

# Madison Council Candidate Questionnaire

The first section of the questionnaire is for your basic contact information and campaign media

Candidate Full Name \*

Amani Latimer Burris

Aldermanic District \*

District 12

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Email Address \*

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Phone \*

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Campaign website (if applicable)

[www.amaniforwisconsin.com](http://www.amaniforwisconsin.com)

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Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) accounts, if any

Facebook AmaniForWisconsin Twitter Amani4Wisconsin

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## Questionnaire - Part 2

Please state your position on the following issues.

Please limit answers to 500 words (approx. 3,500 characters). Any answers exceeding the word count limit will be redacted after 3,500 characters.

If you have completed this questionnaire before, you may skip any question that is not starred (\*\*) unless you would like to modify or update an answer submitted in a prior year. If a question is skipped, we will re-post the most recent submitted answer in its place.

## 1 Why are you seeking this office?

The decisions we make today we make today will absolutely and deeply affect the future, right now.

I can see this directly as I have spent the past year and a half or so on the road traveling to various cities all over the United States for my work. Then prior to that, even though my roots were and are Madison, my work and professional development led me to spend a great deal of time in Waukesha, Milwaukee and Chicago.

So this intensive and rapid travel to a multitude of cities has given me a different perspective and in a round-about way, has served as a simplistic case study of the future right now.

This said, if Alder Syed Abbas had not decided to not run for re-election, I would not have sought this seat because I know as my former alder, he was thoughtful (when you talk to him you quickly understand that he measures and decides), he communicated to his constituents (the people in his neighborhood) , filtered things through a different (and inclusive) lens, listened (even when he didn't have to), let you know you were heard (even if he did not agree with you), didn't make it about his specific agenda (but rather advocated for the diversity of voices he heard), wasn't partisan (to particular group or political cohort and didn't seem to dwell in the back channel), loathed being a target and political gaming, tried to operate as an independent voice concerned about people on the whole, and did his best to make Madison better, to move Madison forward, to be an example for other heartland communities and rapidly growing cities.

So that's why I am running, to do this and to work on issues and projects that will allow all of us to build upon the past and move Madison forward to create new possibilities in the future and do it with integrity, transparency, access and accountability. I hope to make inclusive and equitable decisions that in the future will allow us to look back and see the difference we made. I hope to get beyond the divisive state of politics, the pitting of people who are in particular cohorts or groups, to get beyond this chaos that prioritizes patronization over problem solving which, in its essence, prevents progress, smothers your voice, and creates fear and discord, which effectively eliminates freedom.

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## 2. What in your background or experiences qualifies you to understand the unique needs facing small businesses?

As a former small business owner and entrepreneur, I know what it is like to be in business and understand the day-to-day challenges small businesses actually face. As I have experienced both successes and failure, I know what it's like when your business is successful and what it feels like when your business fails so in that I understand business concepts versus business reality.

Now, after having worked in the business of government (constituent services, public policy, government relations, outreach, advocacy) I also understand how policy and access (communicated or not) to municipal agencies, local, state, and nationwide policy and funding, shapes business and future outcomes for a small business. Going forward, I realize that we have the possibility and could be in a unique position, through economic development, innovation, and the expansion of the hi-tech sector, to not only support micro, small and main street businesses, as well as entrepreneurs and innovators, but in community help to shift the paradigm.

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## 3. What are the most important issues facing businesses in your district?

It depends on what type of business is in question, as many any businesses have been forced to significantly adjust their practices due to the inability to find and retain qualified and reliable workers for various jobs. So for some it's finding a reliable workforce. For others, it is finding quality workers and training or adapting to doing business in this new era. For some it's the reopening or recharging and maintenance of their business. For some others it's the challenge of rapid growth because they were in the right sector. For even others it is regulation, technology (and it's rapidly changing impact) and how to develop working relationships with the government and getting through the approval process or even knowing what is going on.

Then for some it is simply how to take a concept from an idea into a reality or the seeding of their business. Or, especially in the nonprofit sector, I'm seeing it's how to build a campaign that will reach the right audience or plan around and develop issues that will have impact and how to execute that.

The majority of entrepreneurs and small business (including nonprofits), capitol is always a concern (whether it is from sales, from donors, or grants, from partnership). All small business owners on some level are usually worried about survival (especially in changing markets), new business generation, and growth. They understand that money is consequential to their dream or business model and many needed alternatives and incentives for their business to simply stay afloat or adjust to the challenges rapidly presented in this challenging period of change we are.

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#### 4. How do you define economic development? Please elaborate.

Economic development is the practice of creating policies and programs that are for the betterment of the economic well-being of a community and when effectively implemented, it should and can affect in the broadest and most democratic manner possible.

In government, economic development is the attempt to improve the lives of constituents (people) related to specific criteria or objectives. So, in simple terms it's policy, funding, rules, regulation, opportunities and how they are supported, communicated and implemented.

Our policies and programs should be oriented toward improving revenues, employment, the environment, and quality of life for the city's residents and businesses alike thus in the long range, we know that making limited segments of the community stronger while ignoring others is not effective economic development, nor is it good for the future.

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#### 5. What is your perception of Madison's business brand? How do you think Madison is perceived locally and nationally?

Madison is unique in that it is a remarkable place to live and is an attractive locality for new and established businesses, events, etc. It has a world-renowned university, government is at its center, it has a growing tech sector, in the health sector Epic has put us on the map, and is known as a progressive city filled with progressive politics. Over history, Madison has been on the edge of what is happening next.

That said, Madison is in a place where we are also on the edge of change. Are we to become the next Seattle or San Francisco of the Midwest, where 90% of the residents that work in San Francisco cannot afford to live there? Are we to be the pride of Gaylord Nelson yet ignore when something is totally toxic, should reasonably be tested, and dealt with before affecting thousands of its citizens, its people?

And then what about opportunities? Shall we make them available to all and not just a chosen few? And shall we just throw opportunities at people, wishing them good luck, checking our boxes that we know needs long term commitment? Then, what about the folks that don't have the knowledge, the skills, or the understanding or know what questions they haven't asked? Shall we develop them, invest in them, prepare and mentor them for a specific purpose and advancement or for their own goodwill?

We know that whatever affects one affects the other, and we have the opportunity to build upon the past and move Madison forward into future possibilities, putting the Madison community first, building up segments, and ultimately creating a balanced playing field.

Everyone deserved a fair chance, and really more than one chance, to improve themselves in order to improve us all.

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## 6. How can Madison best attract and retain a diverse workforce?

The phrase “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” is not just a slogan, not a tagline, a photo op or good lip-service, it is what makes the difference. When it’s scheduled as such and not supported, played out for politics, box checking, extraction or coopting, or your collective actions speak otherwise, it is reduced to something totally meaningless and no progress is made, just placeholdering. So if you’re into diversity, equity and inclusion beyond the sake of the words, it become apparent what is needed, because you know that diversity is good for business, creates better solutions, and experiences and opens up possibilities that you couldn’t see. Plus, it goes beyond data, helps you to better understand data, and takes you out of the data and into real life.

Just saying these words while practicing business as usual or without opening yourself to a real sense of understanding will not accomplish anything. It simple demagogues people into tokens and exceptions and ultimately, when noticed, will result in resentment from others. It will serve to divide not diversify.

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## 7. What strategies would you recommend for the city to meet the diverse needs of workforce housing?

There is undoubtedly a shortage of housing which affects businesses. Homes and apartments are difficult to find and afford, making a challenge for employers to find and retain a steady and reliable workforce. Continuing to work with a variety of groups, developers, and outlets to make sure that we grow out of our housing shortage is crucial to meet the needs of local businesses. The city should look at alternative and creative ways to continue to fill the housing gap.

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**\*\*8** In what ways can city government support entrepreneurs of color working to start and grow an emerging business in Madison?

Most entrepreneurs don't even know what services are available to them or how to access them. Entrepreneurs of color have the same and sometimes greater need for learning how to find, apply for, and obtain grants, incentives, and other available programs, financing and technical skills just like everyone else.

A good place to start would be to study Greenwood, also known as Black Wall Street, of which I am a direct descendant. My father was son to one of the formidable Latimer Brothers who built (and then rebuilt) Black Wall Street after it was torched & laid to ruin during the 1921 Tulsa Massacre, and the family that raised my mother (whom Milele Chikasa Anana Elementary School is named after) was from Greenwood as well.

As some people know, in Greenwood's heyday there were business of every kind. In my own family, the Latimer Brothers and Sons would be in business as architects and builders, farmers and lawyers as well own a meat distribution company, several restaurants, a grocery store and a school of music; all in and around Greenwood, all in service to community. What happened to create this is worthy of study, consideration and creation, for during the 120 or so years it lasted and thrived, supported families and the community. The city and was a model of economic development and created the promise of generational wealth. A promise that through the race riot, politics, policy, outright suppression and gentrification was attempted to, and finally succeeded in destroying it.

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**\*\*9.** What is your assessment of Madison's transportation system? What priority improvements are needed to support mobility for a growing workforce?

The public transport system is consistent and reliable during traditional work schedule times, but often lacking during off hours. Routes and times are limited and different on weekends, however many workplaces are offering second and third shift hours making easy access to transportation troublesome for many. Often the more industrial workplaces have either limited or non-existent public transit options, causing hardship for workers and businesses alike. Carpool services and express lines that are coordinated collectively between the city and businesses would help alleviate this shortcoming.

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**\*\*10** A challenge that often comes with growth are issues impacting crime and safety. Some of these challenges are real; others perceived. In either case, it impacts livability and our ability to recruit and retain talent to Madison. Do you view Madison as a safe community and what is the Common Council's role in building safe communities?

Madison is a safe community, though improvement is always a possibility. Many express concerns about individuals and families moving to Madison from larger cities with higher crime rates and lower standards of living. Whether this is real or perceived becomes irrelevant if the community feels less safe as a result of city growth. The Council plays a crucial role in ensuring that concentrated pockets of high poverty and crime do not build upon themselves by applying the idea of diversity, equity and inclusion in its decision-making process. Zoning, construction limitation, and availability of services are just a few examples of everyday matters for the Council that have wide impact on the community.

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**\*\*If offered an endorsement from the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce, would you accept it?** \*

Yes

No

**\*\*By submitting this candidate questionnaire, you agree that the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce may publish it with the intent of sharing it with its membership and the general public.** \*

I acknowledge the Chamber will publish my answers to this questionnaire.

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