

Responses cannot be edited

Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce Candidate Questionnaire

Please tell us about yourself.

Your Name: *

Samba Baldeh

Aldermanic District: *

District 17

Current Address: *

5150 Crescent Oaks Dr, Madison WI 53704

Email: *

[REDACTED]

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Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce Candidate Questionnaire

Instructions: Please state your position on the following issues. Please limit answers to 100 words. Any answers exceeding the word count limitations will be cut after 100 words.

If you have filled out this questionnaire before, you may skip starred** questions or modify previous answers to those questions. If you skip starred answers on this questionnaire, we will re-publish your 2015 answers.

****1. Why are you seeking this office?**

When I first ran two years ago, I promised to work hard to include District 17 residents in the city decisions that affect all our lives. We are beginning to raise neighbors' expectations about being involved and contributing important information. For most of the neighborhood meetings I have held on development and commercial projects, there has been a good turnout. More than 100 people attended our District 17 forum in September, but we still have a long way to go to see the city address the needs of residents in this area.

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

I am the co-owner of a small, local business here in Madison. I also have experience that has led me to understand what people go through to open a small restaurant business and address hiring and personnel issues. Further back in my experience, I also have been involved in creating training and development opportunities for youth, to be productive in the workforce.

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

District 17 does not get a fair allocation of city resources. This affects the entire population, the available workforce, and the businesses – because when there is a higher quality of life people want to live and work in that place. We have the only elementary school in the entire Madison Metropolitan School District that is not within the desirable distance to a public library, we have no community center within accessible distance for people without personal transportation, and we have some very vulnerable populations whose members have no access to city services. We need partnership with businesses to encourage the changes that will make for a higher quality of life, and reduce factors that make our area attractive for crime. It is no good for business to be in a location people avoid and I have people tell me they avoid East Towne. I know not everyone is happy with the ordinance about panhandling in the medians but I think this is important for safety in our part of the city and should be an improvement for businesses in the area. The city's planning process for the redevelopment of the greater East Towne area has been slowed down but we need to bring businesses together with area residents to develop a mutual vision of a sustainable, vibrant environment.

4. What is the City of Madison's role in growing the economy? How can the City of Madison best support the growth and retention of jobs?

We are doing pretty well as a hub for technology in general and biotechnology. We are doing pretty well in the support of innovation, and the investment we made toward development of cooperative businesses is also a good step. It is good the public market is going forward.

We are undoubtedly connected to the global economy. But there are many uncertainties in the global market and technology is developing and changing very rapidly. We need to make sure the foundation of our local economy is stable, and that it is diverse enough to weather changes to some piece of it. We want this to be a good place for people to live and contribute to civic life and raise their families. Everything the city does that affects the quality of life, including investment in affordable housing, youth and adult training and development, and encouraging wages that people can live on makes a contribution to a healthy business climate. Beyond small and local businesses, more medium-sized and larger businesses want to come to a place that is already doing well.

We must also look at transit. Can employees get to where they are needed? This was an issue for Oakwood Village East, without bus service that made it possible for employees to get home after their shifts.

5. How can the City of Madison best attract and retain a diverse and talented workforce?

We have a reputation as a progressive place but it does not always feel that way for professionals of color. There are trainings to promote diversity and these can be important, but I think we have to look at the diversity of talent and potential that is already here, and invest in our young people. There is way too little opportunity for young black kids in Madison. I would like to see businesses partner with the city and the schools to see how we can make sure that everyone can have basic security and an environment in which they can learn and grow.

****6. Do you support the use of TIF, and how do you believe it should be utilized moving forward? How would you rate the City of Madison's past use of TIF? (Would you describe the use of TIF as underutilized, over-utilized, or appropriate?)**

I know that some people do not think we have been aggressive enough in our use of Tax Incremental Financing. Some people think Madison has been too stringent. I do not think that is the case. With TIF, the public agrees to forego the immediate tax benefit of development or redevelopment, in order to make it more attractive or maybe even possible for a certain development to be undertaken. This is a risk to the public. There is no way to recover the opportunity cost of revenues foregone. Because we cannot do TIF with everything, every project we agree to must be chosen carefully. When tax money does not flow to the schools, there is no way to make that up to the kids who enter kindergarten and graduate before a Tax Incremental Finance District is closed. This is why I believe a project needs to have tangible public benefits in order for me to support the use of TIF. The version of Judge Doyle Square that included the Exact Sciences headquarters was an example of too much risk and potential opportunity cost and not enough tangible public benefit, and I was in the minority that voted against. But it would be wrong to say that this is how the city and Council have operated. There have been some projects with substantial TIF that have not been controversial at all.

7. What specific initiatives in the Connect Madison economic development strategy

(<http://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/economicdevelopment/economic-strategy-symposium/554/>) do you support, and which, if any, would you like to see modified? Why?

There is a lot of overlap between the five strategies proposed and my responses to Questions 3 and 4. I appreciate the statement that a stronger economy is a more inclusive economy and the expressed value of equity. The data section certainly bears out what people say about the "Two Madisons". Yes, the work force is concentrated at the bottom (low wage, unskilled) and top in terms of technology skills and earning potential.

Here are some highlights of what I find to be especially promising:

- Focus on new small businesses and new models of business, and developing city support for people involved in fostering these (multi-agency team).
- Become a KIVA city – micro-lending would be an excellent development
- Minority contractor pipeline
- Madison Development Districts
- Business Coalition for Transportation
- Work-based learning opportunities for youth

And a few places where I would have concerns and/or think it would matter very much how this was implemented:

- Madison Development Districts – I can think of instances of where neighborhood plans have been considered outdated, or alternately were invoked even though outdated, and where there was not transparency with the neighborhood. There has to be a good and not a rushed process for the public to be involved in the decisions about what the districts are and what they would look like. We are trying to do this in District 17 with "envisioning" around potential re-development at East Towne, which we need and welcome.
- Work-based learning opportunities for youth – It is extremely important that youth have these opportunities. However, the process by which MMSD has developed Pathways did not have much public participation and there are unanswered questions as well as controversy. I do not want to see youth treated exclusively as workers without concern for their opportunities to participate in the arts, recreation, or develop themselves in other ways before those options are narrowed by a "pathway". Better opportunity means supporting youth in their whole lives and not only their work readiness.

8. What is your perception of Madison's business brand? How do you think business in Madison is perceived locally, statewide, and nationally?

I work within the IT field and I think the perception of Madison in terms of our strengths (Information Technology, Biotechnology, Food Systems, and Precision Manufacturing) is probably pretty accurate. This fits with our image as a progressive place. However, I think we absolutely have to learn from other places where they have realized gains from equity as a priority and raised the standard of living for the whole population. That should be part of our future brand.

Probably we also need to somehow work harder to combat the negative image of Madison outside of Madison and within the state. The truth is that we are an economic engine for the state.

9. How do you define economic development? Please elaborate.

If we say "development" instead of simply "growth", then something is implied about progress, about making things better. So in "economic development" there is an element of enhancing the well-being of the community. The economic and the social are inseparable. Economic activity is social activity, people engage in it. And a community is not doing well if it is not in a good position economically. You can see this in the Connect Madison plan with the focus on equity. The strategies would be different if the point was only to make money, regardless of how few or many people benefit.

10. The Chamber believes that equity and social mobility are achieved through wealth creation and that the surest way is through an entrepreneurial class of color. The Chamber is launching initiatives to support this goal. What do you believe is the City of Madison's role in creating an entrepreneurial class of color?

As a small business owner as well as an employee in the IT industry, I will be very interested to discuss this and know what the Chamber is planning. There are proposals in the Connect Madison strategy, such as micro-lending, that could be enhanced by private and business community efforts.

But I would like to know more about what metrics the Chamber would set, or has set, for the success of this effort. What size of the entrepreneurial class of color must be achieved before you know have succeeded? And what level of earnings must an entrepreneur of color achieve to be counted among the successes? Over what period of time? When starting a business, it can take some time before a business is profitable. Also, I think we know that wealth actually does not trickle down. When I look at this community and see how many youth of color do not have opportunity even to have a good education, because of the barriers they face to learning, or if they do learn, because of the expense of postsecondary education, I wonder how we will ensure equality of opportunity to become a member of the entrepreneurial class.

11. How can the City of Madison provide better customer service to new or existing businesses that seek approval through the permitting and planning processes? How do you define customer service in this case?

Every person who does any kind of business with the city should be met with courtesy and prompt assistance. Staff should be knowledgeable as to the policies and procedures that are relevant to any inquiry. If this is not the experience representatives of businesses or individual business people have, then we need to know that. I want to know that. Also, there should be a reason for every step in the permitting and planning process. If there is frustration with a particular step, or a reason for it doesn't make sense, we should talk about that, not necessarily assuming that it should be changed, but it is usually help for everyone to understand why. In District 17, I want residents to meet with developers, for example, early in the development process. I want this to happen even if there is not a technical requirement for it, and I appreciate those developers and business people who have joined me to hold very productive meetings. People have important information to contribute about locations, and deserve to know what is being planned for their neighborhood. They often ask good questions. I believe it is actually trying to avoid these mutual conversations that lead to a more adversarial relationship.

12. 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 that the Chamber will publish my answers to this questionnaire