

Madison Council Candidate Questionnaire

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

Candidate Full Name *

Matt Van Eperen

Aldermanic District *

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Home Address *

[REDACTED]

Email Address *

[REDACTED]

Phone *

[REDACTED]

Campaign website (if applicable)

www.votemve.com

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

Campaign Twitter and Instagram @votemve

No Facebook page at this time

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'm seeking this office in the hopes of bringing a fresh new perspective to the Council, especially with the incumbent deciding not to seek reelection. I have experience interning and working in a variety of different industry sectors, and with individuals of differing opinions. I think a major problem facing society is the unwillingness to consider alternative points of view on complex issues, and I believe the role of the council should be less alienating and more collaborative with the community and community interests. Madison (and Dane County in general) is growing fast, and the city needs to be mindful to not only deal with the current issues facing us, but also look ahead and plan for the future. How can we guarantee that our current and future citizens have housing? Food security? Employment? I want to make sure the council is focusing on economic factors so that our city's growth and citizens livelihoods is not inhibited by city actions, but rather benefits from the actions our council takes. Madison is commonly ranked near the top of the best places to live, and I want to build on that and make Madison a model for other cities.

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

I am someone who never proclaims to know everything. I know what I know, and I'm smart enough to know what I don't know. I'm someone who has no problem asking for advice in professional or personal matters—seeking help is how we grow. Listening and being attentive to problems also fosters growth. As someone not personally involved with small business (besides being a consumer), some of the unique needs facing small business will be new to me. I will undoubtedly seek advice and input from those businesses. I will also be seeking advice from my father, who owned his own small businesses in our hometown for many years before selling and retiring this past year to focus on his cancer battle. Growing up, I could see sometimes the stress caused by certain regulations and red-tape placed on small businesses.

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

The most important issues facing businesses in the third district are making sure we can match (potential) employees with employers and making sure businesses are not inhibited by regulations placed on it by the city. Although the job market has seemed to cool a bit, there are many open positions, and the city should examine ways in which it can help match people with businesses. Ensuring fair employment not only benefits the citizens in a full socioeconomic way, but also helps the businesses grow, as productivity and efficiency are increased. It's also likely that this would help spur business innovation, as new ideas are brought in and collaboration develops. Regarding regulations, there seems to exist a false dichotomy that someone is either pro worker or pro business, and so the result is regulations or intense scrutiny being placed on businesses in the name of being pro worker. I personally reject that idea, and I believe it's possible to be both pro worker and pro business. While some regulations are necessary to ensure safety, non discrimination, and fairness, regulations should not exist simply as red tape or in ways that inhibit innovation. If elected, I look forward to working with small businesses to learn more about the issues facing them, and from the workers to ensure solutions would not then hurt them.

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

I believe economic development is more than just job creation or investment or building. To me, economic development includes a broad range of acts, including those above, but which positively affects the socio-economic wellbeing of the community. Economic development should enhance both the economy and, through the economy, individuals' lives. This includes an equitable allocation of resources (land, labor, investment) that benefits employer, employee, and the broader community. In terms of how a city can affect economic development, intervention should be deliberate and the decision-making process should include a consideration of sustainability (not just ecological, but economical). Economic development should promote innovation and competitiveness, and in relation to businesses, should focus on helping to retain, expand, or create business and jobs. If sustainable, economic development will not just result in business profits, but fair incomes for the labor force and support for continued growth (and a larger tax base, depending on city action).

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

I think Madison has a great business brand. Much of it likely stems from UW-Madison being a renowned university and research institution, where innovation happens all the time. Madison's business brand likely also benefits from the city's usual rankings near the top of the U.S. best places to live. This helps attract businesses and top-notch employees to Madison businesses. With Madison being relatively young, collaborations and competitiveness are driving industry-leading innovations.

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

The best way Madison can attract and retain a diverse workforce is by making the city a great, affordable place to live. If the city is a great and affordable place to live, it will attract a well-qualified workforce and increase employment and wage competitiveness, as well as industry competition. In making the city a great and affordable place to live, the city needs to be mindful not to take actions that would disfavor certain sectors of the workforce or certain industries. Helping connect the workforce with business, and providing education/training opportunities for industries suffering from workforce shortages, would also help attract and retain a diverse workforce.

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

To meet the diverse needs of workforce housing, I would recommend that the city study the outcomes of (i) possible tax credits for multi-family housing projects; (ii) low-interest loans to rehabilitate older workforce housing and making it easier to rehabilitate; (iii) redevelopment of old or idle commercial property into workforce housing (for example, the Sears site that sits vacant at East Towne); (iv) reducing red-tape on projects so as to not drive up the cost of housing, while ensuring safety and environmental concerns; and (v) expanding the affordable housing trust fund. Undoubtedly, there are more possibilities that exist, and my hope is that increased discussion on this topic by the council would spur further ideas. Coordination with other municipalities in Dane County is also necessary due to the growth of areas surrounding the city of Madison, as we should be ensuring that we're all working to solve the issue instead of it resting on one city.

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

The biggest thing Madison can do to support entrepreneurs of color working to start and grow an emerging business in Madison is providing resources to those folks. Whether it's direct support or links to other resources/support, we should ensure that if someone is looking for assistance, we have a way to provide it. Having an easy-to-find/use resource center, in-person and/or online, ensures that those seeking support are not dissuaded from following their dreams of creating and owning their small business. The city should also consider loans to assist entrepreneurs starting and growing their business, as one of the hardest parts, particularly for persons of color or others economically disadvantaged, is getting the capital to start and last past the first year. Having financial advice through any loan program would also benefit both the city and new business.

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

I think Madison has a fine transportation system. The infrastructure itself leaves a bit to be desired in some locations (for example, the Milwaukee St. bridge over I-90 which is dangerously narrow and dark for pedestrians/cyclists). One thing that I want Madison to avoid is the idea that expanding roads always leads to an ease of transportation issues, which is not always the case. Any transportation system needs to work for all who share the roads, and fair consideration should be given to all. The city should also consider any potential incentives there may be to make public transportation or walking/cycling more used, and study whether making it cheaper to use public transportation alleviates broader issues. Priority improvements to support mobility of a growing workforce should focus on where there are congestion and traffic issues, and figure out ways to reduce those. As Madison continues to grow, it needs to ensure that new commercial and residential development have sustainable transportation infrastructure that connects workforce to jobs.

****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?**

Yes, I view Madison as a safe community. Madison is continually ranked near the top of the best places to live, and part of that consideration is the fact that Madison is statistically safe. Of course, however, there is crime, and any violent crime or even rise in non-violent crime affects people's perception. The Common Council's role in building safe communities starts with helping build trust and respect between law enforcement and the community. This isn't something the council can do alone, though, and it requires buy-in from law enforcement and community. It also involves holding police accountable for bad policing actions, so that the community can see that bad acts will be dealt no matter who commits it. Individuals also play a role in developing trust and relationships amongst themselves, as closer communities experience fewer crime. The council needs to consider whether certain programs can bring people closer together, both intra-community and between law enforcement and community members. Besides policing and crime, though, a lot more goes into the idea of building a safe community. How can Madison increase wealth and provide housing and job security? How can we ensure there are no food deserts and folks have food security? How can we ensure that transportation infrastructure is safe? How can we ensure that folks have the healthcare (mental and physical) they need? These issues all intersect with crime and cannot be forgotten.

****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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