

# Madison Council Candidate Questionnaire

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

Candidate Full Name \*

Kristen Slack

Aldermanic District \*

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Home Address \*

[REDACTED]

Email Address \*

[REDACTED]

Phone \*

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Campaign website (if applicable)

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

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

Twitter [https //twitter com/KristenSlackD19](https://twitter.com/KristenSlackD19) [https //www facebook com/KristenSlackD19/](https://www.facebook.com/KristenSlackD19/)  
[https //www instagram com/kristenslackd19/](https://www.instagram.com/kristenslackd19/) [https //www linkedin com/in/kristenslack/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kristenslack/)

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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?

I have engaged with hundreds of residents, entrepreneurs, and business owners throughout Madison and two themes are clear--a belief that the City is not doing enough to protect our natural resources and address climate change, and immense frustration with a lack of authentic community engagement and transparency by the City on far too many issues. Addressing issues related to protecting the environment, fighting climate change, improving community engagement practices, finding smart solutions for affordable housing and public transportation needs, and helping to build a strong and equitable economy are priorities for me. These priorities are intertwined with considerations like projected population growth, the unique features and natural resources that make Madison special and deserve our stewardship, ensuring our decisions don't exacerbate the wealth gaps in our society, and carefully considering how the pandemic is changing the behaviors and decisions people and families are making with respect to how and where they work, live, and use transportation going forward.

Creating a unifying vision for Madison is absolutely essential and is the foremost responsibility of City leadership. I believe that there is a unifying vision for the City that can be achieved and that virtually all residents can get behind and help move forward. But it has to belong to city residents, not to whomever is in power at the moment. Equitable, community-driven, and transparent planning, budgeting and policymaking are necessary ingredients to getting there. I have many ideas about how to more authentically and meaningfully engage residents, entrepreneurs and business owners throughout Madison in creating this vision, and I am excited to help steer us in these directions.

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

I started an Ed Tech business in 2017 and have been involved in the Madison area entrepreneurial scene since then I've worked with the Small Business Development Association, and have received amazing support and mentoring from the Doyenne Group and the WARF Upstart Program as well as from many other business mentors in the Madison area I have learned about and directly experienced the multiple hardships small business owners face getting started, gaining traction, and staying afloat, particularly as the pandemic created unforeseen hardships that many are still facing Barriers encountered include access to capital, unaffordable rent, zoning restrictions, and for many first time entrepreneurs, the experience of feeling overlooked, underestimated, and marginalized from a funding ecosystem that is difficult to break into

I'm also a professor at the UW Madison, where I have worked for 23 years In this role, I get to know many students who have exciting and innovative business ideas in the for profit and non profit sectors There are resources and supports for helping students think through and plan carefully in developing their ideas further, but more is needed Many students want to stay in the Madison area and bring their ideas to life, and the City should do all it can to support and encourage that

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

The pandemic wreaked havoc on many businesses. Declines in business traffic, labor shortages, and a sense that they were largely on their own to figure things out are themes that emerge in discussion with employers. Some closed their doors and some continue to struggle or are planning to close. Others were largely unaffected, saw a jump in business, or were able to pivot to different strategies like ramping up online order sales or takeout options. There were also cases where City practices interacted with the pandemic to create additional hardship, like road reconstruction and development projects that were not proactively coordinated with affected business owners. I've talked with some business owners who felt that the City offered little to no support or guidance during the pandemic to assist with staying afloat. Others have benefited from City policies. Most of the business owners I've met with in my district don't have any knowledge of major initiatives like the Odana Area Plan.

To start, we need more coordination by the City with other area business and economic development associations and initiatives so that local business owners know exactly where to go to get the support and information they need. The City should also expand efforts to regularly engage and communicate with business owners to hear about their ongoing needs. With respect to the last statement, this work is really the Alder's responsibility and it requires much more than posting a blog entry on a District website, assuming people regularly monitor the City website, or sending out an occasional mailer.

As a society, we have not settled on what work will look like going forward. How many and which jobs will be fully remote or hybrid? What will the co-working ecosystem look like? What are the local reasons that many retail and service businesses are having such trouble finding employees, even with increased wages? What do we have to do, looking forward, to attract and keep businesses and employees in the area? We do not have a clear picture of any of this, yet where we land as a society and as a city and region has big implications for where people choose to live and how they think about transportation and the location of various services. Local businesses need help strategizing about the future and help with the costs associated with any needed changes in their business models. We're definitely at an inflection point in our society and one thing is clear: we will not be returning to what was "normal" before the pandemic, and economic development, housing, and transportation plans made prior to that time must be revisited to make sure they adequately support the direction our society is heading.

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

Supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs, attracting new businesses that can provide living wage jobs with benefits, investing in training programs that can help local workers acquire more and different skills to meet the requirements of today's employment opportunities, helping students who have stepped out of a degree or training program return and complete their degrees or certifications, creating incentives for attracting new businesses and retaining existing ones, and collaborating with local organizations and programs on strategic investments that create jobs. All of the above is for the purpose of helping communities thrive, helping residents achieve economic stability at a livable level, and ensuring a robust economy that is accessible to and benefits everyone.

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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 a hotspot of innovation and entrepreneurship, and these things are part of the spirit and brand of Madison's economy. The City continues to gain a strong national reputation in this regard, and residents of Madison take pride in the local businesses and entrepreneurs that create jobs and bring additional value to the city and region.

We have strong workforce expertise and skilled workers in the computer science, IT, bioscience, and agricultural sectors as well as in the manufacturing and building trades, and we have strong health care, higher education, government and nonprofit sectors. Our amazing natural resources and love of outdoor activities are major attractions for prospective residents, visitors, and employers. Madison also has a long history of environmental activism and preservation, and as Alder I hope to help elevate and integrate these values into economic development initiatives and plans because this is something that makes the City stand out as a leader and model in fighting climate change. Businesses that specialize in eco-friendly and carbon neutral building, recycling and composting technologies, strategies for ensuring clean water and air, cutting edge agricultural practices and the like align with our environmental legacy and I would like to push the City to make concerted efforts to attract more of these types of businesses.

I would also love to see more support for creative ways to integrate local art in many forms throughout Madison communities, as well as for more neighborhood and city venues for community theatre, music performance, spoken word, and art galleries. The City has a role in creating space and funding for such things, through new and revitalized community centers, public markets, park shelters, and pedestrian streets. Ways to bring people together and build community help to reduce social isolation, create more social opportunities, strengthen social support networks, and generate neighborhood pride, which all bodes well for attracting, growing, and retaining businesses and encouraging entrepreneurship.

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

First, individuals and families need to be able to afford to live here. Second, we need meaningful and persistent outreach to attract not only a diverse workforce, but diversity among employers, too. Some of this work is the City's responsibility, and some can be achieved through better support of local organizations whose leadership and staff already know how to do this well. Third, Madison and every neighborhood within it should be welcoming places for all to move into, and for all to continue living in once here. While some pockets of progress have been made in this regard, our efforts as a city and a region are too slow and not enough. Luckily, we have very strong local leaders and residents with lived experiences who can and do bring expertise to this topic, and who must be at the table from the start to strategize, plan, guide, and implement efforts towards achieving these goals.

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

Addressing this issue requires a broad mix of housing options. Many cities, including ours, are aggressively pursuing more rental units. We need to do this, but we cannot overlook the need for pathways to equity, which are achieved largely through home ownership. We will end up hurting our economy if we ignore the fact that people still want homeownership options. With the astonishing racial wealth gap in this country, the more we constrict options for homeownership and drive home prices up, we risk exacerbating this wealth gap further. Families will make choices about where to live based on proximity to schools, childcare options, services, and public transportation. Land banking, zoning that allows for smaller homes on smaller lots, multi-family homes and much more attention to neighborhoods where our public schools are located are all part of the equation. As someone who is passionate about fighting climate change and protecting our natural resources, something that I think is part of Madison's history and legacy, I am hopeful that whatever directions we pursue, our City becomes a leader in this regard. Better stormwater management practices, more trees and native plants, preservation and where possible expansion of green spaces, and carbon neutral development should all be prioritized, as should a concerted effort to expand the number of jobs available that pay a living wage and offer decent benefits for workers so that market rents and home prices are more attainable.

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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?

Supporting networks of entrepreneurs of color begins with offering to assist with the work of those already doing so. The Madison Black Chamber of Commerce, the Wisconsin Latino Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin, the Ho-Chunk Nation, the Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce, and many local nonprofits and organizations that already advocate for and provide such support and have been doing so for a long time. The place to start is to see what these leaders and entities are doing and what they see as the primary needs and hurdles for entrepreneurs of color. And then ask for their input and advice about how the City can help.

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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?

I believe that our core public transportation model should preference coverage over maximized ridership because I believe that the former is, on its face, the more equitable solution to our transportation needs in Madison. City leadership initially proposed the latter and it took significant time and energy and created enormous frustration among Madison residents and groups adversely affected by this plan to push for changes toward greater coverage. There are more changes still needed.

We also need to be careful, as we rethink public transportation, to ensure that we do so in a fiscally responsible way given a limited budget and an increasing structural deficit. And we need to think more carefully about what the future of work looks like in terms of remote and hybrid options and the many implications that follow, worker demands for such choices, and the resulting preferences people have related to where they prefer to live. As the Madison homeownership market constricts and more and more people are priced out of it, families are moving to surrounding areas and commuting to work or working from home in order to afford a path to home equity. And many people who are considering Madison as a place to live are choosing to go elsewhere to pursue more affordable home ownership. Employers may start making different choices about where to locate based on the relative affordability of land in outskirt cities and towns that are growing in population size. What all of this means for Madison's economy, where businesses choose to locate, and how people change their transportation routines is simply not yet understood. I absolutely support a better public transportation network, but we need to revisit our pre-pandemic-made plans to make sure these significant investments are going to support the future of work and the housing and transportation choices people make as a result.

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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?**

First, I want to say that things like violent and nonviolent crimes are symptoms of larger structural problems, like unlivable wages, lack of affordable and high quality childcare, lack of health care coverage, under-resourced education systems, inequitable opportunities, and the criminalization of poverty. Racism and discrimination exacerbate all of these societal shortcomings. We do not provide equal or sufficient opportunities for success, health, and safety in this country. If we did, the social problems we worry about most would be much less common, and the systems designed to address these problems would be much smaller. That said, I do think that Madison is a much safer place than many other cities of similar size, but we are not without safety concerns and these concerns are larger or smaller depending on the neighborhood you live in.

The Common Council has a role in building safe communities in several ways. Alders should be regularly doing outreach to engage with their constituents about the safety concerns they have, and ensuring residents have accurate information about trends and statistics in criminal incidents. Alders should be regularly communicating with the police in their districts and with the civilian oversight board to communicate resident concerns and bring resident ideas for addressing safety in ways that do not create or exacerbate harm to residents and communities. The Council can also find ways to support local efforts around prevention, advocate for and implement systems change to preference prevention over reaction wherever possible, as well as move certain functions from policing like what the City has done with the CARES Program.

Transportation safety and public health are other aspects of safety. As we make investments in these areas, we need to make sure that we are providing benchmarks, monitoring these benchmarks, and engaging in robust and ongoing evaluation of our public safety investments and policy decisions so that we can change course and pursue more effective strategies if necessary.

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

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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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