



Office of the Common Council

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 3, 2020

Open Letter to the Public

Response to Mayor and Council President Statement Regarding Behavior at September 1 Common Council Meeting

We are writing to express our concern regarding the September 2, 2020 statement issued by Mayor Rhodes-Conway and Common Council President Carter regarding behavior at the September 1, 2020 Common Council meeting.

First, we challenge the framing of the issues. We agree with the Mayor and President's strong words condemning the use of gender-based profanity directed at a member of our community. We agree there is no place for such an utterance in our meetings and that city residents should never be treated with disdain and disrespect.

And, to that point, on behalf of the Madison Common Council, we, the undersigned Alders, apologize to Ms. Kilfoy-Flores, the community, and to all those harmed by what occurred at our last meeting.

But we do not agree with the assertion that "the culture and civility of Common Council meetings have drastically deteriorated," nor that this supposed deterioration "culminated" in the inexcusable use of a misogynist slur against a member of our community. Such an assertion deflects attention and accountability from the actual harm that was caused.

It is important that we agree on who is to blame for the outburst. There is little question as to the source and we ask that the person who uttered this word comes forward of their own accord. If that individual fails to step forward, we request a thorough investigation, including a forensic analysis of the recording. In the context of restorative justice, acknowledging the truth is the prerequisite for reconciliation, both among ourselves and with the broader community.

Regarding the culture and civility of Common Council meetings, we have indeed had tense moments over the past year dealing with controversial topics ranging from the vehicle registration fee, to F-35s, to, most recently, police oversight. That is nothing out of the ordinary for political discourse in a public forum. At times, discussions get heated, feelings get hurt and egos get bruised. Despite all this, we generally find a way to work together and continue the task of representing the people of Madison and moving our City forward.

More to the point, we disagree that the “culture and civility” at our meetings have deteriorated in recent months. What has changed in recent months has been an increased outpouring of public

comment and debate about the value of Black lives and the accountability of public agencies and elected officials. Our meetings have provided a much-needed forum for residents to express their grievances about city policies and the votes and statements made by elected officials. Using this incident to direct blame towards Council culture rather than directing the focus on the inexcusable behavior of one individual, mischaracterizes the work of the Madison Common Council and risks eroding the public’s faith and confidence in our work.

We strongly condemn this very regrettable incident. We further call upon the Mayor and Council President to take additional steps to ensure such behavior is not repeated and that the harm done to our community is addressed.

Sincerely,

Patrick Heck, District 2
Lindsay Lemmer, District 3
Mike Verveer, District 4
Shiva Bidar, District 5
Marsha Rummel, District 6
Donna Moreland, District 7
Max Prestigiacommo, District 8
Arvina Martin, District 11
Syed Abbas, District 12, Council Vice-President
Tag Evers, District 13
Grant Foster, District 15
Rebecca Kemble, District 18
Keith Furman, District 19
Christian Albouras, District 20