

# 2025 Madison Common Council Candidate Questionnaire

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

Candidate Full Name \*

Will Ochowicz

Aldermanic District \*

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Home Address \*

[Redacted]

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Campaign website (if applicable)

<https://www.willochowitzfordistrict2.com/>

Social media (Facebook, X [formerly Twitter], etc.) accounts, if any

## 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?

uty and a privilege to represent the constituents of District 2. The main issue that is leading me to run is the high cost of housing, and many of the related problems such as rising homelessness, unsafe housing conditions, and insecurity caused by high individual housing burden. I am also concerned about climate change, and the impact that fossil fuels have on climate change.

Transportation is another issue that I care deeply about, and that impacts me as a pedestrian, bicyclist, bus rider, and driver. We need an effective transportation system that is safe, but can also move people quickly. Downtown, that means balancing the high cost of parking with the knowledge that many people drive, and funding the bus system so that it is a competitive option for those who might otherwise drive.

Importantly, I view housing, transportation, and climate change as interrelated issues that need to be addressed holistically by changing how we plan city development, especially encouraging infill and transit oriented development.

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

I have worked for many businesses, both large and small. I know how small the margins can be for small businesses, how long it takes to build relationships, and how difficult it can be to balance managing your business with personal time. I want to make it easier for people to open and run small businesses, and reduce barriers to entry.

I have also worked for years as a lead for Madison is for People on updating city zoning codes and making it easier to build housing, as well as funding affordable housing. I have built relationships with many people in the local community, including business leaders, activists, organizers, and alders. I know how to build relationships and create local change.

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

The most important issues facing businesses in my district are reduced foot traffic following the COVID-19 pandemic, retaining, growing, and training their employee base, high rents, and general inflation. DMI's 2024 calls out that Downtown visitors are recovering from the 2020 lows, and that tourism spending is increasing, which are good indicators, but there is still more to be done to increase foot traffic downtown. I support plans to increase foot traffic downtown by increasing housing near businesses and amenities, making transportation to downtown easier, especially walking, biking, and mass transit, and by funding events and placemaking downtown.

It is difficult for the city to control inflation, but I do think that it is important that we speed up the permitting and inspection process, and limit upfront permitting costs in favor of the long term benefits of an improved tax base.

Building a strong workforce will require public investment and working with local leaders to improve educational opportunities and promote economic development.

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

I would define economic development as practice instituted by public and private actors to grow and develop the workforce, fund infrastructure improvements, and increase productivity. This could include public investment projects such as the Madison Public Market, infrastructure improvements funded by TIF such as Silicon Prairie, workforce development projects, or investing in childcare.

The main goals of economic development in Madison are high employment, high wages, and opportunities for workers. In the long-term, the best way to accomplish this is by building an educated workforce and working with private partners on larger projects, both for planning and funding. In the short term it is important that we make it easier to open and run businesses, fund training opportunities, and economic development workshops. Additionally, funding childcare can make it easier for parents to enter the workforce.

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

The best way to attract and retain a diverse workforce is to make Madison a desirable and affordable place to live for all people. As a city, that means providing access to resources, including financing, for everyone, as well as investing in a diverse workforce.

Madison is lucky to have a well educated population, but in order for Madison's growth to continue we need to ensure that people want to stay. That means investing in housing, transportation, training, and industry expansion. Federal grants such as Madison's designation as a Biohealth Tech Hub should be pursued to continue developing our local economy.

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**\*\*6. How would you characterize Madison's current workforce housing landscape? What strategies would you recommend for the city to meet the diverse needs of workforce housing?**

For purposes of this question, I'll be using the definition of workforce housing as housing that is affordable to 80-120% of AMI. While I think the city needs to do more to address housing at the <80% AMI level, and especially at the <30% of AMI level, I won't focus on it for this question.

The city's 2023 Housing Snapshot Report details how a lack of housing above 80% of AMI leads to those households renting down, which further squeezes households making less than 80% of AMI. That lack of housing also reduces the available options for those making >80% of AMI, meaning that they may make housing choices that keep them further from social connections, amenities, or work, or may be of lower quality than they prefer. These effects can cumulatively lead to people moving away, or seeking opportunities in another city.

The city has been approving more housing in recent years, including several thousand units of market rate housing in the past years. The city has also expanded its land banking fund, and has added workforce housing as a preference for RFPs such as Judge Doyle Square (unsuccessfully). I would support continuing to use city land and development opportunities for workforce housing, and using city funds to match WHEDA and LIHTC loans for workforce housing.

**\*\*7. How do you view Madison's continued population growth? What are the opportunities and challenges that come with it?**

I see Madison's continued population growth as a great opportunity. More people creates a growing economy with more job opportunities and makes the city more lively. The main challenge with a growing population is planning sufficient services to meet those people's needs and expectations, without detracting from current residents' quality of life. I support expanding services, increasing housing options, and coordinating with private sector services such as childcare providers to ensure that we continue to attract talented people.

**\*\*8. What is your assessment of Madison's transportation system? What priority improvements are needed to support mobility for a growing workforce?**

I supported Madison's transit redesign and BRT. It is very important for transit to be fast, frequent, safe, and reliable in order for it to be a viable alternative to driving. I think the early success of BRT shows that prioritizing frequency and reliability over coverage can increase ridership and the perceived quality of the transit system.

Madison should also prioritize micro mobility, especially biking and walking, for last mile or short haul trips. Although a private company, Bcycle's success has been partially boosted by city programs like Transportation Demand Management.

Priority improvements include operational and capital investments in Madison Metro, prioritizing pedestrian and bicycle safety when redesigning streets, and coordinating and smartly pricing on and off street parking.

Long term, Madison needs an Amtrak station to connect it with other large cities in the region.

**\*\*9. With declining aid and rising costs, local leaders must find creative ways to be more efficient. Some examples include merging services or operational reforms. Please identify ways the City of Madison government can potentially be more efficient.**

The city is already doing a lot to find efficiencies, including requiring 1% general spending cuts across most departments the past two years, delaying replacement of city workers who leave or retire, and cutting programs such as funding ice skating at city parks. Unfortunately, these cuts also mean that fewer city employees are providing the same services, and are being stretched thin. In general, I would focus on growing the tax base over cutting programs. I would also focus on partnering with county and neighboring municipalities to coordinate and expand programs such as CARES to help offset some of the costs that the city incurs by running the program by itself.

Additionally, the city had a budget surplus due to unexpected interest revenue. This revenue can be used to delay implementing infrastructure charges as laid out in the city's 5 year operational budget.

The real fix to the city's budget issue is fixing the state's shared revenue formula, as Madison does not get sufficient money through shared revenue compared to the tax dollars generated for the state.

\*\*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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