

# Madison Council Candidate Questionnaire

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

Candidate Full Name \*

Noah Lieberman

Aldermanic District \*

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Campaign website (if applicable)

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

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

[https //www facebook com/people/Noah Lieberman For Common Council/100087923498641/](https://www.facebook.com/people/Noah-Lieberman-For-Common-Council/100087923498641/)

### 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?

In short, I believe that Madison needs alders who are committed fully to the progressive ideals of our city. Our ability to enact effective policies has been severely hamstrung by the Republican legislature, so it distresses me when good initiatives and policies are stymied in our common council by alders more interested in maintaining the status quo than pursuing real change. I am running to make sure we do not stand in our own way and live up to those ideals.

For me, this chiefly falls into four issues where I believe our city can and must do more than our current council is pursuing:

**Affordable Housing** - We cannot allow anything to stand in the way of housing development in Madison. I support building multi-family housing throughout the entire city, not just the areas which have historically seen this type of development. However, this does not mean building the same cookie cutter apartment complex over and over again - I believe that a sustainable housing plan involves building apartments, townhouses, duplexes, and other forms of compact and affordable housing. Solving our housing shortage is the only way we can keep the city growing and make sure we have enough workers and consumers to support our businesses.

**Transportation Policy** - Madison needs to be a city that is easy to travel by car, bus, bike, or foot. Bus rapid transit is going to be a huge improvement in this regard, but there is still more that needs to be done - We have to expand bus service into neighborhoods around the city, to make it a convenient option for folks to make their entire commute. We also have to improve our bike infrastructure on city streets so riders are protected when not on bike paths. And we have to make pedestrian safety a priority when building and refurbishing streets, slowing cars down and giving pedestrians better options to cross.

**Climate Resiliency** - Our city is clearly committed to fighting climate change, but it is apparent that the effects of this disaster are already upon us. We have to improve our infrastructure to prepare for unprecedented storms and heat waves. This means building rain gardens, porous streets, and other projects to prevent flooding, as well as shaded public areas and cooling shelters to help vulnerable citizens during heat waves. We also have to work with our utility companies to ensure we have built resiliency and redundancy into our electric grid to prevent outages during heat waves.

**Racial Justice** - We must do more than pay lip service to issues of racial disparities in our justice system. I support further empowering the Police Civilian Oversight Board by allowing them to make proactive policy recommendations and giving more visibility to their actions so the public knows that we take this issue seriously. I also support reducing arrests and citations for non-violent crime and deploying more care team interventions and community resources to address the root causes of crime, rather than treating police action as a panacea for all issues in our city.

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

I won't lie and say I have a great deal of experience in this regard. I have never owned or worked for a small business. Part of the reason I'm seeking this endorsement is because I want to hear from you and learn about the challenges you are facing. I think that too many elected officials like to think they already have all the answers and are unwilling to listen to those with experiences different from their own. I would happily welcome the chance to speak with you all in depth about the issues facing our city's businesses and employees.

What I will say is this: I came to Madison like many young people do - I had no experience with the city or this area of the country in general, but I was recruited by Epic and decided to pursue the job offer. I quickly fell in love with this city, and have set down roots here with my wife, but I've seen firsthand the issues that have driven young workers away from the city. I think that keeping young people in the city beyond the initial draw that brought them here (whether that be Epic, the university, or another economic opportunity) is going to be key to maintaining economic development in the city. Young, talented individuals are crucial both as employees and consumers for small businesses, and keeping them in our city will help all business excel. This means investing in the areas that matter to these folks and would make Madison an appealing city to live in long term. That includes investing more in a diverse array of arts, culture, and entertainment, expanding public transit and improving walkability to make downtown more accessible for those without cars, and generally being more open and responsive to their requests of local government. I would love to be an advocate and liaison for younger people in this city, and work to make Madison more than a brief stop on these workers' journeys.

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

First off, I think the businesses in my district face a variety of problems because they run the gamut of types of businesses, from the restaurants and shops of South Park Street to the in-home daycares and salons of the Nine Springs neighborhoods. However, in general, I think they face the same major problem affecting businesses across the city and country - attracting and retaining workers. The city may not have as much power to address this as federal and state lawmakers, but the more we can do to make employees' lives easier, the more likely it will be that they will be able to remain in the jobs they enjoy. This includes expanding our transit options, offering more services for parents of young children, and generally providing more economic resources for the working class in our city. But again, I would welcome the chance to talk with your members about the issues impacting their businesses and how they think the city can be part of the solution.

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

I think economic development goes beyond the raw numbers that are so often the focus of economic reporting (tax revenue, jobs created, property value) and has to instead be judged by the wellbeing and livelihood of the people in the city. Are we providing avenues for people to pursue their passions and enter fulfilling careers? Are we encouraging entrepreneurship from across the city, including our communities of color? And are we building the infrastructure and systems to make this development sustainable? Developing an economy means more than generating wealth, it means creating a society in which all people have an opportunity to thrive and where the market forces around them lift them up rather than holding them back.

Now I know a lot of those goals are more qualitative than quantitative, and while we should strive to have a more comprehensive understanding of our economy, I do work in analytics and understand the importance of having metrics to judge our city by. Personally, I would look to how the median and lower quartile of income compare to the same measures for rent in our city. Right now our median household income is less than 3 times the price of our median rent, and the lower quartile is less than 2 times the price of the corresponding rent, which indicates to me that living in the city is far too expensive for folks making below the median wage. We need to take immediate action to both increase wages and lower rent prices so workers can afford to live in the same place that they work. I'd also look to the number of people in our city who work multiple jobs or work more than 50 hours a week, as I think growing numbers in these categories are signs of an unsustainable workforce.

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

I think Madison is recognized as having a highly educated, highly skilled workforce and the businesses to match. I don't think it's any surprise that we are a leader in tech and science jobs given that reputation. UW and Epic play a big role in that perception, but as more startups and established businesses find success in employing our talented workers, the more that reputation will grow.

On the other hand, Madison is also viewed as an extremely white city, and one with sharp racial disparities. I think this prevents workers and business owners of color from coming to Madison, and is ultimately going to put a cap on how successful we can be as a city. It is going to take more than a few success stories to change that perception and will require a full commitment to addressing the underlying causes of these discrepancies and divisions to fix. I'd refer you to my answers in the next question for how I believe that can be achieved.

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

I've spent a lot of time thinking about this and discussing it with my peers. The sad fact is that Madison is not seen as a welcoming place for people of color, which is why we have such a hard time recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. I think that there are several things we can do to change this perception. First, becoming a leader in terms of racial justice and police reform. The perception of Madison as an unwelcoming place for black and brown people certainly goes beyond issues of racial disparity in our police force and justice system; but by publicly and full-throatedly challenging the racism in this system, we could communicate to potential new Madisonians that we are not complacently accepting the prejudices in our society and instead confronting them head on.

We also need to be more inclusive in the art and culture we choose to promote and nurture as a city. We must show young people of color that we value the same things they do, and won't simply treat their culture as an afterthought divorced from the accepted norms of our city. Promoting a wider range of concerts, art installations, and businesses will show that we are actually interested in these people joining and influencing our city and community, and not just paying lip service to it to draw them in for their labor.

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

In short, we absolutely need to build more multifamily and compact housing. We have a definite housing crisis in Madison and do not have nearly enough affordable housing. I fully support the zoning changes to allow building more apartments, townhomes, condos, and duplexes around the entire city. The city is limited in what it can do to control prices by the preemptive laws passed by the legislature, and is further limited in what actions it can take through spending by the decrease in shared revenue (also due to meddling by the state legislature), so we have to pursue more inventive solutions. I think the city should empower renters to form a tenants' union, so they can use their collective power to negotiate for more affordable rents and better living conditions. Even if not all tenants were to join, the market force this group would provide could lower rents for all, leading to an increased supply of affordable workforce housing.

I also think that transit has to be part of the solution to our housing problem. Currently, there are parts of the city and county that are not viable for workforce housing because the commute from there to people's places of employment is too onerous. Bus Rapid Transit could be a real solution to this issue, allowing folks to live further away from their places of employment and spreading out the demand for housing away from the current hot spots. In my capacity as Campaigns Chair of the Dane County Democratic Party, I've helped dozens of progressive candidates get elected who are equally committed to a county wide transit system, and I would relish the opportunity to work with them to make that a reality.

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

The most obvious, and effective, way is through direct financial support. Many entrepreneurs of color have trouble getting started due to systemic and internalized racism in our financial and business institutions. Allowing prospective entrepreneurs of color an avenue for funding that does not require going to a bank for a loan can greatly reduce discrepancies in how easy it is to fund a new venture. Outside of directly funding entrepreneurs, the city could also allocate more resources to organizations like the Progress Center for Black Women who are already doing the work in the community to promote and train women of color to become business leaders. The city can also use its money to provide venues for businesses run by people of color to sell their goods and services. I think the forthcoming Public Market will be a great example of this, but the government could also highlight and promote minority-owned businesses without the use of physical space through contract selection and online promotional resources.

I also think that several of the answers I gave about supporting a diverse workforce also apply here. People will not want to start a business in a community where they don't feel truly welcome, so every step we can take as a city to combat our own racist tendencies (both systemic and cultural), will help us achieve a more diverse ownership class as well.

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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?

Our transportation system is seriously lagging behind the needs of our community. It is just too onerous for most workers to take our public transit to their place of employment every day of the week, unless they happen to live and work on the same bus line, due to the infrequency of routes and difficulty in coordinating transfers. Even then, workers are out of luck if they work unusual hours. I think we need to expand our bus system, not just with Bus Rapid Transit to ease getting from one part of the city to another, but with more frequent stops in neighborhoods as well, so that commuters are able to navigate the entire city without the use of a car.

As stated before, this has been a key focus of my work as Dane Dems Campaigns Chair, and I want to be able to leverage my connections with likeminded elected officials in Verona, Fitchburg, Middleton, and other local municipalities to build a transit network that not only works for our city, but our entire community. I am one of the thousands of workers who live in the city of Madison but work elsewhere in Dane County. And until we have a more comprehensive, county-wide bus network, the vast majority of these workers will only have car travel as an option for their commute. While part of the responsibility for setting that up falls on the county board, I believe there is a lot the city can do on its own or in partnership with the outlying communities.

One other transportation issue I'm keen to focus on is the safety of our streets. The Vision Zero initiative has done tremendous work to reduce traffic fatalities and injuries, but these tragedies are still far too common. More common still are the fears of parents who live on highly trafficked streets, who won't let their kids play in the front yard or even wait outside for a school bus due to reckless drivers. Lowering speed limits, while a good start, is not enough to slow drivers down on these roads to a safe level. As we repave and refurbish our roads, we also have to reimagine what a neighborhood street looks like, with speed bumps and smaller lanes to promote safe vehicle speeds, and more physical protection for bikers and pedestrians.

**\*\*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?

I absolutely view Madison as a safe community. While car thefts and gun violence did rise during the first year of the pandemic, that was part of a larger national trend and not reflective of any issues with the city itself. As we have seen in the last year, these crime rates have dropped and are even below the five year average. I think that the Council's role in creating safe communities has to go beyond funding the police force. We need to be investing in community resources and social service interventions which can address the root causes of crime in our community. Namely, we have to address poverty, housing insecurity, and mental health care in order to have any chance at a sustainable decrease in crime. I believe that as outsiders see our city is truly committed to investing in the wellbeing of our residents (and not just putting more police on the street), they will be more excited than ever to come to Madison for the next step of their careers.

**\*\*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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