

Dane Dems Endorsement Questionnaire

Thank you for seeking an endorsement from the Dane County Democratic Party. You do not need to answer all of the questions below, but please answer all of the ones you feel are pertinent to your campaign. We will ask more detailed questions and followups during our interview, if we choose to have one, so feel free to answer these questions as briefly or thoroughly as you desire. These answers will be shared in full with our membership before they vote on your endorsement.

Email *

bechen4board@gmail.com

Candidate name *

Carlene Bechen

Position you are running for (include municipality) *

Trustee, Village of Oregon

Campaign website

https://www.facebook.com/Bechen4Board

Professional Experience *

For nearly 30 years, I was a public school educator in the Madison Metropolitan School District. After retiring from MMSD in 2016, I wrote curriculum for the District, managed Fitchburg Farms retail operations and spent lots of time with my grandchildren.

In 2019, as a result of the Fair Maps for Wisconsin Summit convened by the Oregon Area Progressives in Marshfield WI, I was hired as Organizing Director with the WI Fair Maps Coalition (FMC) to engage grassroots activists around the state to fight gerrymandering in Wisconsin. Following the imposition of the current extreme gerrymander by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, FMC expanded our mission to include access to voting and a fair judiciary.

I am currently working to educate Wisconsin voters about the role of the State Supreme Court, the cases likely to come before it in the next sessions, and to encourage voters to turnout for the February primary and April general election.

Political/Service Experience *

Political activism has been part of my life since I was a teenager in Maxton, NC, where I campaigned with my dad for Mo Udall for US President. Since then I have done almost every role in a campaign, from stuffing envelopes and making phone calls to hosting fundraisers and managing campaigns. My activism is not limited to elections. I have lobbied legislators, served on the Dane Dems Exec Board, testified before legislative committees and the JFC, and more. I am a founding and active member of the Oregon Area Progressives. In 2021, at the encouragement of Amanda Peterson, I was a write-in candidate for Trustee on the Oregon Village Board. That year there were three seats open and only one declared candidate. This year there are three seats on the ballot. Three incumbents, including me, are joined by four other candidates. While I am glad for the interest in local government, I would have preferred not to have a primary at a time when the Wisconsin Supreme Court race is looming large.

Why are you running for this seat? *

In my first two years on the Village of Oregon Board, a range of important work has been accomplished, including:

- >Determining the location and budget for the new library;
- >Meeting community needs while keeping Jaycee Park renovations within budget;
- >Engaging the community in deciding the best use of the Village-owned property at 249 N. Main St.;
- >Overseeing new residential developments and affordable housing options;
- >Creating three new committees – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Transportation, and Sustainability;
- >Initiating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training for Village staff, trustees, committee and community members;
- >Making tough decisions to balance the \$36 million Village budget to keep taxes as low as possible, while providing municipal services residents want and need.

As a Trustee, I serve as the Village Board representative on the Library Board and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. Determining the best location in the Village for the new library and which elements to keep and eliminate in order to build the library Oregon residents want and need as affordably as possible was a challenge. Responding to community input was important. The process we undertook resulted in a new library that I believe will be amazing when it is finished.

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee began our work in May 2022. Our first task was to decide on DEI training for Village staff, trustees, committee members and interested community members. We are committed to ensuring that the Village of Oregon is a place that recognizes and values the inherent humanity and dignity of every person and their right to live, work, and play in Oregon.

In the next year, the Village Hall will move and the new library will be completed. The Village of Oregon Board will make decisions that impact our community regarding the Oregon Senior Center, the property at 249 N. Main, and expected expansion of Village boundaries, among others. It is important that Trustees weigh these decisions carefully and consider their impacts on all community members.

I am proud of my work in my first term as a Village of Oregon Trustee. I do my best to represent the interests of all Village residents, to be honest and forthright in my thought process, and to make responsible decisions in the best interest of our entire community.

I am asking for your endorsement in the primary election on Tuesday, February 21st and the general election on Tuesday, April 4th.

What are the three most important issues in your race? *

Expanding affordable housing options; Easing the financial burden on Village residents while maintaining Village services; Creating a community where the inherent worth of every person is recognized, respected and honored so that all feel welcome, included and seen

What are the largest environmental concerns you aim to deal with in office?

The Village will develop a new comprehensive plan in the next year. Our plan must address the ongoing flooding issues in the Village. The original settlement was built on a wetland area. Attempts to control and reroute it have been unsuccessful. As we plan for future growth, we must consider how to re-establish the wetlands in a way that supports plants and animals and the water filtration provided by wetlands AND create sustainable residential and business opportunities for the Village.

How will you use your position to create more equitable opportunities and help those living in poverty?

Expanding affordable housing is a top priority. In recent years, several new projects have been built and are being initiated in the Village. Access to transportation is another need that we are aware of and attempting to address as a Board.

Food, medications, and services for seniors and teens also come to mind. Our locally-owned grocery store is closing tomorrow and Hy-Vee is reopening in the same location in a couple of weeks. Bill's donated a portion of receipts to local nonprofits, including the Oregon Food Pantry, Senior Center and Youth Center. The Village budget helps to support these services as well, but the loss of those receipts will be felt in budgets and need to be addressed.

A new Oregon Senior Center will be built in the next few years. Along with the new building will be an expansion of services. The Senior Center currently serves a large population of seniors living on fixed incomes, many below the poverty line. The Village Board will need to find money in the budget to help support these expanded services.

What will you do to address racial inequality?

The DEI Committee is currently discussing racial inequality and will be engaging with Village staff, board and committee members through DEI training. This is a first step in shared understanding of how racial inequality impacts BIPOC people and how it is perpetuated by inequitable systems.

How will you promote restorative justice and address racially biased policing?

The issue of racially biased policing will be addressed through the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training the Village is just starting. I am hopeful that restorative justice will be an outcome of the training and subsequent discussion and policy decisions by the Village Board and Police Commission.

How will you improve the public health of our community in your position?

I am committed to creating and supporting opportunities for physical and mental health, through local sports leagues, programs through the Oregon Library and Senior Center, passive recreation in nature, free clinics in collaboration with Dane County Public Health and more.

What are the largest transportation issues you wish to work on and how will you address them?

Most Oregon residents do not work in the Village. While many work remotely, most drive to their place of employment in individual cars. Transportation options for the Village are being explored by the new Transportation Committee. I am hopeful that their recent survey of Village resident will indicate a strong interest for transportation services, including electric charging stations, regional bus service, and in-town transportation.

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

I am a strong advocate for diverse voices and regularly bring up the lack of diversity on the Village Board, among Village staff, and on Village committees. One of the first recommendations of the DEI Committee was an expansion of the way openings are publicized so a more diverse pool of candidates might apply for positions or run for office. The new policy was adopted by the Village Board and is being implemented.

Any other issues/topics you wish to discuss?

The broken shared revenue system in Wisconsin is an enormous issue facing county and municipal governments throughout the state. We must demand that the State Legislature and Governor Evers work together to solve this problem (and the broken public education funding formula). It's hurting all of us!

The tasks before the Oregon Village Board are daunting. Quite frankly, sometimes I wonder why anyone would want this job. That being said, I am committed to public service and to making the world better for all people. I humbly ask for your endorsement.

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