

# 2025 Madison Common Council Candidate Questionnaire

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

Candidate Full Name \*

Badri Lankella

Aldermanic District \*

Madison Common Council - District 7

Home Address \*

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Campaign website (if applicable)

[badrilankella.com](http://badrilankella.com)

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

<https://www.facebook.com/badri.lankella/>

## 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?

I am running for this seat because I am deeply committed to serving the community that has given so much to me and my family. Over the years, I have seen the unique challenges and opportunities facing District 7, and I believe my leadership experience, collaborative approach, and diverse skill set make me well-suited to address them.

I'm running for District 7 Common Council because I believe my unique background - as a father of two Madison public school students, a Computer Engineer at the DNR, and someone who has served on multiple city boards - gives me the right combination of experience to help address our district's challenges. Through my work on the Transportation Board and Madison Public School Foundation, I've seen how thoughtful policy-making can positively impact our community. I want to bring this experience, along with my engineering background and MBA from UW-Madison, to help create practical solutions for issues like affordable housing, sustainable transportation, and environmental protection.

What sets my candidacy apart is my deep roots in the community - from coaching FIRST Lego League teams at MMSD schools to serving as treasurer for our homeowners association. I understand both the technical aspects of city planning and the human impact of council decisions on families. As your alder, I'll focus on collaborative leadership that brings together diverse perspectives to build a stronger, more sustainable future for all District 7 residents.

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

As the founder, president, and CEO of two successful technology companies - BNLSOFT Corp established in 2008 and Blazor LLC established in 2020 - I bring firsthand experience in building and running small businesses right here in Madison. I understand the challenges business owners face because I've lived them: managing budgets, hiring and developing local talent, navigating regulations, and adapting to changing market conditions.

My perspective is unique because I've seen business needs from multiple angles. As an entrepreneur, I've built companies from the ground up. Through my MBA from UW-Madison, I gained deeper insights into business strategy and operations. And through my service on Madison's Transportation Policy and Planning Board, I've helped shape policies that impact our business community.

What sets me apart is this combination of practical business leadership and public service experience. I know what it takes to create jobs and grow a business while also understanding how government decisions affect small business owners. I've experienced the challenges of regulatory compliance both as a business owner and through my work at the Department of Natural Resources.

When small business owners talk about their struggles with workforce development, regulatory requirements, or infrastructure needs, these aren't abstract concepts to me - they're challenges I deal with every day running my own companies. As your alder, I'll bring this real-world business experience to the Common Council to help create an environment where local businesses can thrive while serving our community's needs.

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

Based on my direct experience as a business owner in Madison and my conversations with fellow entrepreneurs in District 7, I see several critical issues facing our business community:

First, workforce development and retention are major challenges. As the CEO of BNLSOFT Corp and Blazor LLC, I've experienced firsthand the competitive landscape for hiring and retaining skilled local talent. We need to strengthen partnerships between our businesses and educational institutions to build sustainable talent pipelines and create more opportunities for our residents.

Second, we face infrastructure and accessibility challenges. Our district's businesses need better transportation solutions - both for their employees and customers. Through my experience on the Transportation Policy and Planning Board, I've seen how smart infrastructure investments can help businesses thrive while promoting sustainable growth.

Third, many businesses struggle with navigating city regulations and permit processes. As someone who has built two companies from the ground up, I understand how complex these requirements can be. We need to streamline these processes while maintaining necessary oversight.

Fourth, as we continue to grow, affordable commercial space is becoming increasingly scarce. Small businesses need accessible, affordable locations to start and expand their operations. We must balance development with preserving the character of our neighborhoods and ensuring our local businesses can afford to operate here.

Finally, we need to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all businesses in our district, particularly those owned by underrepresented groups. This includes improving access to capital, technical assistance, and city contracts.

As your alder, I'll work to address these challenges through collaborative solutions that support our business community while enhancing our district's quality of life

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

Economic development, in my view, is about building a community where everyone has the opportunity to succeed and contribute. It's about creating a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient local economy that serves the needs of today while planning responsibly for tomorrow.

This means focusing on:

1. **Inclusive Growth:** Ensuring that economic progress benefits all segments of the population, particularly underserved and marginalized communities. This includes supporting minority- and women-owned businesses, creating affordable housing, and providing workforce development programs that prepare people for high-quality jobs.
2. **Small Business Empowerment:** Small businesses are the backbone of our local economy. Economic development should prioritize their success by reducing regulatory barriers, increasing access to funding, and creating opportunities for networking and collaboration.
3. **Sustainable Practices:** Development should prioritize long-term sustainability by encouraging green infrastructure, renewable energy, and environmentally responsible business practices. By balancing economic growth with environmental stewardship, we ensure prosperity for future generations.
4. **Infrastructure and Connectivity:** Economic development requires investments in transportation, technology, and public infrastructure to create an environment where businesses and communities can thrive. Enhancing connectivity through reliable public transit and broadband access helps link people to jobs and services.
5. **Talent Development and Retention:** A skilled workforce is essential for a competitive economy. Supporting education, job training, and upskilling programs ensures that residents are prepared for emerging industries and that businesses have access to the talent they need.

By focusing on these priorities, I will work to ensure that Madison's economic development benefits all residents, creates opportunities for businesses to thrive, and strengthens our city's position as a leader in innovation and sustainability.

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

Madison has a unique opportunity to position itself as a city where diversity, equity, and inclusion are prioritized to create a thriving workforce. To attract and retain a diverse workforce, we must focus on the following key strategies:

### 1. Creating Inclusive Culture:

Employers and the city must actively promote inclusivity by addressing systemic barriers and ensuring workplaces are welcoming to people of all backgrounds. This includes implementing diversity training, mentoring programs, and employee resource groups to support underrepresented employees.

### 2. Improve Transportation methods:

An efficient, affordable, and reliable transportation system is essential for connecting workers to job opportunities. Investing in transit options, particularly in underserved areas, ensures accessibility for all residents.

### 3. Investing in Education and Workforce Development:

Creating and expanding partnerships between local schools, technical colleges, and businesses can provide job training and upskilling opportunities that prepare residents for diverse careers. Programs focused on technology, healthcare, and other high-demand fields are especially critical.

### 4. Affordable and Accessible Housing:

Ensuring that housing options are available and affordable for individuals and families at all income levels is crucial. People are more likely to live and work in Madison if they can find housing close to their jobs and within their budget.

### 5. Enhance opportunities for Small Businesses:

By providing grants, mentorship, and resources to small businesses owned by people of color, immigrants, and women, Madison can empower entrepreneurs and diversify the local economy. These businesses also serve as a magnet for talent by offering a variety of jobs and services.

### 6. Celebrating Diversity in Community Life:

Madison can attract talent by creating a community where diversity is celebrated through festivals, cultural events, and inclusive public spaces. Promoting multicultural initiatives helps potential residents see Madison as a place where they can belong and thrive.

### 7. Ensuring Equitable Opportunities:

Transparency and equity in hiring, promotions, and pay are essential for retaining a diverse workforce. Madison should encourage public and private employers to conduct regular pay equity audits and adopt best practices for fair recruitment and retention.

### 8. Focusing on Family-Friendly Policies:

Supporting families with affordable childcare, quality schools, and family leave policies helps retain a workforce that values both career and personal life.

By focusing on these strategies, Madison can build a workforce that reflects its diverse population, strengthens its economy, and makes the city a more vibrant and inclusive place for everyone.

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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?**

Madison's current workforce housing landscape faces significant challenges. Rising housing/rental costs, limited availability of affordable rental units, and a lack of housing diversity have created barriers for many workers, particularly those in middle-income brackets. While strides have been made in affordable housing initiatives, workforce housing—affordable for those earning 60-120% of the area median income—remains underdeveloped, leaving many essential workers such as teachers, healthcare workers, and service industry employees struggling to find suitable housing.

To address this issue, I recommend the following strategies:

**1. Incentivize Workforce Housing Development:**

The city should offer tax incentives, grants, or reduced fees to developers who prioritize workforce housing in their projects. This can include inclusionary zoning policies that require or encourage mixed-income developments.

**2. Streamline Zoning and Approval Processes:**

Simplifying the zoning and permitting process for workforce housing projects can reduce costs and expedite construction. Revisiting zoning regulations to allow for higher-density developments, such as duplexes, townhomes, and accessory dwelling units, can increase the housing supply.

**3. Public-Private Partnerships:**

Collaborating with private developers, non-profits, and community organizations can help fund and create workforce housing. The city can also explore land trusts or land banking to make development more affordable.

**4. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD):**

Building workforce housing near public transportation hubs ensures that residents have easy access to their workplaces and reduces transportation costs. TOD can also encourage more sustainable urban growth.

**5. Preservation of Existing Affordable Housing:**

Protecting and rehabilitating older housing stock can maintain affordable options for the workforce. Offering incentives to property owners for maintaining affordable rents or renovating existing units can prevent displacement.

**6. Employer-Assisted Housing Programs:**

Partnering with local employers to provide down payment assistance, rental subsidies, or housing loans can help workers secure stable housing close to their jobs.

**7. Focus on Equity:**

Address disparities by targeting workforce housing initiatives to communities disproportionately affected by housing insecurity, including communities of color and immigrant populations.

**8. Utilize State and Federal Funding:**

Madison should leverage state and federal resources, such as Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and HOME Investment Partnerships, to support workforce housing projects.

By implementing these strategies, Madison can create a workforce housing landscape that supports economic stability, reduces commuting burdens, and ensures that workers essential to our community can afford to live where they work. A comprehensive approach will also contribute to a more inclusive and resilient city

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

Madison's continued population growth is a testament to its vibrant economy, high quality of life, and reputation as a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Growth presents a significant opportunity to diversify our community, expand our tax base, and attract businesses and talent. However, it also brings challenges that require careful planning and collaboration to ensure sustainable and equitable development.

Opportunities with population growth:

1. Economy Growth

Growth drives demand for goods, services, and housing, which can spur job creation and attract investments from diverse industries. This economic vibrancy can benefit both residents and local businesses.

2. Cultural and Community Growth

A growing population brings new perspectives, skills, and cultural contributions, enriching the social fabric of Madison and fostering a more inclusive and dynamic community.

3. Infrastructure Growth

Increased demand for housing, transportation, and public services can justify investments in infrastructure improvements, benefiting both current and future residents.

4. Talent Growth

With growth comes an influx of talent, particularly in sectors like technology, education, and healthcare. This provides opportunities for innovation and positions Madison as a leader in various fields.

Challenges with the growth:

1. Affordable housing

Rapid growth can exacerbate housing shortages and drive up costs, making it harder for many residents to find affordable housing. Addressing this requires proactive policies to increase housing supply and ensure equitable access.

2. Infrastructure overload

A growing population places pressure on transportation systems, schools, utilities, and other public services. Ensuring these systems keep pace with growth is essential to maintaining quality of life.

3. Environment impact

Urban expansion can threaten natural resources and green spaces. Balancing development with sustainability is critical to preserving Madison's environmental health and beauty.

4. Disparities

Growth can sometimes deepen disparities if underserved communities are left out of decision-making processes or economic opportunities. Ensuring that all residents benefit from growth is crucial.

Madison's population growth is a tremendous opportunity to shape the city's future positively. With

thoughtful planning and a commitment to equity and sustainability, we can ensure that growth enhances the lives of all residents and strengthens the community as a whole.

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

Madison's transportation system provides a solid foundation but faces several challenges as the city grows. Public transit, active transportation infrastructure, and road networks all need significant upgrades to ensure the system can support the mobility demands of a larger, more diverse population. With increased population density, a growing workforce, and rising environmental concerns, it is crucial that Madison's transportation system is both efficient and equitable.

Having served on Madison's Transportation Policy and Planning Board, I have a unique, hands-on perspective on the city's transportation system. Madison's transportation network has made great strides in recent years, but there are still significant areas for improvement, especially as the city continues to grow and attract a larger, more diverse workforce.

Priority Improvements Needed:

Expand and Strengthen Public Transit

**Increase Frequency and Coverage:** As Madison's population grows, public transit must become more frequent and accessible. Expanding coverage to suburban and outlying areas will help workers living in those areas access jobs in the city. This includes extending hours for late-night and weekend shifts, which are critical for many service and healthcare workers.

**Complete the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System:** The BRT system, once fully implemented, will serve as a backbone for the city's public transportation network. Expanding this system to cover more of the city will ensure that the workforce can move efficiently across the city.

**Improve Accessibility:** Public transportation should be fully accessible to all residents, including people with disabilities. I will advocate for ensuring that buses, stations, and stops are designed to accommodate individuals of all abilities.

Enhance Active Transportation Infrastructure

**Expand Bike Lane Network:** I will advocate for the completion of a comprehensive bike lane network that connects key areas, including neighborhoods, downtown, and business districts. By focusing on providing safe and well-maintained lanes, we can make cycling a viable alternative for commuting.

**Improve Pedestrian Infrastructure:** Expanding safe pedestrian infrastructure is key. I will work to ensure that Madison's sidewalks, crossings, and pedestrian paths are safe, well-lit, and connected, particularly in areas with high foot traffic.

**Integrate Transportation Modes:** To support a seamless and sustainable transit system, Madison should integrate biking, walking, and public transportation. I will push for policies that ensure easy access between different transportation modes—such as bike racks on buses and bike-share stations near transit hubs.

Address Congestion and Road Network Issues

**Smart Traffic Management:** Implementing adaptive signal systems and other smart technologies will improve traffic flow and reduce congestion. This will help both commuters and businesses in the area reduce travel time and associated costs.

**Prioritize Infrastructure Maintenance:** Ensuring that our roadways and bridges are well-maintained and safe is vital. I will push for investments in maintaining and upgrading the infrastructure to handle increased traffic volumes.

Sustainable Transportation Solutions

**Transition to Electric Buses:** As part of our effort to reduce carbon emissions, I will work to electrify our bus

fleet. This will lower pollution and operating costs, while aligning Madison with best practices in green transportation.

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**\*\*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.**

With limited resources and growing demands, the City of Madison must prioritize innovative strategies to enhance efficiency without compromising service quality. A focus on operational reforms, collaboration, and technology-driven solutions can help achieve this goal.

#### 1. Shared Services and Regional Collaboration

- **Merge Similar Services:** Partner with neighboring municipalities to consolidate overlapping services like waste management, public safety dispatch, or fleet maintenance.
- **Joint Purchasing Agreements:** Collaborate with other governments or entities for bulk purchasing of supplies, equipment, and services to lower costs.
- **Regional Task Forces:** Develop shared solutions for regional challenges, such as housing affordability, transit, and environmental sustainability, reducing duplicative efforts.

#### 2. Technology and Data-Driven Decision-Making

- **Invest in Smart Technology:** Use data analytics and smart infrastructure to optimize traffic flow, monitor utilities, and manage city assets efficiently.
- **Digital Transformation:** Transition more government processes online, such as permit applications, public engagement, and payment systems, to save time and reduce administrative overhead.
- **Performance Metrics:** Use data to evaluate programs and services, identifying inefficiencies and areas for improvement.

#### 3. Operational Reforms

- **Streamline Processes:** Review and simplify regulatory and administrative processes to reduce redundancies and improve service delivery.
- **Zero-Based Budgeting:** Periodically require departments to justify their budgets from the ground up, ensuring funds are allocated based on current needs and priorities.
- **Cross-Department Collaboration:** Encourage departments to share resources and expertise, eliminating silos and fostering innovation.

#### 5. Employee Empowerment and Training

- **Upskill the Workforce:** Provide training to equip employees with the skills needed for modern challenges, such as technology use and project management.
- **Empower Frontline Workers:** Involve employees in identifying inefficiencies and suggesting improvements, as they often have direct insights into operational challenges.

#### 6. Sustainable Investments

- **Energy Efficiency Upgrades:** Invest in energy-efficient buildings, LED streetlights, and renewable energy to reduce long-term utility costs.
- **Preventive Maintenance:** Focus on regular maintenance of infrastructure and equipment to avoid costly emergency repairs.

#### 7. Community Engagement and Volunteerism

- **Leverage Community Support:** Engage residents in volunteer programs for parks, neighborhood watch, or community events, reducing reliance on paid staff.
- **Participatory Budgeting:** Involve citizens in budget decisions to prioritize spending based on community needs and values.

#### 8. Explore Revenue-Generating Opportunities

- **Introduce or expand user fees for non-essential services,** such as recreational programs or specialized permits, ensuring those who use them contribute directly.

- Identify underutilized city assets that could be leased or repurposed for additional income. By embracing these approaches, Madison can not only navigate financial challenges but also enhance service delivery, strengthen community trust, and foster innovation across its operations. A commitment to efficiency and collaboration will ensure that resources are utilized to their fullest potential.

\*\*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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