

10 May 2022
Erik Paulson

Dear Common Council Executive Committee,

I am pleased and humbled to offer this letter as my application to fill the upcoming District 3 vacancy on the Common Council.

I came to Madison 25 years ago to start as a freshman at UW-Madison. While at the UW, I earned a B.S., M.S., and Ph.D., all in Computer Sciences, but most importantly I met my husband Ben. After a long stint downtown, we moved to District 3 and for seven years now have happily lived here along with our dog Tip.

After graduation, we decided to stay in Wisconsin and we both work for Wisconsin companies. I currently work for Johnson Controls, where I do data management and research for energy efficiency and indoor air quality for buildings and the built environment.

I served as the inaugural chair of the city's Digital Technology Committee from 2013 to 2015. Prior to that, I was a member of the city's Broadband Telecommunications Regulatory Board, until industry-back legislation blocked Wisconsin cities from oversight of cable companies. I have attended and testified at many other city and county committees and boards, getting to know their procedures and issues well enough that I could provide some community coverage of those meetings as blog posts on Brenda Konkel's 'Forward Lookout' collaborative blog.

While at the UW, I was part of many shared governance bodies and other committees, including a Chancellor search committee. I was a member of the ASM, where I am particularly proud of having led the development of a stable funding stream to support the Tenant Resource Center's presence on campus. That partnership has been successful for over a decade now, and I believe has been a true win-win for both UW students and the Madison community at large.

I was an active member of Capitol Neighborhoods, and chaired several neighborhood steering committees for redevelopment projects. Some of the projects were eventually constructed and others were not, but I believe in all of them the process was collaborative between neighbors, developers, and policymakers. I have also organized community groups around technology and open data, and have presented at the Mayor's Neighborhood Conference and Roundtable. Much of the rest of my community involvement has been in electoral politics, working to elect progressives to office to build a better community for everyone.

Why I wish to serve

I firmly believe that the idea of Madison as a model city should be our North Star and inspiration. Indeed, we are - there are no shortages of headlines that say "Madison ranked high in 'Best Places to Live' list" but we all know that those headlines aren't really accurate, and if they were truthful would read 'Best Places to Live (if you're white.)' So, while I still believe that Madison

should always aspire to be a model city, it's clear that we need a 21st century renewal of what it means to be a 'model city' to be a city that includes everyone. I want to serve on the Common Council to help with that renewal and to always keep pushing Madison forward to be a model city. I believe that I have the skills to listen and hear, to have empathy and understand, and to turn that into collaboration to accomplish things together.

Part of being a model city is to have audacious goals. I don't want to forget about plowing the snow or picking up the recycling, but there's a civic pride that comes from knowing you live in a city that's described as "only in somewhere like Madison would they try that." But we must be careful not to put our hopes only in distant plans, we need to tie these goals to the present as well. For example, setting a goal to cut our carbon emissions to zero at some point decades in the future is admirable, but what are we doing to cut emissions by five percent by 2023?

Part of being a model city means being a place where people come to build better lives. Too often in discussions we hear some of Madison's challenges being blamed on "new people" or "people from Chicago." This of course is barely disguised racism, but I want to reclaim that discourse. Madison should be the place that people come to live somewhere better, be they coming from Cross Plains or Chippewa Falls or Chicago or Chihuahua, that should be a source of pride for us. We should be bold in saying it.

District 3 is a very interesting district. It has established neighborhoods and it has brand new neighborhoods. Large sections of it are still cornfields that will someday be home to neighbors we don't yet know, and there are other parts of the district that could be ready for redevelopment. I'd like to serve on the Common Council because I'd like to help lead conversations and collaborations that touch on all of these different stages of neighborhood development. I think that I can build on what previous alders have accomplished and I can give a solid foundation to future alders.

What I Want to Accomplish

Because I would be taking over for Alder Lemmer mid-term, part of what I want to accomplish is to see some of her goals and projects through to the end. For example, now that state law does not require police officers to provide the transportation for people having a mental health crisis, I want to finish her work on finding non-police options to do that transportation. In the interest of minimizing disruption, I am happy to serve on the committees that she currently serves on. Beyond continuing what is already in progress, I have several priorities:

Structural reform and efficiencies for the Common Council and city committees.

I was opposed to and voted against a full-time council, but I recognize that the current situation is likely not tenable. I am fortunate and privileged to have a day job that is work from home and flexible schedule-wise, as well as a family situation that will make it possible for me to serve with the current alder workload and demands, but we do need to address what it takes to be an alder so it is open to more people. As a long-time observer of the Common Council and committees, I have some preliminary ideas but am excited about the chance to see how things work "from the

other side” and fine-tune my ideas, and look forward to being part of the discussions about where to go next, after the referenda.

Budget

Federal funding has bought us a bit of breathing room in the budget, but as that runs out we will be back to serious budget challenges. One option that I think needs to be on the table is going to referendum to exceed state levy limits, but we will need to be very careful, clear, and deliberate in explaining to the voters of the city why the Common Council wants to go that direction, and to be sure that we have community support before putting it on the ballot. I don't know that we should go to referendum in the immediate future, but I want to start discussions about it with the Common Council now so we have it as a tool in the future.

Housing

Creating more housing addresses key causes of many of our challenges in Madison. I am very interested in working on creating more affordable housing, but I also think that more housing at any price point is on the whole beneficial. I want to be more aggressive about land banking and I want to increase funding to the affordable housing trust fund.

Sustainability

I believe that cities are on the front line in addressing sustainability and environmental protections. To the extent that we can, while respecting limitations of the building code, I would like to use our planning and development approval process to be more aggressive about requiring sustainability measures in new projects. We should not accept new final plat maps without stepped-up sustainability and efficiency measures, and just like we hold out density and bonus floors for exceptional designs, exceptional sustainability measures should also factor into allowing bonus floors.

Data and Technology

I am interested in gathering, using, and releasing more open data, and am supportive of our “What Works” recognition and efforts. I would like to work with city staff and committees and see what investments we might want to make in collecting additional data. I am also cautious about over-reliance on being data driven without understanding what limitations and biases exist in the data. Making decisions based on incomplete data can exacerbate the inequities we hoped to reduce.

Regional Cooperation

The destinies of Madison, our suburbs, and Dane County are all intertwined, more so than most other counties in Wisconsin. Many of us were disappointed when the Regional Transit Authority was eliminated right after it was created, but there's nothing stopping us from mostly recreating it through cooperative agreements between the local governments. True, it wouldn't have the authority to impose a sales tax for additional revenue, but we could all agree to the binding transportation planning the original RTA had as its scope, potentially even with binding funding commitments. As another example, Public Health Madison & Dane County seems to be a model that works well together, and I wonder if we should explore a combined Madison and Dane

County Parks department, ideally with other municipalities. Neither of these would be short-term ideas, and it may be that neither of these ideas are good ideas, but I believe we should be talking regionally and without regards to lines on the map.

Economic Development

I'm interested in all of the issues the Economic Development Committee has in its scope, but I am especially interested in finding ways to add more people of color to our middle class. One opportunity we should pursue is to task the City of Madison HR department to focus more on career development of city staff members, and in particular work with city staff members to be sure that they are actively applying for new opportunities, be it for other positions in city government or outside of city government. Obviously we have to work carefully with the unions for our represented employees when designing this program, but people have to take shots in order to advance, and we shouldn't limit the shots they take to only openings in city government for career advancement. So, for say a person of color who is employed in the purchasing department, let's not restrict our definition of career advancement for them to be waiting until a supervisor position opens in the purchasing department, let's help them advance now even if it's with a job with a private company in Madison. As an added bonus, since I believe the City does an excellent job in recruiting staff, such a program would help local businesses recruit talented employees. This is a policy lever that is entirely under the city's control.

Running in the 2023 Spring Election.

I do not know if I will run in the 2023 spring election. I am inclined to do so, but I want to have some first-hand experience to fully understand the impact of the time commitment so my husband and I can make a decision. The commitment I can make now is that I will announce my decision no later than 48 hours after the final budget vote, to give some time before the start of nomination signature collection for any other candidate to make their own plans with no surprises from me.

Thank you for reviewing my material, and I look forward to answering your questions later this month. Thank you also for your service to Madison, and for the work you are putting in to find a good representative for our district.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erik Paulson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "P".

Erik Paulson

Erik S. Paulson

Education

Ph.D. Computer Sciences, University of Wisconsin
Minor: Energy Entrepreneurship

M.S. Computer Sciences, University of Wisconsin

B.S. Computer Sciences, University of Wisconsin

Professional Experience

Data Engineer Johnson Controls
Madison/Milwaukee, WI 2013–Present
Staff member in the Data and Analytics team at Johnson Controls. Lead an industrial consortium for semantic metadata standards for building systems.

New Media Analytics Democratic National Committee
Washington, DC 2010
A three month research placement for graduate students. Catalog and analyze email experiments conducted by the DNC and Obama campaign after the 2008 election. Participate in online mobilization efforts during final passage of the Affordable Care Act.

Research Assistant University of Wisconsin
Madison, WI 2005–2013
Graduate student in the Computer Sciences department. Research in distributed and parallel databases, entity matching, and human-in-the-loop AI systems.

Systems Programmer Condor Project, University of Wisconsin
Madison, WI 2000–2005
Software developer and administrator on the Condor High Throughput Computing software package and associated compute cluster at the UW-Madison.

Service

Chair, City of Madison Digital Technology Committee, 2013–2015
Member, Broadband Telecommunications Regulatory Board, City of Madison, 2007–2008
Member, Information Technology Committee, University of Wisconsin, 2007–2010
Member, Chancellor Search Committee, University of Wisconsin, 2008
Member, University Academic Planning Council, University of Wisconsin, 2008–2011
Member, Chief Information Officer Search Committee, University of Wisconsin, 2011
Graduate Student Representative, Associated Students of Madison, 2009–2010
Member, UW Madison Administrative Excellence Advisory Committee, 2012–2013
Member, Capitol Neighborhoods, Inc. Executive Board 2009–2011
Organizer, CityCampMadison Open Data Unconference/Code for Madison, 2012, 2013, 2021
Member, Democratic Party of Dane County Executive Board, 2008–2015
Chair, WisDems LGBT Caucus, 2011–2015
Chair, Democratic Party of the Second Congressional District, 2013–2017