

Interview details:

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Interviewer: Barbara Alvarez

Interviewee: Angela Ramey

Transcription:

Barbara

Can you please spell your name for me?

Angela

Sure. Angela. A-N-G-E-L-A Ramey R-A-M-E-Y.

Barbara

So Angela, can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your relation to being an elected official?

Angela

Sure. So I moved to Sheboygan nine and a half years ago. I'm originally from the Madison area, but I've also lived in the northwoods of Wisconsin and New York City and other cities in Wisconsin, but most of my life has been here in Wisconsin.

I moved here for a job. I work at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, where I'm the performing arts program director there, and I have a family. I've got two young children and a partner. And yeah we live... Where am I? Kind of the north side of Sheboygan. In District Five. Yeah.

Barbara

Awesome. So who or what inspired you to run for office?

Angela

So I wasn't inspired to run for office, so it's kind of maybe a unique story. I think my name got the attention of the mayor because I was a part of some correspondence that had to do with one of our green spaces here, the City Green. So, as I mentioned, I work for the Arts Center. A big part of my job is overseeing the Levitt Amp Sheboygan Music Series, which takes place on the City Green.

So it was a very public facing position, for sure, but there was just some happenings with that space, and there was some change of power there. And it happened to be around the same time that Markus, who was the District Five alderperson, was going to be moving out of the district, so they needed to replace that seat. So I was at work one day, and Mayor Ryan Sorenson came in to meet with me, and he brought it up. Is it something I would be interested in?

And it was honestly nothing I really ever considered, especially here in Sheboygan, because I don't feel quite like a native of Sheboygan, even though I've been here for almost ten years now. So just never anything I thought about. I have a friend who is on common council, so I knew a little bit about what it entailed. So when he brought it

up, I, of course thought about it and talked to my partner and went like, okay, I'd be interested in that.

So I told him that, yes, I'm interested in. So I had to write my letter of intent and send my resume and cover letter and then go before Common Council.

Barbara

So when was that?

Angela

Oh great question. That was just before summer, so I think yeah, it was in, I believe, May, right?

Barbara

Of this year?

Angela

Of this year. So I've only been on for a few months.

Barbara

May 2022.

Angela

Yeah.

Barbara

Great. So what was that appointment process like?

Angela

They did their best to warn me that it is an incredibly unnatural feeling.

So you go into city council, you go into the chamber and you're a part of the agenda. And so the mayor calls you up. And I had a prepared statement brief. I was told to keep it under three minutes, which I did, and just kind of said why I wanted to do this. And then you sit down and I was opposed. There was another person there who I just recently found out was going to be running and he gave his statement and took a seat.

And then they all vote by ballot, like literal paper ballot, who they're voting for. And then they read it off, they say, "for Ramey," and they name all the alders who vote for you and all the alders who vote for the other person and they say, "Majority is for Ramey." It was seven to two. And they call you up, you put your hand up, they swear you in right there and you take a seat and you're immediately a part of the meeting.

Barbara

Wow.

Angela

Yes. And you're voting from that point on.

Barbara

What a whirlwind.

Angela

And you're just like, okay. You get sworn in and that's incredibly nerve wracking. Right. And then you have your seat and you take your seat.

Barbara

So what was going through your mind when all that was taking place?

Angela

Well, I was very much like, "Don't trip over your words. Try not to sweat so much and try to be in the moment and just listen." Because sometimes you just get completely in your head and you don't even hear what's going on. And I just was so worried that I was going to miss something.

It's a tremendous responsibility to be on common council, and I do not take that lightly. So I just really wanted to be in the moment and to be as present as possible and to listen as closely as possible. And I had all the support from everyone. They all knew, they all didn't have to go through this process, but they all understood that you're stepping into a tornado and you're trying just to hold on.

So thankfully, it's been trial by error, learning as I go and just trying to read as much as possible and really understand how the whole process works.

Barbara

That is fascinating. How long is your appointment for?

Angela

I am fulfilling Markus' appointment, so I have one year and I can then run again next year. So I have to make that decision in January if I'm going to run or not.

Barbara

Got it. Wow. Thanks for sharing what that experience is like.

Angela

Of course, it's crazy.

Barbara

So what have you learned about yourself and the community so far and being in this role for the last three months?

Angela

I think the first thing that comes to mind is I need to learn how to have thicker skin. It's a very vulnerable position to be in. You're serving not only your district, but you're serving your whole city. And it's a huge responsibility.

And there's people in the community and part of the City Council and just part of the city elected officials and all of that. They have varying levels of passion, right? So you've got people who are incredibly outspoken, incredibly passionate, and just a wealth of knowledge. And this is talking about people in City Hall and in our community and the diversity there.

There are citizens who are very much engaged in what's happening in their city, and there are those who just kind of go along with it. I

actually admit that that was kind of me. I definitely always voted for the national elections and things like that. And then I started voting for more local and trying to be more involved and talking with people and understanding how that works. I'm learning I need to not take things personally.

It's not about me. And everyone has different ideas of how a city should run. And I just really appreciate when I get a lot of emails and phone calls and really how I start and end those conversations is that no matter what it's about, I just thank them for being an involved citizen. So I'm learning how actually we're all incredibly powerful in our city. Whether you're in Common Council or not, we have a lot of power, and if you just up your involvement a little bit, you can really make serious change.

Barbara

That's awesome. So what would you say to another woman who perhaps is thinking about running for local office or somebody approaches and says, "What do you think about being appointed for this position?" and they might be feeling doubtful or insecure. What would you say to that woman?

Angela

Do it if there's any interest whatsoever.

We need more women in politics, of course, now more than ever, on every level, from local to national. I understand that inner voice of that kind of imposter syndrome for sure, and I think I'm realizing everyone has a bit of that. And we really are kind of all walking the same path. We're all just walking each other home.

So you might think that you're going into this room where everyone is just leaps and bounds more intelligent than you or have more experience, and they do. So I enter that room with the utmost respect for people who have been there before me, but also respect for myself and knowing that I have something to say and that my opinion and my life experience and my knowledge is worthy to be heard.

And so I would share that with any woman that was thinking of doing that and had any kind of "I don't know if I'm smart enough, if I know enough about politics." All of that you can learn for sure your opinion and your path in life is worth hearing.

Barbara

And you mentioned how we need women in politics at all levels. What do you think is the future of women in politics?

Angela

I hope it follows the trend that it's going now.

We need to be the ones on top. We need to be the ultimate decision makers. Our voices need to be heard finally. We have had an entire history of being second class citizens and that has to come to a stop and we have to have an equal voice at the table for sure. So I'm hoping that more women... I would love to see more BIPOC, I would love to see more of the LGBTQ+ community represented, not only nationally, but locally.

I would love to see people with different abilities sitting on our Common Council. We need all of those voices heard. I truly believe that our Common Council should be a very obvious representation of the city that we live in. And right now that's not the case. And historically it's never been, of course. So that would be like my big encouragement is I want everyone... Just like for the concerts I always talk about, I want everyone to see themselves on stage. I think everyone should at least be able to find some sort of common tie to someone who is in our local politics.

Barbara

I love it. Last question, you've touched on this already about how much you've learned in this role. Why do you think people should get involved on a local level?

Angela

That's where change starts. Absolutely, that's where change starts. You've heard of trickle down? I really feel like in politics it should be trickle up. We need to be listening to our small, mid-sized communities and those people are very passionate humans who are making real change on this level and hopefully that will expand into the state level and then the national level.

So the more that you understand and sometimes, yeah, I'll admit it can be boring, it can be like, okay, talking about another sign or something along those lines, but real change happens. So I always encourage people, like when there's an election coming up, whatever level, but speaking specifically to the local level and you might be like, I don't understand what that addendum is. I don't understand what this person is.

As long as my streets are being fixed and my garbage is being picked up, everything is okay. I just say just learn, think about what's important to you. Maybe pick a top three or even top two, you know, moral belief that you have and find that politician that hits that close. You don't need to know about every single little thing. But if you're really passionate about women's rights or if you're really passionate about more dog friendly parks...if you're more passionate about those things.

Find out just you don't have to know everything about that politician. But find out some of those things that you align with and you'd be surprised that actually once you start just kind of having conversations with peers and other people about people who are running. You'll hear opinions and then you'll eventually be able to formulate your own. And right there, that is where your power lies because then you have a clear understanding of what you actually can do. And we can do really anything.

We can. We can sway one way or the other. If you really want something, we can actually do that. And I don't think people realize how powerful we are as citizens.

Barbara

Thank you so much, Angela. Is there anything else that's what you'd like to add to this conversation?

Angela

No. Just educate yourself, vote, and be a good person.

Barbara

Thanks, Angela.