

2023 alder candidate_Slack

1. Why are you the best candidate to represent District 19?

For over two decades, I've been a social work professor at the UW-Madison, where I teach and conduct research on a range of social welfare issues. I have held several leadership positions at the UW-Madison, including directing one of the largest units in the College of Letters & Sciences, most recently during the (extremely challenging) 2020-2021 academic year. I am trained in data and policy analysis and program evaluation, as well as analyzing social problems with an equity lens. I am also trained in community engagement principles and practices.

I am the founder and CEO of an educational technology company that serves the higher education space. I have benefited from some of the local resources for entrepreneurs, but also see the gaps and inequities that exist with respect to access to capital, mentorship, and affordable physical spaces for small businesses.

I have a strong passion for protecting our natural resources and habitats, ensuring safe drinking water, and fighting climate change, and would like to see more emphasis on carbon drawdown strategies that rely on healthy lakes and waterways, an abundant tree canopy and use of native plants, and more environmentally sound stormwater management practices.

2. Why do you want to be an alder?

District 19 needs an alder who views residents as partners and resources and who enjoys listening to people and having conversations about important city issues. Residents of the district also deserve a representative who holds City leadership (including the Mayor and Common Council) accountable. I decided to run because many people in District 19 encouraged me to do so, and because my kids are getting older and I have more (but not unlimited) time to spend on other things. I believe that my background in policy analysis and program evaluation will be an asset to the Common Council. I will ask hard questions and insist on rigorous evaluation and transparent benchmarks for monitoring the performance of City policies and initiatives, and I will communicate the full story to my constituents, rather than a cherry-picked version.

The issues we face as a City are complex. There is rarely one single solution to a problem, unintended consequences can undermine hoped-for outcomes, and there's not a large enough city budget to solve everything, nor is everything the purview of city government. That is why it is imperative to invite a range of expertise to the table, engage in authentic community engagement, and commit to honest debate among members of city boards, commissions, and committees (BCCs), including the Common Council. These debates should consider existing research, the unique context and needs of Madison, opportunity costs in other areas, and regularly updated input from City residents, community leaders, and business owners.

3. What are your priorities once in office?

I have several overarching priorities, but I want to first say that *how* these priorities are balanced and pursued requires input from constituents and Madison residents, and residents may have additional ideas about what to prioritize. I address how to acquire this input in Question 4. As described further on my website, kristenslack.com, my priorities are to:

- Improve City transparency and community engagement practices

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- Protect and enhance our natural environment and unique ecosystems as Madison grows
- Strengthen our local economy by working in partnership with local businesses and nonprofits and by incentivizing new business development
- Address Madison's housing crisis with collaborative approaches that emphasize affordability and home ownership
- Ensure that City services are equitable and accessible

We are also in the midst of a mental health crisis as reflected in a number of concerning trends, especially among our children and youth. This is an all-hands-on-deck problem on which we need urgent action that involves schools, health and mental health providers, local nonprofits on the frontline of this crisis, many levels of government, and of course, families and youth themselves.

4. How will you communicate with the people in your district once elected?

Community engagement principles emphasize earning the trust of those you serve or represent. This requires humility, a learning mindset, an openness to feedback, a bottom-up vs. a top-down approach, visible fairness, and transparency at every stage of City planning and decision-making. To reach as many people as possible in an ongoing way, I plan to engage with residents, business owners, and nonprofit agencies through regular in-person and zoom meetings in rotating locations and time slots, multiple social media platforms, the District 19 alder website, and multiple touchpoint surveys with my constituents (which can hopefully be integrated into a larger City platform).

However, these mechanisms are only effective if they reach a broad and representative group of people, and some groups require more targeted and specialized outreach. I will seek advice on the best strategies for inviting and encouraging feedback from marginalized groups or groups with specialized needs by consulting with those who have already built a foundation of trust with them, such as individuals who work with and advocate for these groups on a daily basis. A one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient and will lead to greater disenfranchisement. I will also show up at community functions and events and invite conversation and input at these venues. Relationship-building is key to ensuring residents, who will not always agree with each other or you, feel heard, respected, and valued.