

2026 Madison Common Council Candidate Questionnaire

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

Candidate Full Name *

Sean O'Brien

Aldermanic District *

District 16

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Campaign website (if applicable)

www.seanformadison.com

Social media accounts, if any

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/people/Sean-OBrien-for-Madison-Common-Council/61569028298013/>

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/seanformadison>

Bluesky- <https://bsky.app/profile/seanformadison.bsky.social>

LinkedIn (Personal) - <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sean-o-brien-33740a13a/>

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 first ran for the Madison Common Council in 2025 because our city was at a crossroads. We were, and still are, facing an affordability crisis. Trump had just been elected and our communities were uncertain of what the future would bring. We needed strong local leadership – and now more than ever, we need local leaders who will continue to stand up for our most marginalized neighbors and work tirelessly to make life more affordable for working people.

Over the past year, we have been able to accomplish so much. We've invested in our public infrastructure and begun work on our second bus rapid transit line. I was proud to be a lead sponsor on the largest package of pro-housing reforms in recent memory. I also led the charge to protect a critical food security program in the face of federal cuts and was a sponsor of Madison's largest-ever investment in homelessness services.

I'm running for re-election because there is so much more work to do. We still need to ease the affordability crisis, expand options for public transportation, and strengthen our city's economic development strategy to ensure that we are building resilient neighborhoods for all of our families. Cities like Madison need to be the backstop – protecting our communities from federal overreach and standing up for the dignity of all people.

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

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

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?

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

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.

****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?

Across the country, the cost of living continues to rise. Whether it's at the grocery store or on their municipal tax bills, Madisonians are feeling the financial pressure. As policy makers, we need to make sure we are being responsible and efficient with how we spend taxpayer dollars.

We need to look at new forms of income for the city and make sure that we are getting a fairer deal of shared revenue and are being fully reimbursed by the state for services we provide. To do this, Madison must continue to have a strong presence in the State Capitol with our lobbyists and other municipal and community leaders. As alder, I have worked hard to build strong relationships with our state leaders, meeting with them directly and regularly receiving updates on our city's lobbying efforts

As an alder, I sponsored a budget amendment to use general fund balance rather than levy to pay for amendments to reduce the burden on tax payers. But we still have a long way to go in making Madison a truly affordable place to live. In the years ahead, our city must look at other ways to reduce costs for residents, make it easier to access housing of all types, bring more state dollars back to Madison, and ensure we have a strong social safety net.

****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](#)

We need to make sure that we are supporting all aspects of our economy, from residents and families to small business owners and the people who visit our city. Madison continues to grow and be an economic driver for the region. It's so important that we continue to have strong relationships with our surrounding municipalities and governments, and that we consider economic development not just through the lens of the city, but for the region as a whole.

This includes continuing to fight for the creation of a Regional Transit Authority and supporting the expansion of the Dane County Airport where it is applicable for the city. Additionally, a sound economic development plan should include support for our workers and their families, with strong transit, child care, and housing options.

Additionally, the plan should include training opportunities for underrepresented communities, as well as apprenticeship programs across industries, and support credit accessibility for small businesses while continuing to invest in emerging industries and sectors.

Finally, we need to make sure that as we are supporting our economic growth, we remain committed to sustainable and environmentally-conscious policies that address the climate crisis and build resilience into our communities. Protecting our environment and building a strong economy go hand-in-hand, and we should take advantage of the opportunities before us by tackling the climate crisis head on.

****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 are a key piece of our digital infrastructure, and they are not new to Dane County. However, large-scale data center campuses are new and they pose significant concerns for energy consumption, employment, and the environment. It is important to fully understand the risks that data centers pose and ensure that we have a plan to handle their impacts on the community.

As with any large-scale development, it is important to responsibly manage and integrate them into our land use plans. It's also important to make sure that residents and community leaders have a voice in development decisions that impact their neighborhoods.

I supported the one-year moratorium on the construction of data centers over 10,000 square feet to make sure that we as a city can create a responsible plan for permitting and development and get answers to our questions regarding the impact of data centers.

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

Madison's growth continues to present us with significant opportunities. It is a clear sign that we are a strong, vibrant, and desirable community. That being said, we need to continue to address the challenges created by rapid population growth – including the rising cost of living, housing burdens, and strain on city services – if we want to truly enjoy the benefits of that growth.

We continue to need sustainable options for future funding that do not cut services or further raise the cost of living. These goals are not mutually exclusive. Madison is being starved of financial resources from the state – a situation that will force us to continuously face the question of whether to raise property taxes or cut essential services.

Additionally we need to continue to look at and update our zoning codes to keep up with the housing shortage that we continue to face. We need to keep investing in our area, park, and comprehensive plans so we can make sure to keep a lens of long term growth. We must consider what projects and policies will look like five, ten, and even twenty years from now as Madison continues to grow. The benefits of population growth are exciting, but we must manage this growth responsibly and sustainably.

****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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