

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 *

vaneperenmatt@yahoo.com

Candidate name *

Matt Van Eperen

Position you are running for (include municipality) *

City of Madison Common Council District 3

Campaign website

www.votemve.com

Professional Experience *

Agreements&Contracts Negotiator

Political/Service Experience *

Judicial Intern, Judge M. Joseph Donald and Congressional District Intern, Congresswoman Gwen S. Moore

Why are you running for this seat? *

As cliché as it sounds, I really want to ensure our community is the best it can be, and I want to help make it the best. I've always sought ways to be involved in civic action, but particularly after my son was born last year, there was a new spark. All the problems we currently face and will face in the future need to be met with action that takes into account the community and via collaboration with others who may have differing opinions. I believe I can be a voice for the community and foster collaboration between other members of the community and on the council.

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

I believe the three most important issues in this race are housing, safety & justice, and economics. We need to ensure housing security, housing inventory (and availability of different types of housing), and housing affordability through measures that respect neighborhood voices but without inhibiting our city's growth. For safety and justice, I don't simply mean criminal behavior, although I do believe we need attention on the underlying causes (food insecurity, housing insecurity, jobs, health). To me, public safety also includes non-criminal behavior related to transportation (e.g., reckless driving, the Milwaukee St. bridge over I-90, shared streets) and other infrastructure and safety risks (e.g., environmental hazards, water contamination). Last, but certainly not least, is the economy. Of course we cannot affect federal interest rates or make egg prices drop with a snap of our fingers, but there are steps to take to ensure all folks here have economic equity. We need to ensure we're not inhibiting growth of our small businesses and help connect workers to jobs, whether that's through trade schools/apprenticeships or through other job assistance. Particularly for folks of color, we need to ensure that they have equitable access to resources to start and grown their business. When budgeting, the city needs to take into account the needs of the community and ensure that the budget is morally sounds and does not create or expand disparities among our neighbors.

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

As we read horror stories from around the country, it is essential that we take steps to mitigate these disasters and deal with the known issues. For example, Well #15 over on the east side was taken offline a few years ago due to the detection of PFAS. We need to ensure that as the remedial project continues, the water needs of Madison's east side is taken into account. As we look elsewhere in the city, we need to ensure there are no PFAS or other contamination of our water system elsewhere. As the global temperatures continue to change, we also need to ensure our environment is sustainable for folks who live here. This includes ensuring shade via planting trees over large concrete pathways or in neighborhoods exposed to natural elements. The city should also examine providing tax incentives or other assistance for ridding our community of things like lead pipes and asbestos. As we look even further into the future, we should ensure that our energy production is at least mostly sustainable through options such as wind and solar.

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

The most important way to help create more equitable opportunities and help those living in poverty is to listen, and I will do just that. I need to know what exactly folks in our communities need before taking action. For example, if transportation is an issue, how can we work with the Metro and utilize our public transportation system? If it is food insecurity, is there a food desert and how can we ensure folks have what they need to survive? If it is housing, how can we ensure there is increased affordable and available inventory of different housing types? If it is jobs, how can we provide job training or other employment assistance? Developing relationships with those in our community and advocating for what they need is how to help.

What will you do to address racial inequality?

As a white male, while I understand that racial inequality exists, I've only ever experienced one side. Listening is such a beneficial way to at least understand the existence of racial inequality and the experiences folks have. To address racial inequality, I will be an ally. I will not drown out other voices with my own opinions. I will lift up the voices of folks who have different lived experiences. I will advocate for resources to increase equality and equity.

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

First I want to start with a quote by Bryan Stevenson: “Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.” When I first heard that, it really resonated with me, and I think it fits with the promotion of restorative justice. Yes, we need to hold folks accountable for criminal actions, but we also need to determine what can be done to repair that harm without dehumanizing the offender. To promote restorative justice, we can de-stigmatize wanting to deal with justice and safety in a way alternative to what it is now—promoting restorative justice doesn’t necessarily mean “soft-on-crime” like some suggest. We need to bring victims and the community into the process and determine what is needed to right wrongs. To address racially biased policing, I believe we need to work with Chief Barnes (and Sheriff Barrett, too) on their community policing initiatives. With two Black men leading law enforcement agencies in our community, they bring a unique experience that we should appreciate. We need to ensure that officers in our community have the appropriate training needed to interact with our community and tools to keep the community safe. We need to develop relationships and trust between the community and law enforcement. We can also support the Mental Health Unit as well as the CARES Team so law enforcement isn’t involved in situations that can be handled by others.

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

The public health of our community can be improved by taking a number of steps previously discussed. We need to ensure there is housing security, food security, and transportation infrastructure that can be easily used by pedestrians and bikes. We need to prevent water contamination and mitigate against PFAS contamination and other problems like asbestos and lead pipes. We need to ensure that our neighborhoods are environmentally-friendly like having tree cover and utilizing options like wind and solar. We need to find ways to incentivize public transportation. We also need to make (and keep) our neighborhoods walkable. Besides all that, I would want to meet with public health specialists to ensure we’re taking all other available steps to improve the public health of our community.

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

The most common transportation issue that has been brought up to me by folks in the district, and one that I experience often, is the Milwaukee St. bridge over I-90. This is dangerously narrow and at night is very dark. It is only a matter of time before there is a fatality. We need to work with local and state leaders to budget funds for an expanded bridge or have a separate pedestrian bridge that we can construct. Besides that, but related, we need to ensure that roadways are safe and accessible for all and not just vehicles. This includes intersection redesign and bike/pedestrian lanes. One example of this would be Sprecher Rd. / Reiner Rd. from south of I-94 to the Woods Farm subdivision towards Sun Prairie. The road is narrow and leaves no space for walking/biking, which separates our community. Meeting with folks in the community, engineers and other folks in city government, and other local/state elected leaders is how we can help address these issues.

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

I have not served in local government and I am not an 'activist,' per se, so I haven't had the opportunity to elevate other voices. What I can do is what I've done—not make discourse about me or my experiences, not rebut or make light of other experiences folks have had, and give space for others to share their voice. I will continue to do so, if elected, but in a position that allows me to also highlight more publicly others' diverse voices. Outside of public service, though, I have done exactly this. In my undergrad and law school time, I worked at a job where, when I first started, was about 90% straight white male. By the time I left, after leading the program for a few years, the majority of our supervisors were either female, men of color, or members of the LGBTQIA+ community. This led to an increase in non-male and non-white applicants, which further diversified our program. Diversity in leadership, diversity in thought, and diversity in voice is easy and important if an effort is made to involve folks who don't look like you.

Any other issues/topics you wish to discuss?

I think I may have written a bit too much above and so instead of writing more (and because I may have the opportunity to interview with you folks later) I will just say: thank you for the opportunity to be endorsed by Dane Dems. Running for office is a step outside my comfort zone, but I believe I can help make real, positive, lasting change for the folks in our community.

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.