

2026 Madison Common Council Candidate Questionnaire

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

Candidate Full Name *

Ellen Zhang

Aldermanic District *

8

Home Address *

[REDACTED]

Email Address *

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Phone *

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Campaign website (if applicable)

ellenfordistrict8.com

Social media accounts, if any

Instagram & Tiktok: ellenfordistrict8

Questionnaire - Part 2

Please state your position on the following issues.

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 use your most recently submitted answer.

1. Why are you seeking this office?

I'm running to be a voice for students in the city. I'm running to advocate for affordable housing, public transit, and increase public safety. My experiences with the City Clerk's Office, the state legislature, and UW convinced me that the city is the most powerful way to affect immediate change for all Madison residents, whether it be boosting our local economy or providing quality services.

2. What qualifies you to understand the unique needs facing small businesses?

Growing up in an immigrant community, I see the value of small businesses beyond economic value, they're a manifestation of grit and become community touchpoints. After daycare, I would go with my dad to handyman jobs, at different businesses and in people's homes. Small businesses are owned by community members who work hard every day. From my own jobs in food service, I know the thin-margins that businesses have to contend with, especially in difficult economic times. As alder, I look forward to working with DMI, the BID, and local businesses.

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

Root causes of District 8 resident issues are similar to the cases of business issues: a housing shortage and incomplete transit network. As a result of the large student population, the vast majority of District 8 businesses offer housing rather than traditional products and services. The gap between supply and demand results in students who are pushed further out and unhappy with their circumstances, as well as a workforce for these businesses that cannot afford to live nearby.

4. How would you characterize Madison's current workforce housing supply? What strategies would you recommend for the city to meet the diverse needs of workforce housing?

Madison's zoning code, height restriction, and isthmus placement has created a shortage of housing for everyone, including its workforce. With these limits, housing costs are driven up, and it's difficult to build large units that can take advantage of economies of scale. By adopting mixed-use zoning code reforms and incentives for developers to build affordable housing, we can create housing density that creates convenient, livable proximity for residents in different areas of the city. The Housing Forward Initiative has made headway and I'm excited to push for more dynamic and creative solutions so workers can live in a city they can afford.

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

Although Madison's car-centered infrastructure faces some congestion, the city must continue to prioritize multimodal access transportation and infrastructure to relieve congestion, improve safety, health, and community. Adding more BRT service makes Madison more accessible for everyone, including the suburbs and takes pressure off the downtown while ensuring it remains an economic engine, especially a route that would connect campus and the airport. I'm excited to push for the Amtrak partnership, increasing connectivity across the Midwest.

6. 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.

We have to find efficient ways in spending to ensure the city is engaging in more public-private partnerships while maintaining quality services to residents while finding ways to limit duplications.

****7.** Do you consider Madison’s property taxes to be too high, too low, or appropriate? Please explain your reasoning and provide specific examples of any fiscal changes you would recommend?

Property taxes in Madison are too high. This is an issue that affects everyone in Madison, whether it be home owners, renters or business owners. During my time interning at the Capitol, I watched legislators battle to deny adequate school funding across Wisconsin, manifesting as the huge property tax spike for Madison residents this year. The city should ensure there’s no duplication of services provided by more than one department. I believe we can consolidate some staff load, such as social media and outreach which should be done city-wide rather than by each department having multiple social media accounts, etc.

****8.** The City of Madison is in the process of updating its economic development strategy. What policies or initiatives would you like to see incorporated into this plan?

[City of Madison Economic Development Strategy](#)

Short-term, we need to make it easier for businesses to open and operate, implementing a similar philosophy to State Street Revitalization, rather than creating economic barriers. Making it easier to operate later at night would benefit businesses and better serve the student community. I look forward to transit and housing infrastructure that will contribute to high employment, wages, and the continued abundance of opportunities that characterizes Madison. Public-private partnerships have been the most cost-effective way to make this happen and hopefully we can get these projects implemented across Madison, so the benefits aren’t only concentrated for one area or group of people.

****9.** While data centers are not new to Madison or the region, they are emerging as a major policy issue at all levels of government. What are your positions and views on data center development, and as an alder, how would you approach large development proposals like data centers?

Data centers pose a threat to Madison’s affordability goals and environment. Much like the rest of my district, I support the Common Council’s temporary moratorium and if any proposals were ever made, proceed with caution, ensuring extensive input from the community to ensure complete equity and transparency. Data centers across the nation have burdened locals with high energy bills and grid strain, significant water issues, and disproportionately impacted low-income communities of color. Considering the significant risks of these data centers, I will treat them with caution. If they proceed, I will ensure there are no government subsidies given as we should prioritize affordable housing, and promoting small business growth instead.

****10. How do you view Madison's continued population growth? Is it an opportunity or a challenge?**

Population growth is only a challenge for a city that remains stagnant and fails to provide adequate housing, transportation, and other services. A growing population and increasing density are things to be embraced that create more unique services and opportunities within close range of any given resident. Madison has already shown that it can respond to the needs of existing and new residents alike by permitting new residential developments and expanding the metro network. The persisting strains on affordability in the housing market simply indicate that expansion of the housing supply needs to be pursued even more vigorously.

****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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