



THE OFFICE OF THE  
COMMON COUNCIL

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024





## **OUR MADISON - INCLUSIVE, INNOVATIVE, & THRIVING**

The mission of the Common Council is to represent the residents of Madison by promoting the safety, health, and general well-being of the community by incorporating the City's core values into their work with currently available resources. The Council Office staff supports the alders in these efforts.



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# LETTER FROM THE CHIEF OF STAFF

From the beginning, 2024 was off to an intense start. Soon after the start of the year, the Council faced the challenges of the 2025 City budget outlook, and alders called for a forum for direct engagement with residents. The Council Office got to work designing and facilitating a series of five alder budget engagement events throughout the city, where residents had the opportunity to learn about the City budget outlook and provide feedback on their budget priorities. I am very proud of the work of Council Office staff in accomplishing this monumental task and I deeply appreciate all of the City staff who assisted us!

The Council Office focused our community engagement efforts in other ways as well this year, giving alders even more opportunities to directly engage with residents and for residents to learn about the work of the Common Council. Lorissa, our Community Engagement Strategist, broadened the Council's presence on social media and in the community through a multifaceted set of approaches. We also welcomed Hannah, our AASPIRE intern, for the summer and back for the fall.

Council Office staff took advantage of several impactful professional development opportunities in 2024, including the YWCA Racial Justice Summit, the GARE conference, and ICMA annual conference. The alders attended a custom retreat designed to provide them with tools for linking their values and lived experience to their policymaking work. Another retreat is being planned that will build on these skills for new and returning alders.

I am expecting 2025 to be an eventful year as well, as we prepare to usher in a new cohort of alders, staggered alder terms, and annual alder onboarding in April. A hearty thank you to the outgoing alder cohort for all of the work you have done representing your district and the city and a warm welcome to the incoming alder cohort!

Sincerely,

Karen



# OFFICE OF THE COMMON COUNCIL

## 2024 Year in Review Dashboard



**20**  
Common Council  
Meetings



**1569**  
Written Public  
Comments on 75  
Council Agenda  
Items



**79**  
Total Drafts for  
Agendas



**12**  
Alder Monthly  
Newsletters



**107**  
Project Requests  
on 26 Broad  
Topic Categories



**10**  
Total  
Memoranda



**12**  
Open Records  
Requests



**28**  
Honoring  
Reolutions

**49**

Neighborhood  
Meetings

**6**

Resource  
Tables

**52**

Weekly Meeting &  
Event Highlights

**21**

News Releases

**70,116**

Postcards Sent to  
Constituents

## 2024 Council Budget Engagement Meetings

**5**

REGIONAL  
EVENTS

**490**

REGISTRANTS  
**346**  
ATTENDEES

**542**

NOTECARD  
QUESTIONS &  
ANSWERS

**1,644**

SMALL GROUP  
DISCUSSION  
RESPONSES

**129**

PAGE REPORT

**35+**

STAFF PRESENT/  
VOLUNTEERING

**218**

POST-EVENT  
EMAIL  
RESPONSES

**4**

SINGLE  
DISTRICT  
BUDGET  
EVENTS

# LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

## COMPREHENSIVE BREAKDOWN

In 2024, the Legislative Analyst recorded 107 different project requests across 26 broad topic categories. These requests generally originated from individual alders, though others come from boards, commissions, or committees (BCCs), such as the Common Council Executive Committee and the Housing Strategy Committee, as well as other relevant City staff.

Alders requested 24 honoring resolutions from the Legislative Analyst in 2024. Additionally, there were seven requests for Civic Recognition Awards, which are an effective way for alders to honor individuals who have made a difference in the community. Beyond requests relating to honoring or celebrating a person, group, organization, or holiday, there were a few topic categories that popped up more frequently than others. Housing and Governance were at the top with 13 and 10 requests respectively, which was similar to the top categories in 2023. Other categories included Parks, Public Safety, and Budget, all of which increased noticeably in 2024.

While this is a general marker of the topics that alders are interested in throughout the course of a year, it does not necessarily account for the time spent on each topic by the Legislative Analyst. For example, the most notable topic this year in terms of time spent was Budget, although it is further down the list in terms of request frequency. The Budget Engagement Events Final Report and the analysis that went into it ultimately took multiple months, causing it to be the largest portion of the Legislative Analyst’s work throughout the course of 2024.

### Legislative Initiatives Breakdown





# 2024 BUDGET ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

## YEAR-END OVERVIEW

Upon alder request, the Office of the Common Council organized a series of events to provide information about the 2025 budget outlook, as well as to collect information about what residents throughout the city believe should be prioritized as the alders worked to balance the 2025 budget. The five 2025 Budget Engagement Events occurred throughout May and June of 2024 and were split up by geographic region: Eastside, Westside, Southside/Near Westside, Central/Downtown, and Northside.

At each event, Finance Director David Schmiedicke gave a presentation on the 2025 budget outlook. The presentations were followed by question-and-answer sections and concluded with small group discussions centered around a series of questions regarding City services and the future of Madison. Council staff synthesized and analyzed resident feedback, resulting in a 129-page [report](#), and provided both resident feedback and the final report to alders for their consideration during the 2025 budget deliberations.

The first-ever Budget Engagement Events were a successful form of public engagement. Alders and staff were able to come together in community, sharing meals and information, answering questions, receiving feedback, and simply interacting with residents from across the city; while residents were able to contribute their thoughts and feedback on the budget deliberations and come away with a greater understanding of City budgeting.

We want to thank the City staff across many departments who volunteered their evenings to assist with the Budget Engagement Events. We could not have accomplished this undertaking without their much-appreciated assistance.



# 2024 BUDGET ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

## FOCUSED OUTREACH EFFORTS

The challenges facing the City operating budget provided an important opportunity for Common Council members to engage the public in important budget discussions. To generate awareness and maximize reach, the Council Office implemented a multichannel marketing and communications plan for these events. This included Eventbrite event pages, social media, e-blasts, radio, curated content for alder blogs, news releases, and physical flyers. We also recruited the help of our City of Madison Community Connectors who served as the primary contact for Spanish, Hmong, and Chinese communities. The Community Connectors assisted in securing radio spots, visiting places of worship, emailing listservs, and did a fantastic job reaching out to Madison residents.

The main goals of the regional budget engagement events were to inform, engage, and solicit feedback from residents. Additionally, we wanted residents to know that this was an opportunity to learn, and residents with all levels of knowledge were encouraged to attend. Because intentional and transparent messaging in promotional materials is crucial to building public trust and grabbing the attention of all residents, we ensured the messaging clearly indicated the goals of the series and what participants could expect at each meeting.

Promotional materials were branded using City-approved colors to create a visual identity. The flyer for each event included a different picture to help differentiate one meeting from another. The City's Language Access Program (LAP) translated all promotional materials and handouts into Spanish, Hmong, and Mandarin. We also worked with LAP to provide multiple language interpreters onsite at the meetings.

The above outreach and communication efforts serve as a strong foundation, providing a structured approach for defining meaningful participation during the 2024 and future budget engagement events. The framework leaves room to evolve to the communities' communication needs as time goes on.



# DET ACTION PLAN

Liz Windsor and Lorissa Bañuelos serve the Common Council and Common Council Office as Department Equity Team (DET) co-leads. The DET focus for 2024 was the DET Action Plan, an agency-specific set of goals which built upon the equity assessments completed in 2023.

In addition to ensuring staff are current on trainings related to discrimination and language access, the DET Action Plan provides departments with the opportunity to identify specific goals for improving equity and accessibility. The Common Council Office by necessity took a nuanced approach to setting goals, as any equity measures we introduce have the potential to impact residents citywide.

A major focus of our DET Action Plan involves alder digital literacy, and ensuring alders have access to appropriate resources wherever digital literacy is an obstacle. To that end, the Council Office worked to increase support options for alders in 2024, including digital literacy training and consulting (available through DaneNet); more alder-specific trainings on technology (offered through City Technical Support); and improved overall access to City technical support services (including frontline support offered by Council Office staff). Looking forward in 2025, we are excited to be able to offer City laptops to the incoming cohort, something that has the potential to drastically enhance digital literacy and accessibility, along with significantly streamlining the process of providing technical support to alders.

Another focus of our DET Action Plan is reaching underserved audiences, and in 2024 we took several key steps forward in the service of this significant goal, including focused outreach for the spring 2024 Budget engagement meetings; increased utilization of translation and interpretation services; and engagement initiatives specifically designed for the Latina/Latino/Latinx/Latine community.

Equity and accessibility remain top priorities within the City as well as the Common Council Office moving into 2025. This year we are planning to attend several upcoming Citywide trainings, including service animal training and implementing video interpretation services. We look forward to continuing our work as DET co-leads, knowing that our efforts play an important role in the goals of increasing accessibility, equity, and engagement with the City of Madison's most underserved communities.



# RESULTS MADISON

## MEANINGFUL MEASURES

Council Office staff undertook a multi-month project in 2024 to define and begin tracking data indicators as a part of Results Madison, a Citywide initiative that uses “data to identify and eliminate inequities in its service and how it delivers them.” <sup>1</sup>

At the heart of this effort is the move to “overhaul its budget process to place results and performance, rather than dollar amounts, front and center.” The effort additionally involves “defining outcomes, strategies, indicators, services, and performance measures for every department and linking those to spending. It’s a product of the City’s commitment to building a strong data foundation to support its equity goals and new governance approaches.” <sup>1</sup>

In order to successfully establish meaningful Council Office indicators, staff met weekly with the City of Madison Data Team over 9 weeks in January through March, with a subgroup continuing with more focused meetings through September. The Council Office ultimately identified 14 unique indicators in the areas of community engagement and events, constituent services, legislative process support, and legislative research and analysis. The Data Team is currently scheduled to present an update on the citywide Results Madison initiative to the Common Council in June, including the new dashboard of indicators.

1Ali, A. (2021, July 14). *With a Strong Data Foundation, Madison Reaches for Equity Goals*. Medium.com. <https://medium.com/what-works-cities-certification/with-a-strong-data-foundation-madison-reaches-for-equity-goals-f45170db9d2f>. Accessed March 5, 2025.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## INCLUSION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Community Engagement Strategist works directly with alders in spearheading several community engagement initiatives focused on promoting civic engagement, generating awareness of the Common Council, and fostering open dialogue and meaningful interactions between alders and constituents. Most importantly, these efforts brought government to constituents and their communities to better ensure that our ongoing efforts continue to meet the real needs of the people.

The value of alder participation and collaboration in engaging historically overlooked groups has made all the difference in reaching Madison communities that contribute significantly to our city's vitality but aren't always represented in local government. Although the four examples below do not begin to cover all of the community engagement efforts made by all alders, they demonstrate the value of collaboration in building stronger relationships between government and communities.



### **Latina/Latino/Latinx/Latine Civic Engagement**

This year, the Office of the Common Council had a great opportunity to generate awareness of the Common Council and its leadership within the Latina/Latino/Latinx/Latine community. The Latinx population is one of the fastest-growing demographic groups in the U.S., which increases its potential impact on elections and civic life. This growth emphasizes the importance of engagement in shaping public policy, representation, and resource allocation. According to the 2020 census, the Latinx population makes up 9% of Madison's population. Madison's Latinx community can play a vital role in shaping civic engagement.

Concerted outreach efforts by the Community Engagement Strategist and the Council President included brainstorming ways to engage meaningfully and intentionally and setting up meetings with community organizations. This resulted in the creation of a civic engagement event to reach young Latine professionals, where the Office of the Common Council collaborated with the Latino Professionals Association to host a Virtual Fireside Chat with Common Council President Alder Yannette Figueroa Cole. Attendees were able to get a first-hand look at what it is like to be an alder and discover the crucial role of Latinos in local government.

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### **Small Business FAM Tour**

The Small Business FAM Tour was a multi-agency collaboration, where alders had the chance to explore the vibrant small business scene in Madison. Common Council staff and alders joined forces with the Office of Business Resources and Madison Metro to meet local entrepreneurs from a range of industries and get an inside look at small business ownership in Madison. This also gave alders an opportunity to learn about the resources offered by the Office of Business Resources and see first-hand the impact of these resources on our small business community. We wanted to make sure that the small businesses were not only diverse in industry and ownership, but also geographically.

Special thanks to Alder Sabrina Madison and Alder Dina Nina Martinez-Rutherford for providing our multi-departmental collaborative planning team with feedback and assistance based on their perspectives as entrepreneurs and local elected officials. With their help, our team was able to create an economic development familiarization tour that was both educational and entertaining!

### **Student Engagement and Campus Resource Tables**

Common Council staff had the opportunity to work with Alder MGR Govindarajan to secure opportunities to engage with students at different events on the UW- Madison Campus. As the benefits of civic engagement for college students are vast, staff along with Alders Govindarajan and Bennett were excited to spark conversations at these events about what the Common Council is and how students could get involved at the local level.

One of our more successful endeavors was having a resource table at the UW-Madison's Public Service Fair. We were able to engage with a diverse group of students who expressed a desire to become more civically engaged. Some were surprised that two of our current alders started their terms as UW-Madison students.

Our office will continue to identify and create opportunities where Council Office staff and elected officials can encourage students to develop a stronger sense of civic responsibility and purpose.

### **Madison Night Market**

2024 was the second year the Common Council participated in the Madison Night Market. The Madison Night Market is a large outdoor market that expands from one end of State Street to the other. Hundreds of vendors come together for one night a month from May to October to showcase their talent and businesses.

The Madison Night Market allows alders to connect with constituents and help generate awareness of the City of Madison Common Council. Topics ranged from the city budget, how to participate in local government, bike paths, and everything in between. We were also excited to speak to many young adults interested in running for office. It will continue to be one of our best opportunities to engage with Madison's diverse community and discuss what matters most to them.

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## REFLECTIONS ON OPPORTUNITIES

### Alder Retreat

On January 20, 2024, the alders participated in a day-long retreat focused on reflecting on the challenges and opportunities of policymaking and their roles as council members both individually and as a group. Facilitated by Abha Thakkar of Mosaic LLC, the workshop provided alders with tools for refining and connecting policymaking processes to their multifaceted values and lived experiences, as well as a framework for understanding and navigating the tensions that come along with the role of elected official.



### ICMA Conference

In September, Karen and Isaac attended the International City/County Management Association's annual meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Each of them was able to attend multiple sessions over the course of the four days spent at the conference. Isaac attended sessions that centered largely around the use of artificial intelligence in local government and ways to better engage with the public. One session that stood out to him was "We Have to Stop Meeting Like This! How Cities Are Transforming Official Public Meetings," which provided interesting and innovative ways to make public engagement meetings run smoothly and collect more insightful data, which was at the top of mind while working on the Budget Engagement Event Report.

Karen attended several sessions, including those focusing on tools for increasing emotional intelligence and best practices for effective communication with community members, City staff, and elected officials. For instance, the session, "How Can Managers Help Build Respect Among Board Members? Improving Group Dynamics through Individual and Group Level Interventions," offered a framework for understanding the impact of varying individual notions of "dis/respect" on perceptions of the effectiveness of interpersonal interactions; and the importance of onboarding programs and retreats as venues for offering opportunities for elected officials to expand their effective communication skillsets.



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## REFLECTIONS ON OPPORTUNITIES

### **YWCA Racial Justice Summit 9/25 – 9/27**

2024 was my 3rd year attending the YWCA Racial Justice Summit. The experience at this conference for me is always deeply impactful, and 2024 was no exception. The theme of the 2024 Racial Justice Summit, which took place September 25 – 27 at the Monona Terrace, was “Reflect, Connect, and Create New Worlds”, and was inspired by the metaphor of the kaleidoscope. The annual summit, which is open to all, is particularly powerful in its ability to refresh and nourish practitioners in the unending labor around racial and social justice. The summit invites national and local leaders (including youth voices) in the movement for equity and racial justice, always includes a facilitated intergenerational dialogue – in addition to keynote addresses and workshops – and culminates in a rooftop celebration at the Monona Terrace on the last evening of the summit.

This year, in addition to a workshop on disability resources, I had the opportunity to attend a screening of [Bad River](#), a documentary which chronicles the history and challenges of the Bad River tribe in Northern Wisconsin. The powerful documentary, available on Peacock and Xfinity, is a local and current example of the ongoing struggle between First Peoples and the fossil fuel industry, which seeks to exploit natural resources at great cost to the environment, tribal heritage, and tribal culture. I felt privileged to be able to participate in the screening, as well as the dialogue which followed and was facilitated by members of the tribe.

The annual Racial Justice Summit is a conference unlike any I have ever experienced, and one I look forward to for inspiring deep reflection and continued activation in the quest for social justice.

–Liz Windsor

### **2025 GARE Conference Reflection**

#### **Building Community**

My overall experience was incredible! I observed an environment where everyone felt comfortable being vulnerable. Regardless of their expertise or level of education, elitism and competition were refreshingly absent and as a result, everyone was open to learning and gaining new insights. People spoke from an informed and educated perspective and communicated from the heart. Attendees at all levels of knowledge were treated with respect; no one was made to feel small.

The conference, combined with a different city atmosphere, fostered honest and open dialogue and an opportunity to build trusting relationships with City colleagues while sharing our expertise on transformative solutions related to our work. Adventuring with acquaintances new and old facilitated further bonding and insight: at the encouragement of two attendees, I stepped out of my comfort zone and took the tram ride to the top of the Gateway Arch; dinner with colleagues in similar roles led to an unexpected and fruitful conversation, resulting in numerous tips for improving my efforts.

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## REFLECTIONS ON OPPORTUNITIES

### **What About Work? Communications & Partnerships**

Attending this conference taught me how to fully utilize my GARE membership: the sessions, networking opportunities, and socializing after conference hours acted like a guided study group, where many participants referred to specific resources from the website. Since attending the conference, I have also put a lot of time into utilizing one of their strategies to some network mapping and have already been able to get some buy-in on civic engagement with local community organizations.

I attended the “Narrative Strategy for Advancing Racial Equity in Government” session. I am utilizing the GARE Communications Guide: Commit to Action to assist in creating an inclusive narrative for our webpage and community engagement materials. I hope to utilize their strategies to combat fear-based language and further mitigate political polarization.

### **Unrigging the Game for Women of Color Movement Leaders**

One other session that stood out to me was, “Unrigging the Game for Women of Color Movement Leaders.” This session was profoundly impactful and specifically resonated with my experiences of feeling undermined and undervalued as a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practitioner. The session was led by Vanessa Priya Daniel, the author of a book with the same title, who brings over 25 years of experience in social justice.

I highly recommend this book to all women, particularly women of color, whose credentials and expertise are often overlooked. It addresses the challenges faced by those whose projects and initiatives are stalled, who deal with unhealthy power imbalances, and who encounter unnecessary resistance when trying to drive initiatives forward.

### **Knowledge to Practice**

As we move forward, our office will integrate GARE training and resources into our DET Action Plan. We will encourage our colleagues and alders to take advantage of these resources. We understand the importance of time and will provide realistic estimates for each training session to accommodate our daily life and demands. Additionally, we recognize that elitism and a competitive mindset can be significant barriers to implementing effective DEI initiatives, potentially derailing our efforts. We remain committed to supporting and guiding our colleagues in their learning journey.

–Lorissa R. Bañuelos

# INTERN HIGHLIGHT

## SUPPORTING THE TALENT PIPELINE

In 2025, the Office of the Common Council will celebrate its third year participating in the AASPIRE internship program, which stands for Affirmative Action Student Professionals in Residence. This paid summer internship lasts 8 to 10 weeks and provides students with the opportunity to work on meaningful projects that align with their interests.

In 2024, the Office of the Common Council welcomed a Community Engagement and Policy intern, Hannah Matthews, a junior at UW-Madison. Hannah joined our team from June to August as part of the 2024 AASPIRE Cohort and returned in the fall to complete one of her course requirements. During her internship, Hannah worked closely with the Community Engagement Strategist and the Legislative Analyst on various projects to raise awareness about the Common Council. In this role, she also had the opportunity to work with and get to know many of our alders. We asked Hannah to share her thoughts on her experience working in the Office of the Common Council.

“While interning in the Office of the Common Council, I gained a unique insight into local government that helped me understand legislation's importance in the community's daily lives. This internship was an incredible experience that allowed me to learn more about policy, mass communication, and how to work in diverse settings. I am grateful for the various Alder projects I contributed to through legislative research and social media, as well as the work I conducted with the budget engagement event data. -Hannah Matthews, Common Council Intern, 2024

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# MOVING FORWARD – GOALS FOR 2025

- NEW ALDER ONBOARDING AND SUPPORT
- INCREASING AWARENESS OF THE COUNCIL AND OF WHAT AN ALDER'S WORK ENTAILS
- REFINING AND CLARIFYING OFFICE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

# STAY INFORMED

- VISIT THE COMMON COUNCIL WEBSITE
- ALDER ONBOARDING

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