

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 *

alec@satyaformadison.com

Candidate name *

Satya Rhodes-Conway

Position you are running for (include municipality) *

Mayor, City of Madison

Campaign website

satyaformadison.com

Professional Experience *

Managing Director UW-Madison Mayors Innovation Project, 2005-2019

See: See <https://www.linkedin.com/in/satyarhodesconway/> for more

Political/Service Experience *

Madison Common Council 2007-2013, Madison Mayor 2019-2023

Why are you running for this seat? *

Four years ago, I ran for mayor because I knew that our city needed to invest in affordable housing, finally bring rapid transit to Madison, combat climate change, and include racial equity in everything we do. Despite a global pandemic and a legislature that opposes us at every turn, I've delivered on those promises - and more. I've fought for our democracy, even when threatened with jail time. I've transformed the City's approach to caring for people experiencing homelessness. I launched CARES, an alternative crisis response team, to provide a patient-centered approach to mental health crises rather than a law enforcement response. And all along, I've made sure we keep delivering the basic service our residents rely on. I'm running for reelection because we need to build on this progress. We need to take a progressive approach to public safety. We need to build more housing. We need to promote equitable economic development. We need to invest in our youth. I'm running for reelection because there is so much work to do, and I know that together, we can build a better Madison.

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

1. Building more affordable housing.

Healthy communities require affordable housing. My administration has focused on creating housing choice in every neighborhood via my Housing Forward agenda (read more here: <https://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/blog/housing-forward-update>). While the City was successfully supporting tax credit housing before I came into office, my administration has more than doubled the affordable housing fund and started supporting innovative ways to create affordable housing, like co-ops, land trusts, backyard cottages, land banking and more. In addition to funding affordable housing, we have made changes to our planning and zoning rules to make it easier to build housing, especially near high-frequency transit. While we have made strides to build more housing, and especially affordable housing, there is more work to do.

2. Improving public safety.

Madison is a safe city, but no amount of violence – especially gun violence – is acceptable. My administration is taking an evidence-based, data-informed approach to reducing gun violence, stolen cars, and traffic crashes. Through our Violence Prevention Unit, we are treating gun violence as a public health problem, and working closely with community groups to implement our roadmap to reducing violence. Under my leadership, the police department, community development division, and Public Health meet regularly, are sharing data, and are collaborating on violence reduction and prevention work. My administration moved parking enforcement and crossing guards out of the police department and into the transportation department where they belong, allowing our police to focus on preventing crime. We launched – and have expanded several times – the Madison CARES program, a team of mental health professionals and paramedics, that respond to mental health related emergency calls instead of the police. My last budget funded an expansion of CARES, and I am committed to expanding it further in an evidence-based way.

3. Investing in young people

In the wake of the pandemic, it is more important than ever for us to make sure that young people are connected to the services and opportunities they need. The City of Madison has a long history of supporting out of school time programming, including funding a joint position with the school district and many community based organizations and neighborhood centers. My administration has increased these efforts, specifically targeting ARPA funds to programs helping at-risk youth connect with employment opportunities, and seeding a project to house youth aging out of foster care. We also run several internship and apprenticeship programs within the city. In my second term, I will continue this work, and continue to partner with the school district on safety, transportation, out of school time programming, and more.

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

Climate change is the defining crisis of our time. In 2019, I ran for Mayor on my background as an ecologist and made climate a focal point of my campaign. We were shortly derailed by numerous crises that nobody could foresee during my first term, most notably, a global pandemic. Despite that, we have been able to make real progress towards our goals of carbon neutrality and climate resilience.

I will continue to work on decarbonizing our city, expand funding and provide incentives for renewable energy projects in Madison, and better prepare our city for the impacts of climate change – especially in our most vulnerable communities.

During my first term we made incredible strides to reach our net-zero emissions goal. Nearly 75% of electricity for City operations comes from renewable sources, putting us well on the way to our goal of 100% clean energy by 2030. We are working towards decarbonizing our fleet of city vehicles. So far, we have over 60 electric vehicles, more than 100 hybrid-electric vehicles, 3 all-electric buses, and we use a mix of Wisconsin-made biodiesel for all trucking. The new East-West Bus Rapid Transit system will be completely electric and the Madison Fire Department is running North America's first and only operational electric fire engine.

We are taking an innovative and multifaceted approach to fight climate change. We're participating in Madison Gas and Electric's Renewable Energy Rider program, building out green infrastructure, purchasing renewable energy credits, and holding inefficient commercial buildings accountable. We've helped new and existing buildings install solar panels through our partnership with MadiSUN, provided job training opportunities for women and people of color through our GreenPower program, and increased the efficiency of residential buildings. The City's Affordable Housing Fund helps the private sector develop long-term affordable housing in Madison. We require applicants for these funds to reduce energy use by 20% based on a Focus on Energy analysis and install at least 30 kW of solar on site.

Climate change is happening and we're already seeing the impacts here in Madison. We must continue to prepare for some of the worst case scenarios because, unfortunately, they could be reality. This means better stormwater management and increasing greenery and tree cover on our streets to reduce temperatures. It also means viewing climate resilience through a racial and socioeconomic equity lens. The populations most affected by climate change are also our most vulnerable. We must ensure that our underprivileged neighborhoods and communities have the infrastructure and resources they need to withstand climate change.

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

Under my leadership, Madison has helped our most vulnerable communities. We helped small businesses weather the pandemic and keep their people employed; expanded affordable housing; funded employment opportunities and job training programs, especially for historically underrepresented populations; started a guaranteed income pilot program to help families cover their costs; built Madison's first purpose built homeless shelter to combat our homelessness crisis and give them a stable place to live and find work; and we invested in our youth through education, community-building, and employment opportunities. But we must continue to do more.

If elected to a second term, I will work on wealth building opportunities, especially for our most underprivileged residents. This will include everything mentioned above as well as expanding opportunities for home ownership and building small businesses. People are finding their footing following the worst of the pandemic and we will continue to invest in them and enable them to thrive.

What will you do to address racial inequality?

When I ran for Mayor in 2019, part of my platform was to address the structural, implicit, and explicit racial inequalities we have in Madison. We are making progress and I have made equity and inclusion a focal point of my administration.

As one of Madison's larger employers, it's important that the City lead by example. Under my leadership, we are running every job description through a racial equity analysis to make sure we are not excluding people from applying. We are also proactively recruiting, creating career pathways, and have developed multiple programs designed to increase the diversity of our workforce, especially in public works. We're also redesigning our HR processes to remove implicit bias from decisions about reclassifications. I've supported the work our RESJI teams are doing to imbed a racial equity lens into the everyday work of the City.

As mayor, I created a new division in our Department of Civil Rights and hired a director of Equity and Social Justice. Our Equal Opportunities Commission has been working on racial disparities in housing, and I was proud to support ordinance changes to reduce retaliation against tenants. We've invested heavily in small businesses owned by people of color, with microloans, grants, and assistance to purchase property. We've also worked with the Urban League to support their homeownership programs and Black Business Hub, and with Centro Hispano and the Center for Black Excellence and Culture on their upcoming major capital projects. Through the pandemic, and continuing now, we supported the Hmong, Latino and Black Chambers and their memberships. Our redesign of the Metro Transit system was specifically designed to improve conditions for riders of color, who have historically had much longer trips and more transfers than white riders. And equity analyses are now built into our Vision Zero program, our complete green streets guide, our capital projects prioritization, and more.

All this work represents my belief that we need to change systems to explicitly promote equity, and that one of the best ways government can do that is to change the rules that govern our systems and our infrastructure. Equity is not just about listening to communities of color – although that is critical – it's about acting to change systems and structures to build a better Madison.

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

I think we need to stop expecting police to solve all our problems, which is why I've started to remove functions from the police department and invest in other solutions. For example, I shifted parking enforcement from the police department to the parking division. And we created the Madison Community Alternative Response Emergency Services (CARES) teams to respond to non-violent mental and behavioral health emergencies. Teams are made up of community paramedics and mental health workers, and are dispatched by the 911 center. Since its inception, CARES teams have gone from responding to around 30 calls per month to over 180. The program has been so successful that we've expanded the hours and geographic coverage, added a second team and a second location, and have several expansions planned for 2023.

I also think we need to take a public health approach to violence reduction and prevention. My budgets have made significant investments in our violence prevention unit (housed in our Public Health Department), which has developed and is implementing a roadmap to violence reduction. Their work is evidence based and data informed, and is expanding to include community-based staff that can interrupt and prevent violence. We also dedicated ARPA funds to this unit, which is contracting with community organizations that work in violence reduction.

And finally, I believe we need to invest in people to prevent the conditions that create violence. Madison is unusual in investing significant funding via our Community Development Division in nonprofit organizations that work with youth, provide job training, support people who are homeless or experiencing domestic violence, and much more. Investments like these, along with investments in affordable housing, are violence prevention work. Madison is also one of the first dozen cities in the country to pilot a guaranteed income program. Only a few months in, we can already tell that this program is helping to stabilize families and improve lives.

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

When I first took office in 2019, nobody could have foreseen the crisis that would come about less than one year later. When news started breaking about a new virus in China I immediately began meeting with Madison's Public Health Department (PHMDC) because we knew that the new virus would be a major challenge – and we were right. Throughout my first term, we battled a global pandemic and a state legislature that seemed determined to thwart our efforts to lessen the spread of COVID-19. My administration, in partnership with Dane County, and despite the State Legislature, made significant efforts to protect our community. We put rules in place to protect people from contracting or spreading COVID-19. We provided testing – especially to our most vulnerable populations. And once vaccines became available, we built out significant infrastructure to get as many people vaccinated as possible – leading to Madison and Dane County having some of the highest vaccination rates nationwide. We are still testing and vaccinating members of our community, and providing data on the virus.

Under my leadership, we expanded the Violence Prevention Unit in PHMDC and we're taking a Public Health approach to combating violent crime. In previous administrations, PHMDC, MPD, and other stakeholders did not meet regularly or share relevant information with one another, now they are – and it's working to reduce violent crime, incidents of shots fired are down more than 20% compared to the five year average.

After Roe was overturned, I worked with the County Executive to significantly expand Public Health's reproductive health services clinic, including the provision of long-acting reversible contraceptives that provide long-term pregnancy prevention. My 2023 budget included funding to continue this service for the long term.

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

Our transportation systems need to be designed for people, not vehicles. During my first term I have focused on making it safer and easier to get around our city in a number of ways.

Madison has been trying to get rapid transit since the early 1990s. Under my leadership, we adopted the plan, secured the funds, and broke ground on a bus rapid transit system. People need adequate access to public transportation to get to work and school, run errands, or participate in community events. The East-West Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line will begin running in 2023. 120,000 jobs, 80,000 residents, 3 hospitals, and 2 colleges will be within a 10 minute walk of this one line.

In addition to improving our transit system, I have made other forms of transportation a focal point of my agenda. Most notably, the Complete Green Streets initiative, which shifts the focus of transportation planning from moving automobiles to moving people. This program will not only better enable foot traffic and cycling throughout the city, but will also reflect our community values – increasing safety and equity. We've invested in bicycle infrastructure and made it easier to build sidewalks, taking the burden of paying for them off of homeowners. Madison continues to be a platinum biking city, and achieved status as a gold walking city under my administration.

I launched Madison's Vision Zero program to reduce fatalities and serious injuries due to crashes on our streets. Taking a data-informed approach, we are using education, enforcement and engineering to improve safety on our streets. For the first time, we're using an equity lens to guide our investments in traffic safety, which has resulted in a tenfold increase in traffic calming projects in South Madison.

Moving forward, I am lobbying for the introduction of Amtrak rail services to Madison, connecting our city to Milwaukee, Chicago, and the Twin Cities. Rail transport between these cities would be affordable, sustainable, and facilitate the ease of movement of both working people and tourists.

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

All too often in government the loudest - or richest - voices get heard, while the majority of the community goes unrepresented. During my time as Mayor, I have worked with City staff to move away from the status quo "three minutes at a meeting" model of community input, and to invest in ways to meet people where they are, and to reach the parts of our community that are most often underrepresented in local government decisions. We've worked with culturally competent consultants, funded community based organizations, sent staff to many, many community events, and most recently hired community connectors to engage the Latinx and Chinese communities in their first languages (we are hiring for a Hmong community connector as well). We've shifted our approach to engage around broad issues instead of just specific projects, so we can better understand community values and priorities, and translate them into specific projects.

Any other issues/topics you wish to discuss?

Following the 2020 election, we have seen an increase in anti-democratic rhetoric and policies coming from the state legislature. They even tried to jail me for protecting Madisonians' rights to vote as part of their propagation of the Big Lie. Our democracy remains fragile and I am committed to doing everything within my power to ensure that everyone in Madison who is eligible to vote and wants to vote, can vote.

We invested in our election officials and made it a crime to threaten them or obstruct their work. We applied for, and received, funds from non-profit organizations to fill a funding gap in our elections infrastructure that was created by the state legislature. And we kept our dropboxes up after the Wisconsin Supreme Court decided they were unconstitutional in an act of defiance and we have hope that the decision will be overturned.

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