

**Progressive Dane Endorsement Questions for 2021 Madison Common Council Candidates**  
**Brandi Grayson**

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

There are four pillars to my platform: housing, justice in public safety, youth and family empowerment, and economic justice. Madison is approaching a housing crisis with development centered on the professional class at the expense of other city residents. This is unacceptable in a community with the resources to house everyone. To expect other socioeconomic and racial disparities to close in education, criminal justice, and employment when people cannot find stable housing is absurd. Ending homelessness and housing insecurity is the #1 priority.

Historically, Madison has prided itself as a safe community. However, the response by some political leaders to concerns around safety is frequently racist and counterproductive. Healthy communities make safe communities, which means investment in community resources, such as municipal broadband or more accessible transportation services (as stated in our youth and family empowerment platform pillar). The funding for such ideas is being taken away by a bloated police budget. Our police department has repeatedly behaved in a way to make us less safe, from criminalizing poverty to killing our community members, like Tony Robinson. Police do not make us safer, they are merely a response to crime after it occurs. Funding must be moved from law enforcement to programming that makes us safer, and we must investigate alternative first responder programs that are unarmed and have true expertise in mental health, substance addiction, and other root issues.

Finally, we can't disentangle racial disparities with socioeconomic disparities. Ending poverty does not eliminate racism, but it is a necessary step in eliminating racism (and vice versa!). Tax breaks to the wealthy, such as property developers, is widening the gap between the rich and poor. We must continue to push for living wage, union jobs for our community members. Unions are a key part of ensuring safe workplace conditions and higher wages - so the city must also do its part to recognize city worker associations and treat them as equal partners in personnel policy and wages.

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.

First and foremost, my most important asset to represent our most marginalized residents is I am a Black woman. I am a Black mother. I've witnessed the strengths of Madison's community, but I've also seen how those strengths are systematically denied for poor people and people of color, ESPECIALLY Black Madisonians. District 14 is a microcosm of that. The wealthiest residents hold community and political power, but the district's demographics speak to a diverse community, ethnically, racially, and socioeconomically. South Park Street remains a hub of services, local businesses, and community gathering but these very strengths puts it at risk of gentrification.

My focus on moving away from funding developers and towards city-owned affordable housing is key in both stabilizing the economic situation of marginalized people but also to prevent gentrification. The South Side of

Madison can be a cultural hub of Black, Latinx, and Asian residents if we focus on empowering the community rather than bringing in outside money.

My personal relationships with said marginalized communities means I can communicate city affairs effectively with them and can help ensure they have access to testimony and other actions to directly impact city policy. This can be seen by my past work with Freedom, Inc. and other organizations standing up against a new jail at the county level or fighting for police accountability at the city level.

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, in many ways, the legislative branch of the government. With its 20 districts, it is more connected to the people than the Mayor. It introduces legislation, amends the budget, and is most directly influenced by community action. Thus, the City Council is both an important policy hub and also a check on the Mayor. A good working relationship with the Mayor is helpful, but it's more important to be willing to hold the Mayor accountable. Executives are often interested in consolidating their power in an emergency, and this power can be used for good and bad - the Council can help prevent abuse of power.

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?
  - 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?

Community control of the police means the community can hire, fire, and reprimand police. The mechanisms of that may vary, but true community control means all people are represented, not just who the Mayor picks or people with political ambitions and privileged access. While we must move to a world where our very definition of law enforcement changes, until then we must put the community in the driver's seat of law enforcement.

What to do with the recommendations is simple: write them up as legislation and budget amendments and push them for a vote. We have plenty of reports and task forces that give us nice, bite-sized recommendations to implement but it's at the implementation stage that Madison always falls short.

Defunding the police is a step towards moving us to a post-law enforcement world. While we remain in a world with police, though, we can still recognize that police budgets are overinflated, a relic of the misguided (at best) "War on Drugs" and the racist era of mass incarceration. The police do not make us safer. Strong communities make us safer. With our ability to raise revenue limited by the state, the police is perhaps the only department to not be partially defunded. These funds need to be moved to services that make our community safer.

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.

All hands on deck are needed to address our housing needs. Transitional shelters and tiny home villages are necessary. Cooperative housing expansion is necessary. Forcing developers to redefine affordable housing units they create as truly affordable (no more than 30% of a full time minimum wage earner's income, for example), is necessary. To be on pace to house everyone, we need to build at least 1000 units of genuinely affordable housing every year. Fundamentally, though, the most efficient process to do this is for the city to build and maintain housing. The private market cannot effectively meet these demands. Housing is a human right - it does not need to be profitable.

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?

Similar to Progressive Dane's platform, my priority is housing for all. Additionally, I am prioritizing economic equality and true public safety through strengthening communities and community oversight of the police. The pillars of the platform match neatly with the pillars of my platform.

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?

Our federal and state governments have abdicated responsibility on an international issue, which has put our community in harm's way. Of course, as with all things, our state's inadequate response has disproportionately hurt low income and Black and Brown communities, the latter disproportionately being essential workers who have to risk their lives during the pandemic. In a perfect world, our state and federal governments would subsidize our businesses so they can close and pay us all to stay home. Lacking that, it's critical we distribute the vaccine as quickly as possible. Our state is being too limited with who they prioritize and it is slowing down distribution. We must lean on our existing institutions, such as UW-Madison and the UW Hospital, St. Mary's and Meriter and we must clearly communicate the need for the vaccine and the urgency.

There is a long and justified history of mistrust in the medical system by Black and Brown communities in particular, who have faced inhumane experiments, racist treatment by medical professionals, and denial of access. This mistrust must be handled effectively by respecting the communities while educating them on the need. Community leaders that are trusted must communicate this knowledge, similar to how the international community addressed the ebola outbreak in west Africa by having local community leaders communicate changes needed in cultural practices, rather than outside figures.

### **Progressive Dane Involvement**

8. 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?

I am interested in the Progressive Dane endorsement because Progressive Dane has been home to many community members and activists who are willing to prioritize progressive change over other interests. Too often, people involved in politics are involved for the wrong reasons - their personal career or recognition, for instance. Progressive Dane, on the other hand, combines expertise in policy with a commitment to change.

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

I am comfortable with this partnership. For example, I have a close relationship with Progressive Dane alder Rebecca Kemble and would love to continue to work with her in office to advance change.

10. 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.

Yes, currently volunteers can contact April Kigeya at [akigeya@gmail.com](mailto:akigeya@gmail.com).

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

No, but am willing to be a member if endorsed and elected.