

# Dane Dems Endorsement Questionnaire

Thank you for seeking an endorsement from the Dane County Democratic Party. **This questionnaire is due by no later than Friday, January 24, at 11:59 PM.**

**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 and mark the questions you do not feel are pertinent N/A.** 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 \*

seanobrien.vote@gmail.com

Candidate name \*

Sean O'Brien

Position you are running for (include municipality) \*

Madison Common Council, District 16

Campaign website

www.seanformadison.com

## Professional Experience \*

My first job was as a dishwasher at the Chocolaterian Cafe on the East Side of Madison, eventually working my way up to being the manager. At Edgewood College, I helped create and staff the LGBTQ+ Student Center on campus and interned in the state legislature with Representative Chris Taylor. I also interned on Governor Tony Evers' 2018 campaign and later in his office. I now work as the Policy and Advocacy Director at Fair Wisconsin, our state's only LGBTQ+ civil rights and political advocacy organization.

## Political/Service Experience \*

At the age of 12, I walked out of school to participate in the Act 10 protests at the State Capitol. Standing up for the collective bargaining rights of public employees and my own teachers at MMSD was what first drew me to public service. As a proud Eagle Scout, I value helping those in need and giving back to my community. I have worked on local, countywide, and statewide campaigns in Wisconsin. My first canvassing experience was in 2016 with AFSCME, and I have been volunteering with GOTV efforts through the neighborhood action teams in Dane County every election since. In my role at Fair Wisconsin, I work to make our state a more welcoming, inclusive, and safe place for members of the LGBTQ+ community. I am also a member of the Richmond Hill Condo Association Board. Public service is an important part of my life, and I hope to continue fighting for my neighbors as an alder on the Madison Common Council.

## Why are you running for this seat? \*

I am running for Madison Common Council because our city is at a crossroads. We have a lot of challenges and opportunities on the horizon as Madison continues to grow, and I believe it's time for new leadership to move our city forward.

I have lived in Madison my entire life and am a proud product of our city's public schools. After graduating from Edgewood College, I bought my first home in District 16. I've seen Madison grow and change over the past 26 years. I know what our city has to offer, but I also know that it is not working nor affordable for all of our residents.

My time in civil rights advocacy and local leadership have taught me how to listen, lead, and advocate for others – especially the most marginalized members of our community. All of these experiences motivated me to run for council, and I believe the skills I've gained along the way prepare me to be an effective alder.

On the council, I am ready to work with anyone in order to get things done. I look forward to rolling up my sleeves and tackling the tough issues facing Madison, from affordable housing and public safety to transportation, infrastructure, and protecting our environment.

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

Affordability, transparency, and city services.

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

As a young person, addressing the climate crisis is a top priority for me. Our future on this planet – and the future of every generation that comes after us – is at stake. As an alder, I will continue the work of keeping Madison on track to meet our ambitious net zero carbon goal and 100% renewable energy target for the city government by 2030. I will continue to invest in solar and other renewable energy sources and expand the city fleet to be completely electric, including our buses and emergency vehicles.

Investments like these will help protect our natural resources, keep our parks safe and beautiful, and safeguard our waters from toxic forever chemicals like PFAS. They will also create opportunities for good-paying jobs and training in the trades. I believe that climate and a strong economy go hand-in-hand, and our city should take advantage of the opportunities before us by tackling the climate crisis head on.

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

Madison is facing an affordability crisis. No one, regardless of their age or income, should be pushed out of Madison due to the cost of living. But today, young people who are trying to enter the housing market and seniors who are living on a fixed income are being priced out. As a city we must use every tool at our disposal to address the affordable housing crisis, end homelessness and evictions, and ensure that no one is displaced in our community. We also need to ensure that people moving to Madison can afford to enter the housing market, and people who currently own housing can afford to stay in their homes. As an alder, I will support policies that diversify and increase Madison's housing stock, expand the affordable housing fund, and lower barriers to entry in the housing market to help increase rates of homeownership among marginalized communities. I am committed to ensuring that new housing projects are developed responsibly and have access to city services and public transit.

We also have to make sure that Madison has economic opportunities, strong small businesses, and avenues for new entrepreneurship. Economic policies that do not uplift low-income and working families are not sound economic policies. Every measure that comes before the council should be viewed through a lens of poverty alleviation. Lack of transportation options for those living in affordable and low-income housing is a serious concern of mine, as well as the continued presence of food and healthcare deserts in our city. As an alder, I will work to protect public benefits and make every effort to close gaps in access to these services.

Lastly, we need sustainable options for future funding that do not cut services or further raise the cost of living. These goals are not mutually exclusive. Madison is being starved of financial resources from the state, a situation that will force us to continuously face the question of raising property taxes or cutting essential services. I am committed to working with state legislators to help secure a fairer shared revenue deal for Madison and put us on a stronger fiscal path moving forward.

What will you do to address racial inequality, promote restorative justice, and/or address racially biased policing?

I believe that those most impacted by racial, social, and economic inequities should be at the table when decisions are made. Their voices and experiences should always be centered in these discussions. As an alder, I will prioritize listening to, learning from, and uplifting members of these communities throughout the policymaking process.

My vision for criminal justice reform is based on the idea that we must prevent crime rather than simply fight it. As a city, we should be investing more resources in addressing the root causes of crime, from homelessness and hunger to a lack of affordable healthcare and social services.

I support expanding services that help meet our city's social needs, including mental health and substance abuse programs. I also want to build on successful safety programs, such as CARES, to better serve Madisonians and alleviate strain on law enforcement and public safety systems. I am committed to centering equity, access, and human need in all of our city's conversations about justice, as well as involving public employees in those conversations.

Furthermore, I believe we should have mandatory competency training for all who are involved in any aspect of the criminal justice system, from police officers and public defenders to members of juries. Dismantling racial biases in our city will require continuous attention and work, and there is no single policy fix that will solve all of these problems. I am committed to listening, learning, and using my privilege to move Madison forward in this fight.

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

District 16 faces a number of public health challenges, including clean air and water, climate change, and social services.

I am committed to keeping our waterways and wells free from harmful forever chemicals like PFAS, ensuring that all residents of our city have consistent access to clean drinking water. Continued investments in climate resilience initiatives will also alleviate the health risks associated with air pollution and gas-powered vehicles.

I believe that access to green spaces is a human right and should be treated as a public health issue. If elected, I will be a champion for our public parks and work to keep them safe, beautiful, and accessible for generations to come.

Above all, our city needs to address the root causes of public health inequities and systems of violence. Communities that are underserved by our city need adequate resources, from grocery stores and youth after-school programs to reliable city services and public transit. These same residents should be involved in the long-term strategic plans for their own communities – plans that will shape economic opportunity, transportation options, and health outcomes for decades to come.

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

As a public transit nerd, I am eager to address transportation issues in office. Madison is a growing city, and we need to ensure that residents in District 16 have access to reliable, efficient public transportation. I hear from voters in my district that they feel left behind by Madison's transportation infrastructure. I'm committed to fighting to expand projects, routes, and new transit opportunities to District 16.

We also need to continue our efforts to make our streets safer, reduce speeding, and eliminate all serious and fatal crashes in Madison. As alder I will advocate for continued funding to expand Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), expand and secure funding for Vision Zero and the Safe Streets Program to eliminate traffic-related deaths by 2030, and fight to bring passenger rail to Madison. I will also advocate for the creation of a Regional Transit Authority to increase coordination with other municipalities and reduce the cost of new transportation projects. This is currently preempted by the state, and I will push for an end this preemption with the new legislature that has taken office.

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

As the Policy and Advocacy Director for Fair Wisconsin, I prioritize elevating the voices of underserved, underrepresented communities in my work across the state. I have led countless listening sessions with LGBTQ+ Wisconsinites and their loved ones, collected written and verbal testimony against anti-LGBTQ+ bills, and worked closely with legislators to craft more inclusive and socially sensitive policies that fight discrimination. I believe these experiences prepare me to be an effective alder who responds to the needs of our most marginalized residents.

I am committed to listening to every person in my district. But oftentimes, our elected officials end up only hearing from the loudest voices in the room. I want to seek out the perspectives of those who may not be comfortable making their voices heard in the conventional political process. I will be intentional with invitations to my town halls and community coffees, as well as during council meetings when city residents come to testify. As someone who has worked in civil rights advocacy for years, I am familiar with checking my biases and assumptions at the door to build safer, more equitable spaces where people feel heard, seen, and valued. At the same time, I will not pretend to have all the answers. I remain committed to listening and learning from those most impacted by systemic inequity in our city.

## Any other issues/topics you wish to discuss?

Another issue that I take very seriously is transparency and communication. I believe that public officials should be accountable to the people who elect them. As an alder, I will be committed to listening to all voices in District 16 and always be responsive to the needs of my constituents. I will be transparent with my positions and explain all of the votes that I take – even if we disagree.

As our city continues to grow, we must also increase collaboration with our neighboring municipalities to increase efficiency and cut costs. Madison does not exist in a vacuum. Working with cities like Sun Prairie, villages like McFarland, and smaller towns like Blooming Grove will help us expand popular services and strengthen Dane County as a whole.

