policy objective to get families on the ladder of building generational wealth, breaking the cycles of poverty-induced trauma. I sponsored and successfully passed a budget amendment toward this end for 2021 and intend to expand this effort moving forward.

- The pandemic has unveiled the extent which the digital divide impacts low-income communities. Digital access should be the same as having running water, heat and electricity, but there are a lot of hurdles to overcome. By state statute, Madison cannot be an Internet Service Provider (ISP), but we must do everything in our power to address this inequity. Children in low-income families have struggled with virtual learning due to insufficient access to the internet, devices and digital literacy. I am working with Alexis London, Bayview's executive director, to address this through the Lending Library program set up by library staff under the leadership of Library Director Greg Mickells. Donating smart phones, laptops and desktops to be recycled for reuse, and identifying funds to purchase refurbished devices for residents who lack them is something I'm pursuing within my district. BIPOC businesses need help with point of sale digital technology, a deficit that can be addressed through the City's new Small Business Equity & Recovery (SBER) program.

- Thanks to the candidacy of Andrew Yang, the idea of universal basic income (UBI) is now seriously addressed in policy circles. We are a wealthy nation, but 40% of Americans do not have \$400 for an emergency. Mayor Satya has joined with several mayors across the country in a campaign called Mayors for a Guaranteed Income. The City has received a \$500,000 grant to get started with a pilot project along the lines of what Stockton, CA is

doing in which 125 families receive \$500 per month. Mayor Satya has invited me to be on the steering committee to implement this pilot, and it will be my goal to see this program expanded as a means of reparations budgeting.

How Do We Address Racial Inequality?

- Madison remains two cities, not one. Racist policies in our nation's past, including policies adopted here in Madison such as redlining, mean the fault line of the racial divide is economic and financial. The racial wealth and income gaps that exist in our City would suggest that all the points I made in the section above are part of this answer as well.
- From a Common Council standpoint, we should be addressing policy deliberations from a framework of reparations budgeting. Affordable Housing, improving public transportation, reinvesting in our communities, reallocating resources away from the police to make these investments, and a commitment to climate justice are all connected to addressing racial equity.
- First-time homebuyer assistance for BIPOC residents.
- Free bus fare for low-income families and students.
- Supportive housing for at-risk youth transitioning out of foster care.
- Land-banking strategies to interrupt gentrification and displacement.
- Implement Guaranteed Income Pilot, gather data as to its impact, and expand as warranted.

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

- Support the work of the new Civilian Oversight Board (COB) to increase transparency and accountability.

- Work closely with the new police chief to rebuild trust with Black and Brown communities
- Expand intervention and support services for at-risk youth and their families.
- Allocate resources away from retributive model of law enforcement to restorative model, including victim-offender mediation circles involving respected community elders.
- Adopt robust violence prevention strategies outlined in Recommendation #40 of the final report of the Madison Police Policy and Procedures Ad Hoc Committee, emphasizing a public health approach to public safety. Double funding for Focused Interruption Coalition so that FIC could do more proactive peer intervention to prevent gun violence.
- Train and utilize parent outreach workers in our city schools.

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?

- We must prioritize core support services due the fact that Federal and State government have starved community services over the years. We have defunded our schools – 90% of our Black and Brown students are not reading at grade level – and then used police to keep order. We have defunded mental health service and then criminalized the homeless on our streets, who are disproportionately people of color. We have defunded essential social services and then made the police the first line of response to those in need. The police have become the backstop against our failure to meet the needs of those most vulnerable in our midst. The system is broken, hence the call to defund the police. We ask the police to do too much, which even former police chief Mike Koval acknowledged. Defunding the police starts with asking what it is the police are doing that we no longer

want them to do. The prime example is the crisis response unit based on the CAHOOTS model we established this year on Council. This is a modest yet important first step. We must get away from seeing the police as the first line of response to those in need. Reinvesting in our communities has direct impacts in commensurately reducing the need for law enforcement responses. The prison abolition and police abolition movement, as described by Angela Davis, is less about tearing down existing structures and more about rendering them obsolete. Healthy communities are safe communities, and our communities are a long way from healthy.

- Depending on how bad things get, we may have to do modest service cuts across the board, but there's every indication that the Biden Administration will address the budget shortfalls state and local governments are facing due to the pandemic. Which brings up another challenge. If there's going to be a massive infrastructure initiative, we will need to fully fund our engineering staff. If HUD under Biden can convince Congress to fully fund the Section 8 program, that would triple or quadruple the number of Section 8 housing vouchers and we'd need to increase staffing capacity to handle those applications. Federal funding to address climate change along the lines of a Green New Deal would require additional staffing. In short, it's hard to speculate about across-the-board cuts given the unknowns about how the new administration's priorities get through Congress.

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

- Alder Sheri Carter and I held a Public Summit Safety last November centering Black voices. The panel consisted of Judge Everett Mitchell, Kaleem Caire, Anthony Cooper of FIC, Brandi Grayson of Urban Triage, and Aurielle Smith of PHMDC. This was in

response to neighborhood town halls westside Alders had convened that were centered in white fear.

- We live in a time of multiple crises, crises that are compounding, interlocking and reinforcing. As a white straight male, it's important for me at times to shut up and make space for others. I can and must use my privilege to advocate for inclusive and equitable policies to make sure all voices are heard. Voice does not mean veto, but voice is the essence of participatory democracy.
- We need to stand up the Office of Resident Engagement to assist Alders in responding to constituent contacts. The loudest voices at the table are not the only voices that matter.
- We need to reduce the number of Boards, Committees, and Commissions and reduce barriers to participation by low-income residents in all our public meetings.

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

- Traffic Demand Management aimed at reducing vehicle miles traveled
- Infill development that is oriented toward transit, walkability, safe bike access
- We need a circulator, an electric trolley of sorts, that takes a loop around the City's major tourist spots. This would get cars off the street and reduce the need for parking at places like Olbrich Gardens, Memorial Union and Henry Vilas Zoo.
- Expanded Metro service including planning for the north/south BRT line
- Bus fare subsidies for low-income families and students

Any Other Issues/Topics You Wish To Discuss?

The City and County need to work in collaboration with the School District to address the opportunity gap. The increases in car thefts

and shots fired are directly tied to the pandemic, but also a result of kids failing in school. The fact that 90% of Black and Brown kids are not reading at grade level is a damning fact that we must own. The private sector, particularly those firms with healthy balance sheets, need to be more involved in funding policy solutions given the budgetary challenges we are likely to face as a result of the pandemic.