

Progressive Dane Endorsement Questions for 2021 Madison Common Council Candidates
Nikki Conklin

1. Why are you running for elected office? What are your priority issues?

I am running because this district needs a new, young face that represents the most marginalized communities. I want to empower others (BIPOC) that we can be in a position of power. I want to bring power to all the folks of District 9. I plan to have open and timely communication with my constituents and I also plan to educate my constituents on how they can access government themselves. My priorities are quality affordable housing, equity and justice, and safety for all.

2. There will be many new alders on the 2021 Council, possibly ones who are from backgrounds and perspectives of our most marginalized residents. If you are an incumbent, what challenges does that present and how will you respond? If you are not an incumbent, please describe the strategies that you will employ to hit the ground running as an alder.

I will stay active in my community and continue to reach out to my constituents. I will be open-minded and listen to all the voices of my district. I already have many endorsements of current Alders and I am in dialogue with almost all the new BIPOC candidates that are planning on running for Council alongside me. I have a lot of support from current and former Alders who are all willing to support and guide me on this journey.

3. How do you understand the responsibilities of the Common Council, and how do you see the Council's role in relation to the mayor and city staff in general and during a major emergency?

The Common Council is a legislative branch that drafts the ordinances at the city level. We pass the laws at the city level. The Mayor is the Executive that gives ongoing communication. During an emergency it is the Common Council's responsibility to listen to the folks who elected them, and respond accordingly.

4. What does community control of the police in Madison mean to you? What should the role of the Common Council be so that the Civilian Oversight Board can be successful, and for the intent of the [2019 Ad Hoc Committee Recommendations](#) to be implemented?

What community control of the police means to me is that the police have to answer to the community. There must be non-biased folks who investigate and hold the force accountable. There are successful models like CAHOOTS in Oregon that send mental health experts to serve as first responders for mental health crises, homelessness, substance abuse, and threats of suicide. Sending armed officers in these complicated circumstances can escalate the situation to become more violent and possibly deadly. In 2019 CAHOOTS received 24,000 calls which is 20% of the city's 911 calls and they only had to call for police backup in less than 1% of dispatches. In July, Council members voted unanimously to request the help of the county in creating a mental health first responder pilot program like Cahoots and I'm happy about that decision. I support reallocating funding into programs like CAHOOTS and investing in education, affordable housing, and green spaces to help create safer communities. As for helping the COB to be successful, alders should actively participate in supporting their efforts and should help turn their ideas into policies or ordinances.

As the final report of the Ad Hoc Committee mentions, there are serious trust issues that need to be repaired between the police and the BIPOC community. As Alder, I will work to make my community a safer place for all.

- a. A demand to “Defund the Police” has been made by many members of our community. How do you understand this call and what is your response?

I understand this as shifting funds away from the police and putting them into different resources like mental health advocates, AODA services, and community funded programs. My response is that police are not needed for every call, and we have to make sure we are sending the right professional to the right job. I agree with this concept.

5. The City’s strategy for increasing affordable housing has relied upon Low Income Housing Tax Credit project developments. This approach is not creating enough units to meet the need. What alternative approaches would you pursue to increase low income housing to meet the need? Describe a model housing project, including location, design, unit sizes, rents, shared spaces, and funding sources.

More shelter for all ages, sex and races. We also need to look into more programs that are getting more folks into homeownership and building wealth. There are residents who qualify for a mortgage by income but have little means to save for the down payments/closing costs. More funding needs to be directed to those individual households in the form of down payment assistance. Educating more Landlords on accepting section 8 vouchers. Housing First is a great housing project. The housing model I would pursue is the Housing First model. Having our basic needs met by having stable housing is the number one priority and once that need is met, have other resources available to address any other issue that folks may have. Employment, transportation, education or mental health. Milwaukee County Housing First project cost about \$2 million/year, it has reduced Medicaid cost to the state of Wisconsin by \$2.1 million/year, reduced mental health cost to Milwaukee County by \$715k/year, and has reduced cost to our legal system by \$600k/year. Also dramatically reduced the overall homeless population in Milwaukee County, not just the chronically homeless. In 2009 there were 1,537 individuals experiencing homelessness in Milwaukee County. The Housing First Initiative began in September 2015 and by 2017 the number of individuals experiencing homelessness was down to 900 in Milwaukee County.

6. Please review the [Progressive Dane City Platform](#) and explain how you would prioritize and implement our platform positions. Is there any proposal you would not support? Are we missing something?

I would prioritize the platforms that most aligned with my values. Which is quite a bit of them. Housing Justice is very important to me. Making sure folks have access to quality affordable housing and combating the homelessness. Healthy communities are important to me as well. If we have a healthy community that means all our basic needs are met and in return we will have a safer community. I know how important community building and engagement is. That is what got me to this point in running for Alder. I want my community to thrive. Sustainable Economic Development, safe, efficient, and accessible transportation, Workers’ Rights and

Wise Land Use and Clean Environment. No, there is not a proposal I wouldn't support. No, you are not missing anything. I think you covered all the bases.

7. What is the role of the City and the Common council in the pandemic response? What challenges do you anticipate at the local scale with continued pandemic management in 2021 and vaccination rollout?

Communicating , getting the needed funding, keeping on top of things, getting the correct information out to the public. We must support the first responders and make sure they are getting what they need to do their jobs. Some of the challenges may be getting Black and Brown folks to accept the vaccine and getting it administered to them. Making sure that the BIPOC community is not left out. Communication across communities making sure the ones in need get it first. Folks may not want to go to the hospital to get the vaccine. Maybe looking at community centers or polling places to administer the vaccine.

Progressive Dane Involvement

5. What interests you in seeking the endorsement of Progressive Dane? If you get the endorsement are you willing to commit to using it in your campaign materials?

Progressive Dane is widely known here in Madison, your values align with mine. With the focus on equity in everything you do. If you get the endorsement are you willing to commit to using it in your campaign materials? Yes, I am

6. Have you reviewed [Progressive Dane's Accountability Policy](#). Are you comfortable establishing this partnership with Progressive Dane?

Yes, I have reviewed the accountability policy, and I am comfortable establishing the partnership with Progressive Dane.

7. If endorsed, will you assign a liaison from your campaign team to the elections committee to help inform our members about how they can support your campaign.

I could and I am willing to have a liaison from my campaign team.

8. Are you currently a member of Progressive Dane? If yes, for how long? If not, are you willing to be?

No, I am not a member yet, but I would be willing to become a member.

9. Is there anything on here that I think folk would want to know more about me?

Now more than ever, we need to amplify the voices of women and people of color and bring fresh ideas and new people to politics. We need better listening and more collaboration and I plan to bring that as District 9 Alder. As a mom raising three children, I have a vested interest in the decisions made today and how they will affect my children's generation and generations to come.