

Interview details:

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Interviewer: Barbara Alvarez

Interviewee: Amanda Salazar

Transcription:

**Barbara**

Can you say and spell your name?

**Amanda**

My name is Amanda Salazar. The spelling is A-M-A-N-D-A and then Salazar is S-A-L-A-Z-A-R.

**Barbara**

All right, Amanda, can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your connection to being an elected official?

**Amanda**

Okay, so I am a Sheboygan native. I left and came back, but love to call this place home.

I currently have a fifth grader that goes to school here, and I've got a lovely dog, and I live really close to the lake, right across the street, so I like to spend some time out there. And being an elected official sort of the question was my connection to it?

**Barbara**

Yeah. How long have you been an elected official?

**Amanda**

Wow, that is a great question. I don't even know. It's been just under two years, so about maybe a year and a half.

**Barbara**

Okay.

**Amanda**

That I've been elected official. I am an alderperson for District Three, and I sit on Common Council.

**Barbara**

Great. So who or what inspired you to run for this position?

**Amanda**

It's a great question. So I think I've always danced around the idea of wanting to run for office. So I have my godfather. His name is Estacio Medina but he goes by Junior.

He was on the county board when I was young and was always involved in sort of nonprofits, and we helped Juan Perez with his campaign when I was young, and I remember being a part of that and feeling that energy. And my uncle used to say to me when I was young, like, "At some point this will be your turn. At some point this will be your turn." And so I knew I wanted to dabble in, and I just

wasn't sure what exactly I was going to do. And then the opportunity presented itself.

Mary Lynne Donohue was not reupping for her alderperson seat in District Three, which is where I live. And so she had reached out to me and said, "I just want to let you know I'm not running, and if you're interested, now's the time." And I said, "Well, I guess I'd like to hear a little bit more about it and what it all entailed." And basically I filled out the paperwork thinking I wouldn't get elected because I thought other folks would be running as well. And I guess what I've heard, the word on the street was that the other folks who pulled the paperwork said, "Oh, Amanda's running. I'm totally not going to turn mine in. This is great."

And so it was anonymous, so no, that's the right way to say..?

**Barbara**

Unopposed?

**Amanda**

Unopposed. There we go.

**Barbara**

Nice. So what was that process like after you decided to turn in the papers leading up to being sworn in?

**Amanda**

Okay, so it is quite messy, to be honest. There isn't a roadmap to how to run, and that was very clear to me.

So I did a lot of my own sort of finding and asking the right questions. Thankfully, I had been involved in additional work that I have done through the nonprofit sector that I work in of knowing who to talk to and who to sort of connect the dots with. And so as I was doing that, I was also taking notes about, okay, this is your next step. And I would sort of make myself a to-do list of what I needed to accomplish to get my paperwork turned in. You had to collect signatures, so I think you needed I think it was 40 specifically. But so that there weren't any mistakes, my goal was 100.

And I got just shy of that. I was like, I think it's 80, 92, or 96, something like that. When I pulled out the paperwork, I decided to first start with just walking my district. So before I even turned in the paperwork, and I think it was like, early December, I walked the entire district, every block, just to get an understanding of, like, this is what I'm covering. These are who these people are. This is what the neighborhood looks like.

What am I seeing? I wanted to become familiar with what I was representing, and that was really, really important for me. So I did that to start, and then I started collecting. So then the signature portion of it. Thankfully, I have a really wonderful relationship and community with the Paradigm Coffee House. And so Kate Krause worked with me, and we walked the blocks together and collected signatures and knocked on doors. And she introduced me to a lot of the neighbors, which she knows so many of them, and I got to introduce myself there.

And I took the time of just sort of asking people not only for their signature, but also, "What are you looking for? Is there something that you needed to highlight?" I was already sort of data collecting before I even got sworn in. That was important for me because I wanted to hear sort of what was important for the district, but also, what am I bringing to the table with the other alders? Right, here is my plan. Here's the goals that I'd like to accomplish. What is your district saying, and how can we work together?

Yeah, so that was that.

**Barbara**

So what did you learn in this process about the community and also about yourself?

**Amanda**

What did I learn about... So the community specifically was... Well, I'll say for my district specifically, everyone has been so warm and willing to sort of roll up their sleeves and do the work.

I feel very thankful to live in a district that is so active and so engaged with what they want to see in their own little neighborhood. That's really exciting to me. And so because they're so invested, I feel so, sort of honored. But also, I guess, pressure not in a bad way. But to really make sure I'm doing the work correctly. Which for learning about myself...

Basically what it's come down to is like I just want the best product to come out and I've learned that the slow pace of politics can be a bit frustrating and I become a little bit impatient. But I'm learning to work on that and sort of understand that there are things in place and action can still happen. You just have to sort of take a longer path to get there, which you have to find usually on your own because that information is, like I said, there's no roadmap sort of listed out of like oh, if you want to do this, you go here.

That doesn't happen, you have to find it on your own.

**Barbara**

Yeah, it sounds like you've done a lot of self education about what it's like to run for office and then also what it would entail to be a representative?

**Amanda**

Correct.

**Barbara**

As well as research about your community.

**Amanda**

Yes, yes, yeah, that's important, right? What does the community say? What are the people saying? That's what's important. And so how can I make sure that I'm echoing that at the table and I'm not going to fulfill every single one.

And I know that. It does feel overwhelming at times and I get a bit frustrated, like I said, when I hit these dead ends or I don't have the right answer. But the other piece, too, is connecting the community to the people. That's also the thing, like to the city employees or to

the department that handles it... being that connector and that I feel like that sort of is missing.

So I try to do a really good job of -if I get an email, I try to either respond back to the correct respond to the person, but also attach the correct city representative that can answer that from that department. And then if they don't get an answer, then I will try my best to either try to meet with them in person. At times that can be difficult with working a full time job and being a single mother, but I make it work and trying to carve out the time.

**Barbara**

So it sounds like the role is a combination of being like a steward to your community while also being an information liaison.

**Amanda**

Correct, yeah, that's a great way to put it. Information liaison. Yeah, that's exactly what it feels like. And even more so now because here's the thing, the community has the internet at their fingertips so they can search up anything. But our information from the city's aspect, it's a little dated and it's hard to get that all on that website.

And how do you direct people? It's also not super user friendly. And then on the other flip side of that, we don't have a local paper. So much of our older generation relied on that print to get information and that now doesn't exist. And so we're just expecting sort of this generational gap of cell phones and websites, sort of leading everything to those who still want to get the paper and learn or even come to the meetings.

Right? The information all gets posted online. There isn't something in print where they can get that says on Tuesday, finance is meeting, on Thursday, public works is meeting. Everything is posted or they have to physically go into City Hall.

**Barbara**

Right.

**Amanda**

The information liaison is important. Not that's specifically my position, but I would say for all of Common Council because that lacks so much in this community, sort of that connection point.

**Barbara**

So when were you sworn in? You said like a year and a half ago?

**Amanda**

I think it was April of '20... What year are we in?

**Barbara**

Was it April 2021?

**Amanda**

April 2021.

**Barbara**

How long is your term for?

**Amanda** Two years.

**Barbara** Okay.

**Amanda** Yeah.

**Barbara** And what would you say to other women who are thinking about running for office or maybe they get tapped the same way you did and say, "Hey, there's going to be an opening, you should consider running for office." What would you say to another woman in that position?

**Amanda** I actually did have this conversation with another woman who just ran and got sworn in. I think it's a few months ago. So Angela Ramey is new and she had actually given me a call and my advice to her was I said, first off, I told her she should do it. "I think you should do it.

And the reason I think you should do it is because it is so impactful." and I know her sort of feelings or towards any woman. If you believe in your community and you want change, like do it, and this is a great way to do it, it feels heavy at times and that I'll be honest about, but the work is good. And with a community like this, I mean, I say come on in, join the group and participate.

And I also feel like it's important to have as many voices at the table as possible. So if we could get some other women in from other diverse communities or backgrounds, absolutely. I think that's important because what you see outside in the fabric of the community isn't sort of always represented in council. And that was another key thing of why I thought it was important to run.

And when we have sort of like school groups that come in or we do like the mayor does recognitions and we have little groups that come in, it's really exciting for me for little girls to see. The majority of the council right now is women. And so that's actually the first ever, let me think 1,2,3,4,5. Six. There's six of them on Council out of the ten seats.

So that's huge. But I think the reflection of the community being able to see themselves in the council is also really cool and important to me.

**Barbara** I think that's really cool that you bring up about kids seeing representation because it brings back to what you were talking about the very beginning when you were a child working on political campaigns and how that made an impression on you.

**Amanda** It did. It did. It really did.

And it was also seeing somebody that was important to me care so much and want to get involved was also instilled in me. And I hope that those school groups that come in or athletic teams or just any sort of younger person that comes in and sees that the majority is

women, but also a reflection of a diverse group of women, I hope that excites them and helps them believe that it's possible for them to have a seat at this table because it doesn't feel reachable.

I mean, I think if you would have asked me this ten years ago, I would say "Absolutely not." There's no way I'd be doing this. And now I just want everyone to know that this is doable and anybody can do it. The information collecting is a bit difficult at times, but there are wonderful resources out there now that I didn't know about when I was running and thankfully through walking in my community and now being involved, I know there are outlets that I can get some help with and take a look at.

**Barbara**

You've kind of touched on this about how it's majority women right now in council. So what do you see though, is the future of women in politics, either on a local level, state or national? Do you have any?

**Amanda**

I mean, locally I would love for us to have... I think we have great leadership now in our city, but I would love for more women to have leadership roles not only within the fabric of the directors of the city, but also within our leadership on that council.

But I am excited that we have a female president and vice president, but I would love for us to have a female mayor. That would be exciting. And I think sort of that new lens on Sheboygan could really change the course of the direction that Sheboygan is going in.

**Barbara**

And my last question is why should people get involved on a local level?

**Amanda**

Well, locally, this is where the change happens, right? You have to start at home. You have to start where you live first to see impact at a state, national level. Right. We all have to pitch in. Yes, it's important to vote for your president and do all those things. But I think locally it's important to talk about like what ordinances do we have in place and are they dated? Are there some things that we're saying that we don't believe in anymore?

It isn't what represents our community. Examples like dogs. We had a dog ordinance and now we're becoming a pet friendly community, but it took us too long to do that. Pets have been a part of us forever and they live here and we clearly have two dog parks. It's locally making that initiative and the local community members saying, like, "No, this is important to us." And so then getting involved has made change, so now we have a pet friendly task force.

Biking is another issue. All of those things happen when the community gets involved. And so that's why I think people should get involved locally. I think it's important to you can be very impactful in a very small way, and that will ripple out.

**Barbara**

Thank you so much for speaking with me. Is there anything else you want to add to this conversation?

**Amanda**

No, I don't think so. Thank you for having me.

**Barbara**

Thanks, Amanda.