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To: [City of Madison Police and Fire Commission](#)
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Dear Police and Fire Commission,

As we begin our search for Madison's next police chief, I want to add factors to this discussion that I see as important, given our current situation and likely future challenges:

1. Continued restraint and humanity towards protesters
2. Commitment to protect residents from kidnapping--including by "federal agents"
3. Moderation of surveillance technology
4. Ability to respond to budget contractions without hyperbole

Protest response

I was completely disgusted at Acting Chief Wahl's response to protests in 2020, when he deliberately escalated the situation and authorized firing chemical and impact weapons on the crowd. It showed an utter disregard for public safety and welfare, of the residents who were protesting, and more broadly all residents downtown, including me.

(Based on his track record of extremely poor judgement, I consider Wahl's endorsement of John Patterson to be a serious mark against him.)

While I was disappointed in Chief Barnes' activism against a proposed chemical weapons ban, MPD during his tenure was not as violent against protesters, and more sparing in its use of chemical weapons, perhaps due to increased council oversight.

Chemical weapons have been banned in many places around the country (and beyond), and it should not be hard to find a candidate with experience operating in one of those places, where escalation is not the default response.

Sanctuary city commitment

Madison has been a sanctuary city for a long time, and that should ensure that MPD doesn't arrest people on behalf of immigration enforcement, or turn them over to ICE.

However, the stakes are much higher now, with immigration enforcement pursuing a misguided quota system, leading them to snatch up non-criminals, people who are lawfully pursuing the immigration process, and even in some cases citizens, with no regard to separating families. They do so without judicial warrants, and often without identifying themselves.

The victims of these kidnappings are quickly human-trafficked across state lines, and ultimately out of the country, without due process and with the intention of avoiding any judicial oversight. People are being snatched up at places like schools, workplaces, churches, and courthouses.

Madison residents need to know that if they witness a kidnapping in progress, they can call

MPD for help. Residents need to know that they can safely come forth as witnesses or victims, without being kidnapped from the courthouse. We need a police chief who can commit to these basic guarantees.

Surveillance technology

The rise of AI has made the stakes much higher as well for any use of surveillance. While I would be all in favor of automated speeding and/or red light enforcement, if our state government allowed it, license plate readers [are also being coopted by immigration agents](#) to stalk their victims.

In cities with unethical police leadership, cameras can also be used with [AI facial recognition](#). For example, Milwaukee has been disturbingly monetizing their department's booking photos.

We need a police chief who understands both the temptations and dangers of these systems.

Budgeting ability

Last fall, Madison had to take a large tax referendum to the ballot, because of the untenable financial situation placed upon us. The state has been shorting us on pass-through funding, failing to reimburse us for the cost of state facilities here, and it's become a challenge to continue city services at consistent levels.

This isn't because of fiscal mismanagement. A lot of municipalities in Wisconsin have ended up in the same predicament in recent years. In some cases, this has led to small towns abolishing their own police department, and relying on their county sheriff instead.

I don't foresee Madison taking that step, but it shows how we could easily reach a point where we have to make actual cuts to the police budget, even if it means a cut in state aid.

When this possibility has come up before, MPD leadership have sometimes made doomerist projections. If any portion of MPD's budget is cut, violent crime will surge, no one will be there when you dial 911, your favorite program will get cut first, etc., etc.

The reality is that MPD is only busy with emergency response about 10% of the time. We need a chief who can engage productively with a scaling budget, without resorting to threats or ultimatums.

In summary, I hope you will keep these factors in mind as you identify and consider candidates for this important role.

Thank you,

Nick Davies
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