

Madison Council Candidate Questionnaire

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

Candidate Full Name *

Michelle Ellinger Linley

Aldermanic District *

18

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Campaign website (if applicable)

Michelle4D18.com

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

[https://www.facebook.com/people/Michelle Ellinger Linley for District 18/100087735573326/](https://www.facebook.com/people/Michelle-Ellinger-Linley-for-District-18/100087735573326/)

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 running as a local small business owner, a community advocate, an MMSD parent, and as a proud Northside resident in District 18. Our district is socioeconomically & racially diverse compared to the rest of the city and remains one of the more affordable places to live. Because of these unique circumstances, I want to elevate the voices of residents in District 18 and approach the alder seat as a listen first advocate. I want to connect residents to city government committees and processes and ensure city government is transparent and accessible for everyday people.

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

I am a small business owner in Madison and am very proud to prioritize employing a diverse workforce and paying a living wage. One lesson being a business owner has taught me is the need to support my employees, especially with material needs. It is their work that makes the business happen and they cannot do their best work if they have to struggle with basic necessities. Additionally, I was on the Raemisch Farm Work Group and saw directly the way city development policy can impact business development.

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

The biggest issue is that there aren't a lot of local anchor businesses in D18. Many necessary businesses are in a neighboring district that not all in my district can access without a car. Those in the district who cannot or choose not to drive a personal automobile are often cut off from necessary resources. With better walkability and public transit, there is more fertile ground for such economic development and my district's residents can more easily access the things they need.

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

Economic development means the public and private sector together are providing both necessities (such as groceries or transit) and wants (such as a diverse range of restaurants or entertainment venues) to all in the community. It means those employed by the private and public sector are paid enough to provide for their families and partake in both business and pleasure in the community. It means keeping up with our community's housing needs.

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

Madison is one of two major economic engines in the state, alongside Milwaukee. Through a combination of the resources connected to the university, the entertainment demands of students and its younger residents, and the stewardship of the lakes and our green spaces, Madison is certainly viewed by many as an attractive destination, for both businesses and workers. However, Madison is growing in its self-awareness that there has frequently been a tale of two cities here. Working class and poor Madisonians, especially those nonwhite, are often denied access to these growing opportunities here. Nonwhite professional Madisonians often struggle with finding institutions that cater to their needs. Nationally, there is growing recognition that Madison has these problems, and this is a critical barrier to overcome for Madison's growth. The future of economic development is one that is all-inclusive, and without this Madison's growth will stop entirely.

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

As noted in a future question, Madison needs to support entrepreneurs of color who can develop anchor businesses and institutions that cater to a more racially diverse community. Additionally, in Madison, our racial disparities are closely tied to socioeconomic disparities. Things we can do to help working class and poor people, such as ensuring living wages, reducing dependence on personal vehicles and expanding public transit, and ensuring there is more affordable housing will all help retain a more diverse workforce. If we help our poorest residents, who are disproportionately nonwhite in our city, achieve stability, that will allow a more diverse group of people to climb the socioeconomic ladder and become the business and community leaders of today and tomorrow.

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

We need an all of the above approach to housing. We cannot have a NIMBY approach to housing development, and more density - which has the added bonus of more walkability and less reliance on cars - is good. However, the private sector alone cannot solve our housing needs. The city has a role to play in funding housing for all income levels, from direct, city-owned housing to funding support for projects like housing cooperative models. This all of the above approach, too, is needed to meet the housing needs of those not in the workforce, such as the elderly or those with disabilities. This is just as important.

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

My district is a major hub of Madison's Black communities, but we have very few Black-owned businesses nearby. Black entrepreneurs know what their communities want and need and should be encouraged and supported, and this is true for other nonwhite communities as well. Our public market project is one we must help succeed after promising support to so many entrepreneurs of color, such as Melly Mel's Soul Food, and we have many points of leverage at the city level, from tax relief to grants to direct funding, to help entrepreneurs of color gain a foothold.

****9. 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 is currently too car-dependent. The priority is allowing all - those who want and those who need - to utilize public transit, walking, biking, or other forms of transportation that reduce our reliance on cars. There is, of course, an environmental benefit to this - something that is also important to Madison's self-image, but it's also the best step for us to make this a city where everyone, regardless of ability and socioeconomic status, can find economic opportunities. We must utilize our Bus Rapid Transit and the proposed Amtrak station in a way that is truly accessible for all. We have a tendency in Madison to cater to the professional class. They certainly deserve access to public transit, but we would see the biggest return for our investment if we expand our working class and poorer residents' access to different parts of the city and the respective economic and housing opportunities that come with that.

****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?**

Much of the rhetoric around crime in Madison is fear-based rather than reality, and often tied to negative and false stereotypes tied to racism and classism; however, crime is always something we must take seriously and remain vigilant against as the Common Council. We must have a holistic view of crime, not just a first responder's view. What that means is we must address root causes of behavior and invest in preventative policies. The number one root of crime is a lack of economic opportunities. The expansion of public transit for all to reduce car dependency, promoting affordable housing for all income levels, and pushing for more anchor businesses and living wage jobs is all part of crime reduction. Additionally, we must recognize the mental health aspect of crime and invest further in programming like the CARES team so people receive help for their struggles, rather than just punishment.

****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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