

Responses cannot be edited

Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce Candidate Questionnaire

Please tell us about yourself.

Your Name: *

Maurice Cheeks

Aldermanic District: *

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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?**

I seek re-election to a third term on the Madison Common Council. I'm running to ensure that our city be a forward looking community where all people can thrive. I plan to build upon four years of working to ensure that Madison can be a national example to other cities by innovating to eliminate persistent opportunity gaps, increasing citizen engagement, and designing intentionally for anticipated population growth. I recognize the importance of bringing the perspective of a young dad, millennial, and one of the few African American elected officials in the state. I humbly embrace that responsibility.

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

In my career I have past experience working full time for a local start-up, consulting for a start-up that was acquired, and co-founding my own start-up business. As former Director of the Wisconsin Innovation Network, I worked with hundreds of large and small high-tech businesses throughout all of Wisconsin to help them grow and succeed. I see supporting entrepreneurship as a key responsibility of a city that seeks to flourish.

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

The Verona Road WIS-DOT construction was the biggest issue facing businesses in my district for the past several years. With much of the immediately impactful parts of this coming to completion, businesses in that area are returning to a new normal.

Another business hub in the district, Westgate Mall continues to struggle. I will keep working with neighbors, the property owner, city planners and developers towards a modern mixed-use future.

University Research Park on the other hand keeps thriving. I will continue working with their new leadership to pursue opportunities for companies in the business park to grow.

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?

Fostering a growing economy should be a top priority of a city. A city can assist in job growth and retention by creating a supportive ecosystem that works with businesses, entrepreneurs, and workers. We must work to connect small businesses to resources that can help them. We must support the creation of incubation spaces. We must make it easy for businesses to interact with and obtain permits from city hall. Finally, we must prioritize spending city money with local business, particularly minority and women owned businesses that haven’t historically received city contracts.

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

In order to continue the trend of young skilled workers choosing Madison, I believe we need to focus on building a modern public transportation system. Our buses service the isthmus well, other areas not particularly well, and most of the greater Madison region are not serviced at all. Additionally, Madison can do a better job embracing high-tech solutions for allowing people to engage in civic life. This will help ground young people with a sense of place. Finally, Madison needs to do a significantly better job promoting diversity in the workforce for young people to feel comfortable and creative.

****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 support TIF as an economic and community development tool. I am pleased that we can use it more competitively to attract projects that we might otherwise not see come to our community. I think the city's TIF usage has been appropriate, though I'd like to help steer the discussion on TIF to be more people focussed. TIF is a great vehicle for development projects, and we can have a stronger emphasis on how it can create good paying jobs through these investments.

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?

Having been directly involved in the creation of this Connect Madison plan at several points in the process, I enthusiastically support it on the whole. While not a modification, I would submit that Work-Based Learning Opportunities for Youth needs to be thought of as an absolutely mission critical component of building a strong future workforce.

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

Madison's brand is well linked to our legacy. As our population grows, increases in diversity, and grows younger - it becomes increasingly important that we are known just as much for where we are headed as we are for the nostalgia of our past. Madison's emerging business brand is that of a place for great restaurants to excel, for many businesses to start, and particularly for health-tech business to thrive. This all contributes to an increased attractiveness for talented people of all ages wanting to stay here and move here.

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

Economic Development is the process of strengthening people, businesses, and physical infrastructure. The purpose of economic development is to help a community thrive while growing the tax base.

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?

The greatest compliment to a city is its ability to attract a diversity of people and create upward mobility for them all. The Chamber's enthusiastic focus on equity and social mobility (evidenced by the 2015 Chamber Dinner speaker) is thoroughly encouraging. The City of Madison must strengthen investments in programs that contribute to equitable wealth creation such as: minority entrepreneurship programs, job training efforts, but also summer youth employment and early childhood education. Additionally, the City of Madison needs to lead by example by creating a consistently diverse workforce where all employees believe that they can thrive.

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?

The City of Madison has fantastic staff in both the economic development and planning divisions. For a city our size, both of those division directors could make a strong case for having a larger team to be able to provide better customer service. If a business is responding to the city's vision for the future, it should be our priority to respond swiftly to make the process of contributing to the city's fabric a painless one. City staff aren't the only cogs in the process however, and a strong and collaborative relationships with the Chamber serves everyone well.

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

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