



# Madison Common Council January 2024 Policy Retreat

**Report Submitted:  
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## Summary of January 2024 Retreat

- **Madison Common Council members participated in a Policy Retreat on January 20, 2024** designed by Abha Thakkar with Mosaic LLC. Abha had met with Common Council staff multiple times and held 1:1s with a diverse group of alders in preparation for the retreat.
- **Policy development was approached through multiple levels of impact: self, relational, organizational and systems.** The goal was to support alders in beginning to develop a theory of change grounded in their values.
- **The agenda included (see slide deck for details):**
  - **An exploration of how being an alder has impacted their:**
    - Public relationships with your neighbors, other alders, city staff, etc.
    - Personal relationships with family and close friends
    - Identity, worldview or other aspects?
    - Mental well-being
    - Physical well-being
  - **Establishing a Shared Framework for a theory of change, which included:**
    - The naming of various tensions inherent in the process of making change in a democracy and their roles as elected officials
    - The continuum of public to private relationships and how these show up in their experience as an elected official
    - The role of intersectionality in developing policy positions
    - Working at multiple levels of impact for change: self, relational, institutional, cultural/systemic
    - Shifting from hierarchical to relational power as a tool for change-making in democratic process
  - **A personal and collective exploration of values and each alder's experience of trust and respect** (see Values Discernment Guide & Word Cloud slides)
  - **A policy cafe that centered around the following five policy areas with individual and group reflection questions** (see Policy Reflection Guide):
    - Housing & Land Use
    - Homelessness
    - Parking
    - Policing
    - Transportation
  - **Drafting a theory of change** - each alder was invited to reflect on the following statement when considering different policy areas.
    - "I take *these actions* in hopes of making *this impact*, which is aligned with *these values*."

## Themes that Emerged

### **Alders expressed a range of impacts since taking office:**

- **Public relationships with neighbors, other alders, city staff, etc.**
  - Increased sense of community
  - More relationships with people from different backgrounds
  - More learning and increased empathy, patience, conscientiousness and sense of responsibility
  - Experiencing both gratitude and blame from neighbors and other residents
  - Less privacy in public
  
- **Personal relationships with family and close friends**
  - Overall, alders experience having much less time for their family and friends and miss out on experiences with them.
  - Alders find themselves practicing intentionality, self-awareness, collaboration and boundary management
  - Decisions as an alder can take a toll on private relationships, especially more peripheral relationships where there's disagreement
  
- **Identity, worldview or other aspects**
  - Feeling more responsible for the community
  - Feeling pride in representing underrepresented groups
  - Becoming more open-minded
  - Learning about policy, politics and media
  - Seeing the world in a more holistic, connected way
  - Working to apply their values to their decision-making, sometimes successfully, sometimes not
  
- **Mental well-being**
  - Less capacity for personal needs
  - Feeling strong sense of responsibility and sometimes guilt
  - Needing to carve out time for self-care
  - Experiencing exhaustion and burn-out
  - Feeling both fulfillment and, for some, anxiety
  
- **Physical well-being**
  - Many alders experience inadequate sleep and time for healthy eating and exercise
  - Conflict and controversy impact their sleep quality and stress levels
  - Alders respond by becoming more conscious of their health and wellness, when possible
  
- **Alders expressed a deep resonance with the “Tensions of Being an Elected Official.”**

There was also deeper discussion around the continuum of public/private relationships and their exploration of values, trust and respect.



# Possible Next Steps for Practice, Exploration and Inquiry

## As Individuals

- **Continue to refine your values and process/theory of change** for policy work (see attached policy reflection guide). Start with a few policy areas that are a priority for you.
- **Explore the tensions of being an elected official** and how that has impacted your experience as an alder.
- **Consider your public and private relationships** (along a continuum), what your needs and expectations in those are and how that fits into your work with your Council colleagues, City staff and constituents.
- **Continue to explore the tension between your values and what you hear from your constituents & colleagues.** How can you be transparent about who you are and what your values are as a way to navigate the inevitable differences that arise?
- **Explore tools, like mindfulness practice, to help you become aware of and manage your stress response.**

## With your constituents

- **Hone your skills in community engagement**
  - How can you better understand who your constituents are and create input opportunities that take into account their intersectional identities and resources, including time, money, policy knowledge and lived experience.
  - Explore various facilitation tools for public meetings with your constituents - how can you design spaces to attend to different learning and communication styles?
- Work with your residents to **develop a vision for your district** to help proactively inform policy decisions.
- **Offer political education training to your constituents** to help them better navigate systems, understand policy-making processes and advocate for their needs.
- **Develop an Accountability Practice** as an elected official to deepen learning, trust-building and healing between you and your constituents (and other alders).

## As a group:

- **Tools to Explore:**
  - **The Social Change Ecosystem** - explore the roles you each naturally play (and would like to play) in groups and learn about your fellow alders
  - **Power Mapping** as a way to develop effective strategies for change-making
  - **Nonviolent Communication**
  - **Trauma-Informed Leadership** - how to recognize and disrupt trauma re-enactments in public life
  - **1:1 Relational Meetings** - as a way to discover shared self-interest as a foundation for public relationships

- **Transformative Community Engagement** (in contrast with extractive community engagement)
- **Build relational power & practice disagreement without permanent polarization** - challenge yourself to seek out dialogue with people who have felt like your opponents, learn who they are. The 1:1 relational meeting is a powerful tool for this that can be practiced. The group could commit to a relational meeting campaign to better understand each other's stories and motivations.
- **Proactively identify collective learning opportunities to help deepen your policy work** - hear from City staff, grassroots and civic organizations and impacted populations.

**Attached:**

- Clarifying Our Values
- Values, Trust & Respect Word Clouds
- Policy Reflection Guide
- Policy Retreat Slide Deck

## About Mosaic

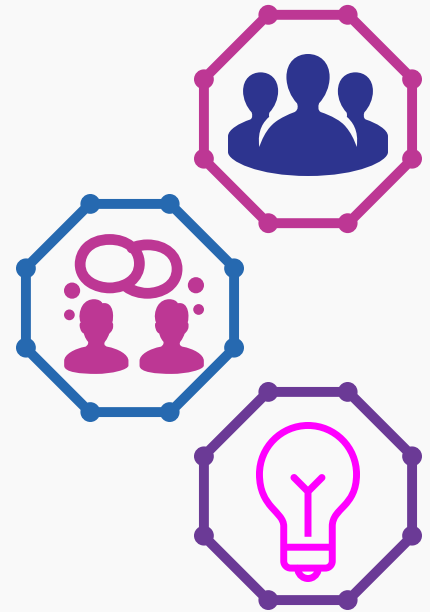
Mosaic LLC is a community-based consulting company founded by Abha Thakkar, a community organizer, facilitator and nonprofit administrator with 20+ years of local leadership experience.

Mosaic brings a unique combination of skills, experience and relationships to each project. Our expertise includes grassroots leadership development, collective action, non-extractive public engagement, trauma-informed care, food systems resilience, community journalism, solidarity economics, restorative justice and nonprofit operations, including fiscal management and policy and process development through an antiracist lens.

As an organization led by an Indian American woman, Mosaic has deep ties to municipal and county government, dozens of nonprofits, local businesses and communities of color and often works through subcontracts with other leaders of color to ensure authentic and non-extractive processes that center people with lived experience.

Mosaic's portfolio of work includes multiple cross-sector initiatives in violence prevention, early childhood development, environmental justice and neighborhood-based health, which engage extensive networks of expertise among leaders of color and people with lived experience.

Finally, Mosaic's approach of building trust and shared power among its partners plays a critical role in ensuring that our work is broadly representative and, in the long-run, restorative and generative for those involved and impacted.



## Clarifying our Values

**Think of 1-2 moments when you felt happiest, healthiest and most fulfilled in your life.**  
*What were you doing? Who were you with? What about those moments made you feel that way?*

**Think of some of the most important influences in your life (mentors, ideas, transformative experiences, etc).** *What do you hope to integrate about them into your work as an elected official?*

**Think of the most challenging moments in your life.** *What did you have to overcome? What helped you navigate those times?*

**How would you most like to be remembered in your role as an Alder?** *What descriptors, accomplishments, memories do you hope people think of when they think of you?*







# The characteristics and behaviors in others that earn trust from me in public life are...

113 responses



# The actions, behaviors and words that make me feel respected and seen in public life are...

65 responses



## Policy Reflection Guide for Alders

*Your votes should have the integrity and impact you want them to have.*

### Policy Area:

*If you don't have time to explore all of these questions, which of these feel most important for you to help you determine your policy positions? Where can you be proactive? Is anything missing here that feels important for you to name?*

1. What life experiences have you or your loved ones personally had with this issue?
2. Who does this issue impact most? Specific districts, demographic groups?
3. What have you heard from your constituents about this issue? A minority or majority of constituents? How does this impact your district? How can you better understand how this impacts your district?
4. What would you like to see happen on this issue in Madison? What values inform those goals? (use the values word cloud if it's helpful)
5. What part(s) of City government impact this issue?



# Common Council Policy Retreat January 20, 2024

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## AGENDA: POLICY MAKING FOR IMPACT

10:05 am	Welcome
10:10 am	Check-In
10:15 am	Group Agreements
10:20 am	Opening Activity
10:40 am	Establishing a Shared Framework
11:10 am	Exploring our Values
11:35 am	BREAK
11:45 am	Policy Cafe
1:15 pm	Drafting a Theory of Change
1:25 pm	Next Steps
1:30 pm	End

## **YOUR THEORY OF CHANGE AS AN ALDER**

**How will you maximize your impact as an alder?**

**A theory of change can serve as a compass, making explicit your desired goals and values and naming an intentional process for meaningful change.**

**FORMAT:**

**"I take *these actions* in hopes of making *this impact*, which is aligned with *these values*."**

We will work towards a first draft of this today.

**10:10 am  
CHECK-IN QUESTION**

**Take a minute to consider:**

**Is there an ancestor or descendent  
of yours who has inspired you  
as an Alder?**

**Find someone sitting nearby and share.  
2 minutes each.**

# 10:15 am

# REVIEWING GROUP

# AGREEMENTS

## GROUP AGREEMENTS

- Acknowledging that this work **impacts and asks all parts of us to remain regulated, grounded and cared for: hearts, spirits, bodies and minds**
- **Cultivating gratitude** for ourselves and each other for doing this very complex work
- Offering curiosity, openness, respect and generosity for **each other's humanity and lived experiences**
- **Finding joy, laughter, play and fun** where we can as a pathway to open-mindedness, learning, hope and trust-building
- Being aware of the role that **intersectional power and privilege** play in our interactions and of how much space we're taking in the context of our relative power and privilege
- **Checking in with each other** when we are unsure
- Being responsive to the way **we each learn and process**
- Making space for and learning from our **different perspectives**.
- **Admitting our mistakes without defensiveness; Allowing each other to make mistakes without judgment or cancellation**
- **What is said here stays here and what is learned here leaves**



**10:20 am**

**THE EXPERIENCE OF  
BEING AN ALDER**

**OPENING EXERCISE**

**How has being an Alder impacted your life?  
Positive, negative & transformational impacts?**

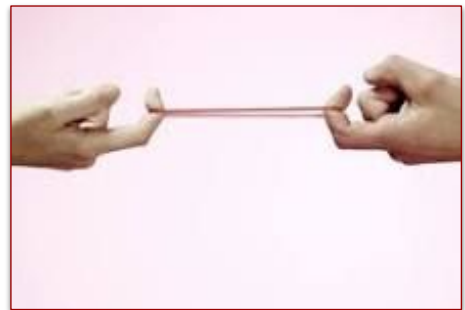
- **Your physical well-being**
- **Your mental well-being**
- **Your personal relationships with family and close friends**
- **Your public relationships with your neighbors, other Alders, city staff, etc.**
- **Your identity, worldview or other aspects?**
  - **your sense of civic responsibility, your sense of personal efficacy, your learning, your values, your viewpoints**

**10:40 am**

**ESTABLISHING A  
SHARED FRAMEWORK**

**A KEY FEATURE  
OF PUBLIC LIFE IS  
TENSION**

**(Not stress or conflict, though  
those can be side effects)**

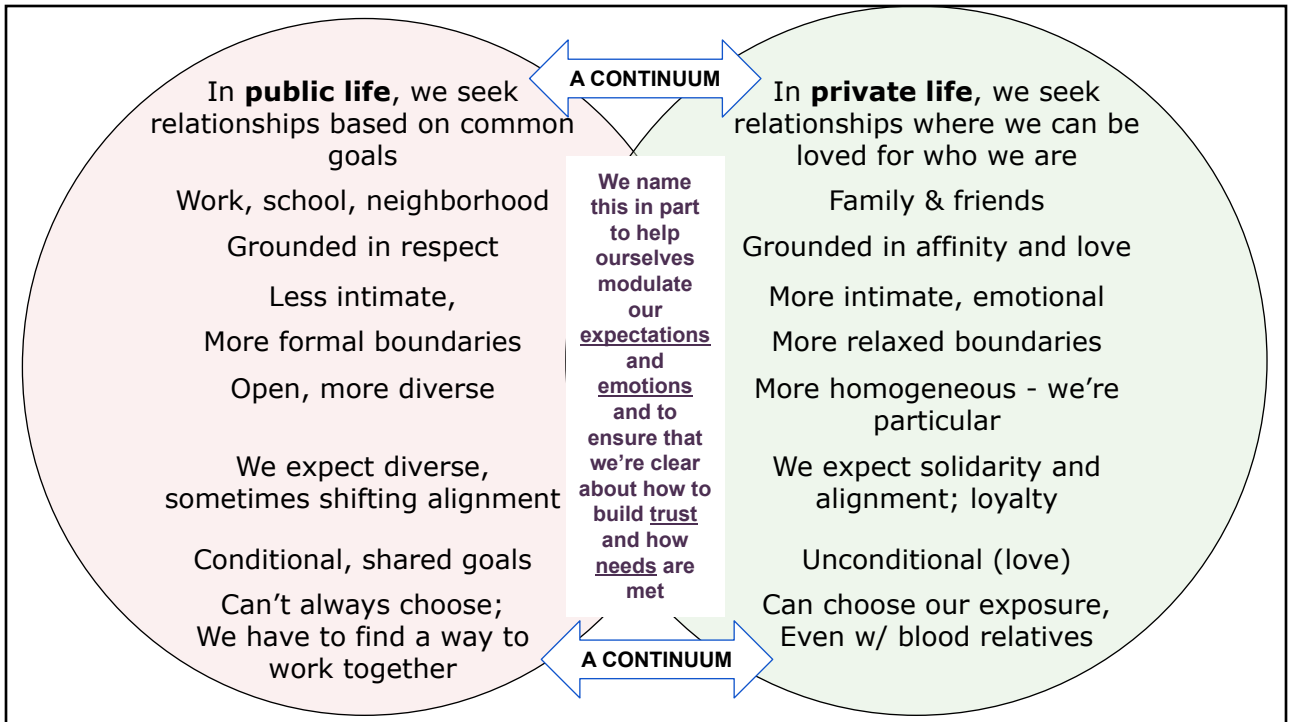


## THE TENSION OF BEING AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

The World As It Is	←→	The World As It Should Be
Resources Available	←→	What People Need
Your To Do List	←→	Time Available
Urgency of Needs	←→	Speed of Democratic Process
Highly Personal Polarization	←→	The Need for Compromise
Divisive; Taking Sides on Record	←→	Coming Back Together
Binary "Yes/No" Voting	←→	Nuanced Issues and Impact
Good Intentions	←→	Unintended Consequences
The Needs of the Many	←→	The Needs of the Few
Majority Rule	←→	Protecting Minority Voice
Clarifying Your Values & Positions	←→	Complexity of Your Experiences
Voices of Organized Constituents	←→	Voices You Don't Hear From
Ability to Make an Impact	←→	Limits to What City Gvt Can Do
Your Position / Opinion	←→	The Position of Vocal Constituents
The Isolation of Your Role	←→	Being Immersed in Community

## The Nature of Making Change in a Democracy

- Democracy is meant to be slow & incremental
- Democracy is designed to require compromise
- Democracy often involves uniting our allies and dividing our opposition, but **it cannot withstand permanent polarization**
  - Which means no permanent allies, no permanent opponents - but within what parameters? Who are you willing to work with to get things done?
- Ultimately, good intentions don't always lead to good outcomes



## TERMS: INTERSECTIONALITY



Concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw

- Intersectionality further complicates the public/private continuum of relationships
- Different layers of our identity overlap and cannot be fully addressed in isolation.
  - Each layer has a different effect on how we impact and are impacted by the world.
- When we consider all the different dimensions of people's identities and their experiences, we begin to appreciate how much diversity of thought there must be out there.



## WORKING AT ALL LEVELS OF IMPACT: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

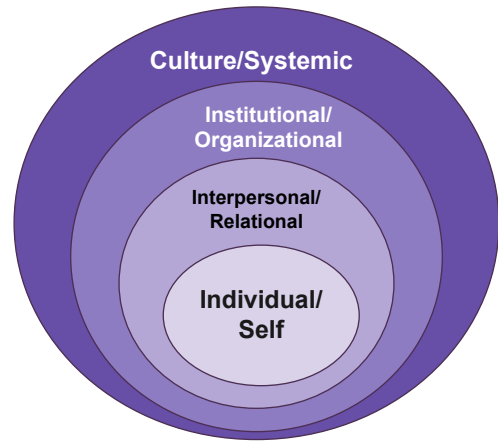
### Shawn Ginwright's Four Pivots

#### Shifting from Lens (Outward - Systems, Institutions) to Mirror (Inward - Self, Interpersonal)

- Understanding how we impact the work: "What has harmed me? What has harmed us? What do I need to heal from?"

#### Shifting From Transactional to Transformational Relationships

- From technical, zero sum relationships to relationships that are built upon humanity, vulnerability, care and compassion.
- This is the foundation of deep **relational power**.



## RELATIONAL POWER -> THE WORLD AS IT SHOULD BE



### POWER OVER

#### Hierarchical, zero sum power:

If you gain power, I lose power.  
I hoard power because I am  
afraid of losing control.

vs.



### POWER WITH

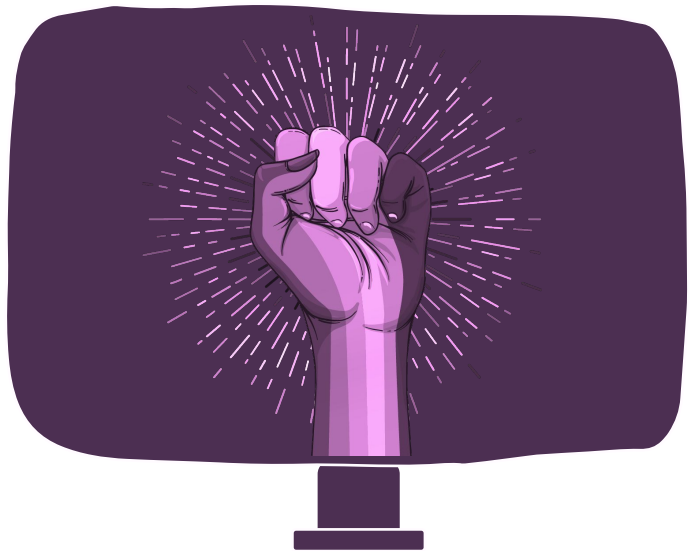
#### Relational power:

The power of organized people.  
We combine our power to  
leverage our collective wisdom  
and our ability to act and get a  
reaction.

**This can be transformational**

## TERMS: POWER

- More expansive
- From the latin word *poder*: the ability to do or act... and get a reaction
- The **size** of the reaction is a measure of your power (equal and opposite).
- The **nature** of the reaction - did it move you towards your goals? - is a measure of the quality of your strategy and tactics



## SOURCES OF POWER AND AGENCY

Power is relative and shifting at all times. An awareness of how power works and an ability to use it mindfully is at the heart of creating change.

### Identities & Experience

Expectations, socialization related to personality, communication style, learning style, family roles, race, class, age, education level, subculture, heritage/family of origin, health and ability, age, size, etc.

### Positionality

What is your functional impact in the world? Your impact can be influenced by your connections & title, decision-making power, seniority and expertise, access and control of information and resources, and your ability to direct, reward or punish others.



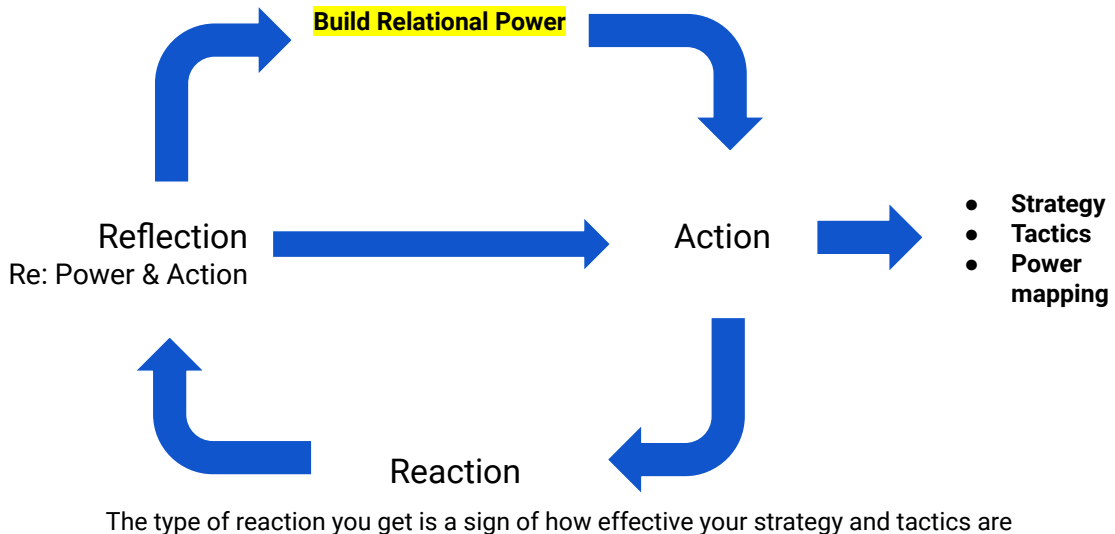
### Relationships:

The power of organized people (vs the power of organized money, positionality, privilege);

Acknowledging each other's mutual, shared humanity is at the core of building relational power.

And it's good for us!

## ONCE YOU HAVE POWER, HOW DO YOU USE IT EFFECTIVELY?



## A THEORY OF CHANGE AS AN ALDER

**Building & exercising relational power involves multiple levels of impact:**

- Understanding your core values (**Self**)
- Listening to your constituents (**Interpersonal**)
  - Who are your constituents? Which identities are informing their positions?
  - How do you address power and capacity imbalances among constituents?
  - What is enough input? Do you seek it out or wait for it to come you?
- Understanding the impacts on your district? (**Institutional & Systemic**)
  - Environment, natural, built, the more-than-human world? Business community? Organizations?
- Learning about what's been done here, elsewhere and what's worked and hasn't worked (**Systemic**)
- Clarifying your goals on this issue (**Self**)
- Working with your colleagues to find allies and understand opponents to build and exercise relational power strategically (**Interpersonal / Institutional**)



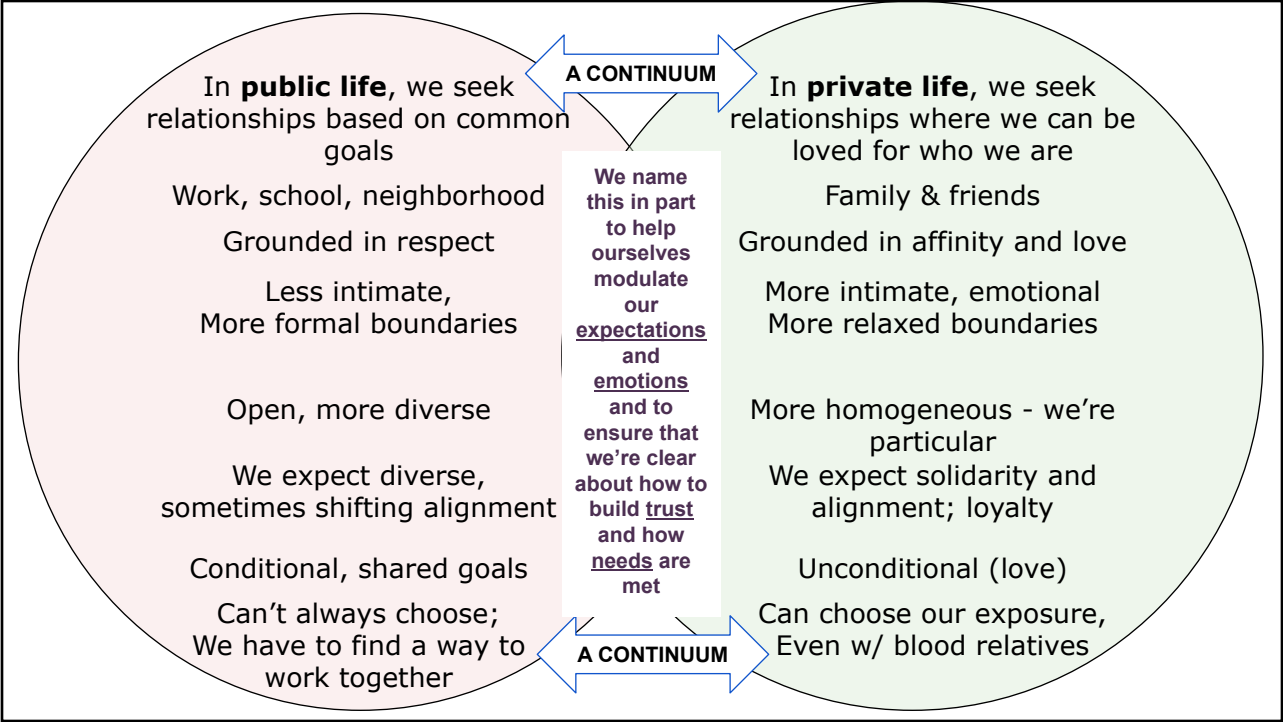
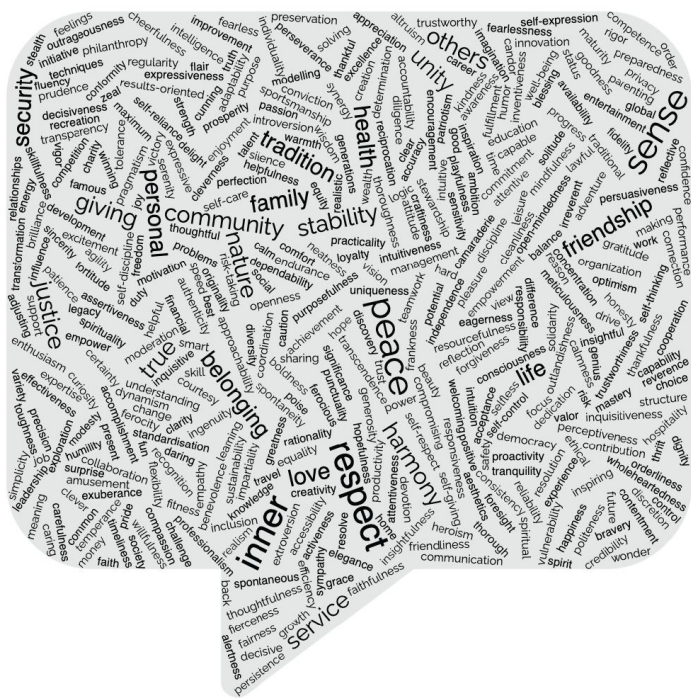
# 11:10 am

# EXPLORING OUR VALUES

## CLARIFYING OUR VALUES - REFLECTION GUIDE

- **Think of 1-2 moments when you felt happiest, healthiest and most fulfilled in your life.** *What were you doing? Who were you with? What about those moments made you feel that way?*
- **Think of some of the most important influences in your life (mentors, ideas, transformative experiences, etc).** *What do you hope to integrate about them into your work as an elected official?*
- **Think of the most challenging moments in your life.** *What did you have to overcome? What helped you navigate those times?*
- **How would you most like to be remembered in your role as an Alder?** *What descriptors, accomplishments, memories do you hope people think of when they think of you?*
- **What 5-10 key values emerge from these reflections?** *Are there themes? You can use the Values Word Cloud for reference, if it's helpful.*

[menti.com](https://www.menti.com)





## **RESPECT & DIGNITY**

**The actions, behaviors and words that make me feel respected and seen in public life are...**

**menti.com**

## **TRUST**

**The characteristics and behaviors in others that earn trust from me in public life are...**

(consider this in light of the public / private relationship continuum)

**menti.com**

# The actions, behaviors and words that make me feel respected and seen in public life are...

65 responses



# The characteristics and behaviors in others that earn trust from me in public life are...

113 responses



# 11:45 am

# POLICY CAFE

## POLICY CAFE PROCESS - 5 ROUNDS

- This is a practice you can exercise in future policy discussions.
- You'll have 17 minutes at each table:
- **Individual Reflection:** You'll each receive an individual reflection guide
  - Write the policy area at the top
  - The first 5-6 minutes at each table is intended for individual reflection about this policy area; I'll let you know when to transition to group discussion
- **Group Discussion:** You'll also see material for shared note-taking at the table
  - The remaining 10-11 minutes will be for group discussion
  - **The question for each round will be up here, on the projector**
  - Choose a group notetaker (hopefully someone with clear handwriting)
  - Write the question at the top of the page
  - After the first round, as a group, take a few minutes to review the notes made by the previous groups so you can react to or build on those. You can vote using the dots (colors don't matter) and you can add notes, reflections, questions, additions to previous groups' notes.

## **ROUND 1: INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

- **Choose a table and policy area**
- **Find the worksheet with that policy area on top**
- **Spend 5-6 minutes with the Individual Reflection Guide**
  
- What life experiences have you or your loved ones personally had with this issue?
- What have you heard from your constituents about this issue? A minority or majority of constituents? How does this impact your district?
- What would you like to see happen on this issue in Madison? What values inform those goals? (use the values word cloud if it's helpful)
- What questions do you have about this issue? For city staff, your colleagues, your constituents, from ordinance and history...

## **ROUND 1 GROUP QUESTION**

**Write the question at the top of the page**

**Who does this issue impact most? Specific districts / geographies, demographic groups?**



## **ROUND 2: INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

- **Choose a table and policy area**
- **Find the worksheet with that policy area on top**
- **Spend 5-6 minutes with the Individual Reflection Guide**
  
- What life experiences have you or your loved ones personally had with this issue?
- What have you heard from your constituents about this issue? A minority or majority of constituents? How does this impact your district?
- What would you like to see happen on this issue in Madison? What values inform those goals? (use the values word cloud if it's helpful)
- What questions do you have about this issue? For city staff, your colleagues, your constituents, from ordinance and history...

## **ROUND 2 GROUP QUESTION**

*Write the question at the top of the page*

What part(s) of City  
government impact this  
issue?

## **ROUND 3: INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

- **Choose a table and policy area**
- **Find the worksheet with that policy area on top**
- **Spend 5-6 minutes with the Individual Reflection Guide**
  
- What life experiences have you or your loved ones personally had with this issue?
- What have you heard from your constituents about this issue? A minority or majority of constituents? How does this impact your district?
- What would you like to see happen on this issue in Madison? What values inform those goals? (use the values word cloud if it's helpful)
- What questions do you have about this issue? For city staff, your colleagues, your constituents, from ordinance and history...

## **ROUND 3 GROUP QUESTION**

**Write the question at the top of the page**

How has the City of  
Madison historically  
responded to this issue?  
Past or existing  
committees, policies,  
reports, ordinances?

## ROUND 4: INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

- Choose a table and policy area
- Find the worksheet with that policy area on top
- Spend 5-6 minutes with the Individual Reflection Guide
  
- What life experiences have you or your loved ones personally had with this issue?
- What have you heard from your constituents about this issue? A minority or majority of constituents? How does this impact your district?
- What would you like to see happen on this issue in Madison? What values inform those goals? (use the values word cloud if it's helpful)
- What questions do you have about this issue? For city staff, your colleagues, your constituents, from ordinance and history...

## ROUND 4 GROUP QUESTION

Write the question at the top of the page

What **can** the City of  
Madison do about  
this issue?

What **can't** the City  
of Madison do about  
this issue?

## **ROUND 5: INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

- **Choose a table and policy area**
- **Find the worksheet with that policy area on top**
- **Spend 5-6 minutes with the Individual Reflection Guide**
  
- What life experiences have you or your loved ones personally had with this issue?
- What have you heard from your constituents about this issue? A minority or majority of constituents? How does this impact your district?
- What would you like to see happen on this issue in Madison? What values inform those goals? (use the values word cloud if it's helpful)
- What questions do you have about this issue? For city staff, your colleagues, your constituents, from ordinance and history...

## **ROUND 5 GROUP QUESTION**

Write the question at the top of the page

What questions do you  
have?

What are some sources of  
information about this  
issue?

**1:15 pm**

**DRAFTING YOUR  
THEORY OF CHANGE**

**Your votes should  
have the integrity  
and impact you  
want them to have.**

## YOUR THEORY OF CHANGE: A FIRST DRAFT

Pick a policy area and write a draft theory of change (last question on the values worksheet)

“ I take **these actions** in hopes of making **this impact**, which is aligned with **these values**.”

### Possible Actions:

- Understand your core values (Self)
- Listen to your constituents (Learn at Interpersonal, Institutional & Systemic Levels)
- Understand the impacts on your district? (Institutional & Systemic)
- Learn about what's been done in the past, what's worked and hasn't worked (Systemic)
- Clarify your goals on this issue (Self)
- Find allies and understand opponents to build relational power (Interpersonal)
- Exercise relational power strategically (Interpersonal & Institutional)

**Which actions feel important to you when time is not available?**

How can you be proactive to prepare in advance?

Where are you comfortable and where do you need to be intentional?

**1:25 pm**

**NEXT STEPS &  
CLOSING**

## SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

### As individuals:

- Continue to refine your values & process/theory of change for policy work
- Consider your public and private relationships (along a continuum), what your needs and expectations in those are and how that fits into your work with your Council colleagues
- Determine how you will seek out your constituents' viewpoints and how those viewpoints will shape your position.
- Balance the tension between your values and what you hear from your constituents & colleagues

### As a group:

- Social Change Ecosystem exercise
- Power Mapping exercise
- Develop an Accountability Practice as an elected official to deepen learning, trust-building, healing
- Build relational power & practice disagreement without permanent polarization - challenge yourself to seek out dialogue with people who have felt like your opponents, learn who they are.
  - The 1:1 relational meeting is a powerful tool for this that can be practiced. The group could commit to a relational meeting campaign to better understand each other's stories and motivations.
- Identify group learning opportunities to help your policy work
- Hone your skills in community engagement

## CRITICAL MASS -> CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

**“We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness.**

**“In this exquisitely connected world, it’s never a question of ‘critical mass.’ It’s always about critical connections.”**

– Grace Lee Boggs (author, social activist, philosopher)

