

Alderman Vasquez ([00:01](#)):

So we can totally get started. Alright. I am Alderman Andre Vasquez of Chicago's 40th ward, which is uh encompasses Edgewater, Lincoln square Andersonville, and some other neighborhoods on the North side of town.

Bryce McAuliffe ([01:14](#)):

Cool.

Bryce McAuliffe ([01:15](#)):

How this Lisa told me that this is the anniversary or like first year anniversary as alderman we're coming up on that, is that correct?

Alderman Vasquez ([01:22](#)):

Yeah, it actually, it occurred on Wednesday.

Bryce McAuliffe ([01:24](#)):

Okay. Well, happy anniversary, sir. Do you, how did you want to become aldermen?

Alderman Vasquez ([01:33](#)):

So it's, it's a really strange story cause you know, I didn't get politically involved until about six years ago and I'm 41. I just turned 41 yesterday. Thanks. so a lot of it was because I got married and had kids and you know, I'd been working at a corporate environment. I was at, at and T for 12 years. When I met my wife and we had our kids and just kind of, I started looking at life differently and like what it meant to actually leave something behind when I'm gone. So that led to me engaging in a lot more in the community, becoming an organizer. And from there just talking to neighbors and building up the amount of support that ultimately led us to running for office now two years ago and we were successful. The things that I wanted to make sure that we did is just have more open government. So people understand how government works that we could solve for affordable housing that, you know, I just view myself as a problem solver. So I wanted to see what problems there were and where I can help. And thankfully, we've had a lot of opportunities to do that in our first year.

Bryce McAuliffe ([02:46](#)):

That's awesome. That kind of leads into the topic of this little chat. One of the questions I'm interested in is like the process of how something could go from an idea, like we talked about maybe like enhanced education for civil servants, police officers, firefighters, EMT, and their ways to interact with people with developmental disabilities. So how would something like that go from a conversation to public interest to then like funded legislation.

Alderman Vasquez ([03:18](#)):

So it's, it's different because everyone's got different ways to do it. Right. And I think that was a question I had prior to being in office and one that I wanted to figure out now being in office. So the funny part about it is there are things that are very challenging that you would imagine. Wouldn't be and things that are pretty simple, that you would think would be challenging. So when it comes to like drafting legislation, we've actually created a volunteer team of neighbors to help us with that because the actual drafting of a law of law itself isn't as challenging as one would think you can kind of Google information

to see what's been there before, figure out what the goal you're trying to solve is and what changes need to be made to get to where you need to get. Right? So that--that's been pretty, pretty simple and kind of build, and we're getting almost into a shark tank model of like, Hey, here's the legislation I have.

Alderman Vasquez ([04:13](#)):

What do you think? Right. And that parts, that part we can build. And I think my office has really focused on opening up government to be able to do that. The part that then is more challenging is once you've got that legislation you want to pass, you have to find a way to get 26 out of 50 people with wildly different perspectives to understand why it's important and agree with you, right. Or 34, if you want to be veto proof. Because if the mayor let's say the mayor wouldn't agree, they have a different range of tools. So that's, that's more of the harder part is like in order to, for any two people to come to an agreement, you've got to build a relationship with people to have that conversation. And so the first year it's very much introducing myself to people as a rookie. Sure. Getting to know what things are important to them. And then as we're talking about different legislations, figuring out how to tie that in. And I think the role of the public is important and kind of raising pressure and doing the things necessary to move people who aren't already with you, but it's part art and science to get all those things, working together to pass something

Bryce McAuliffe ([05:27](#)):

That sounds like a complicated process that I know almost nothing about.

Alderman Vasquez ([05:33](#)):

I mean, like I said, totally free. If you ever want to be a part of the volunteer team, you can always like hop in and just see what we do. I want people to learn that the other part is the part that's like hidden and a lot of variables, right?

Bryce McAuliffe ([05:48](#)):

Yeah. I think even before this conversation, I didn't, I often as a citizen, overlook the importance of my, my local elected officials. And so it's nice to get to talk to you about how you actually make change in a city as large as Chicago. And so I, you know, it's great to get, to hear what that's about and all of those steps that it takes to make change happen.

Alderman Vasquez ([06:18](#)):

Well, thank you. I mean, I appreciate it. Cause I was in that position before I got in here. So.

Bryce McAuliffe ([06:22](#)):

Yeah.

Alderman Vasquez ([06:22](#)):

It's always been my commitment to make it easier for other folks to understand it and like be able to utilize it because government doesn't belong to us. It belongs to the people.

Bryce McAuliffe ([06:30](#)):

Sure. Yeah.

Bryce McAuliffe ([06:33](#)):

What do you know in your like ward? Do you have demographic data on like students who are in like specialty schools who are now their routines have been disrupted and you know, they're educators and caretakers and family's lives have been sort of overturned as a result of this?

Alderman Vasquez ([06:54](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I think the hard thing to figure out is a scale. I mean, I, for me, my default is that everyone's gone through it. Yeah. Like I don't think anyone in our society feels like, you know, Oh, it's normal we're okay, right? Like uprooted the way everybody looks at education. And that's aside from folks who are neuro-atypical, it's a whole different ball game. As far as the interaction, sometimes the tactile learning, having the face to face with someone, if you need special education or a different style of education. So what the problems across the board bad. But if you're in a position where, where you have to have a specialized different kind of education, that's exacerbated even more. Yeah. Yeah.

Bryce McAuliffe ([07:46](#)):

Yeah. I was thinking about Ben, the person who's directing the show that I was involved in and now part of this project, his brother has a high impact autism and he is now the primary caregiver for his adult brother. And I've seen the, the stress get to him as we've met, you know, for weeks. And just my heart goes out to all of those families whose, who are dependent on a certain care that comes from outside of them. And that has now been fully removed from their structure.

Alderman Vasquez ([08:19](#)):

So, I mean, you think about the training that someone who is an educator has to be, to be able to work in that field because it is to some extent trauma informed. And it's also to your point having to have a tolerance of like, okay, this is, this is how it is. I understand that. And so very challenging when you remove that real stability in that dynamic and how do you make up for it? So it has a lot of effects across the board.

Bryce McAuliffe ([08:50](#)):

Do you, how aware are you of like the training protocol for police officers, EMTS, firefighters in terms of like sensitivity training

Speaker 3 ([09:04](#)):

[Inaudible]

Bryce McAuliffe ([09:05](#)):

Oh, I believe the alderman just froze.

Speaker 4 ([09:09](#)):

Hang on.

Bryce McAuliffe ([09:10](#)):

Or he's deep in thought.

Lisa Bowden ([09:12](#)):

No, it froze. Okay. Yeah. Sorry.

Bryce McAuliffe ([09:15](#)):

That's all right.

Lisa Bowden ([09:31](#)):

Can you hear us Andre?

Speaker 4 ([09:37](#)):

That was weird. That's weird.

Alderman Vasquez ([09:41](#)):

Yeah. I, you all froze on my end?

Speaker 4 ([09:44](#)):

Interesting.

Lisa Bowden ([09:47](#)):

'Cuz you froze on ours

Bryce McAuliffe ([09:48](#)):

You froze again for me

Alderman Vasquez ([09:50](#)):

Yeah. So to-- Can you hear me okay?

Bryce McAuliffe ([09:52](#)):

Yes. Yeah. I can hear you.

Alderman Vasquez ([09:54](#)):

Okay. So I am not as familiar as I could be like CIT training or like CIT officers, like there's crisis management training that goes on. But as far as the specifics I'm a little fuzzy, to be honest,

Bryce McAuliffe ([10:11](#)):

That's fine. That's uh- You know, a very specific area of expertise. So I'm asking about, you have a lot of things to oversee. How does, like, how does the structure of the Chicago PD breakdown? Like, what is your engagement? Is it's ward specific? What does that like hierarchy like?

Alderman Vasquez ([10:33](#)):

So, so it's a little bit of everything. So it is definitely wardspecific, you know, like our ward there, I want to say five different police districts. Well, I talked to the commanders and like deal with situations as they occur. They let me know about it. As it pertains to like the larger city level, you know, we're in talks with the superintendent, we also have hearings on public safety. We figure out what police accountability count looks like. So I think, I think the opportunities are there. And so are the

communications. I think you kind of, well, you alluded to every, every Alder has their own kind of like lane of things that they want to work on. And so there are people who come in and say, I clearly want to figure this inside and out Germany when it comes to police, it's really been about accountability in general, because there are a lot of instances where the color of your skin is going to determine the interaction and the outcome of it. And so we have to get much better at accountability there.

Bryce McAuliffe ([11:33](#)):

Sure. What are the ways that you are working on that?

Alderman Vasquez ([11:38](#)):

Yeah, so, well, we have been talking through and I was a champion of it before we came in to council was setting up a civilian police accountability board. Okay. It's one thing to have people from the police department sort of self-regulate, I don't really have a lot of faith in any entities to self regulate. It opens you up for, for problems. Establishing a civilian board would be having neighbors be able to weigh in on policy, practice training. So that's something that we've been working on accounts. And right now there's two, two different things. There's, C-Pac the Civilian Police Accountability Council and GAPA, which is a group, a grass roots Alliance for police, accountability, different bills relating to this. And so right now it's trying to figure out like, alright, what is the best solution? How do we figure out what moves forward? And that provides its own challenges because people disagree on those bills as well. Sure.

Bryce McAuliffe ([12:46](#)):

How you're

Alderman Vasquez ([12:50](#)):

Let me think of how to ask this question. Sure.

Bryce McAuliffe ([12:56](#)):

Okay. That's not the right way. What.

Alderman Vasquez ([13:03](#)):

Either way, either way,

Bryce McAuliffe ([13:05](#)):

Just say it. What school districts do you oversee and like what resources for special schooling do you have in your, in your ward?

Alderman Vasquez ([13:18](#)):

So we've got, as far as you know, that you've got about nine schools, right? As far as district, I have, I'm always fuzzy on what numbers they land on i just know which ones are in my ward. Right? Like that's kind of how I look at it. Most of them have some sort of special education training, right. Or classes or anything. We have somebody in our team Lindsey Tillman, who's our community outreach coordinator, Lisa. Right. I alwas getting the engagement and outreach. I got to make sure I get those. So Lindsey is our outreach cord, community outreach engagement, a coordinator. Yeah. and she does two things. She's in communication with all of our parks. She does communications. And she also is the one who's the first

liaison to all the schools. Okay. Oh, you know, she had been keeping us abreast of how those conversations are going.

Alderman Vasquez ([14:14](#)):

Once we got into the world of COVID, we establish weekly meetings with the principals of all our schools to find out how do we move forward? What does it look like to educate people? What are you doing and what needs do you have? So that's been a constant, regular communication. That's gone biweekly now. Cause we've got a system in place find out directly from the teachers or from the principles of like, what are the needs so we can help. We've also tried to keep our office open. We do keep our office open to like regular virtual town halls, regular meetings. So that neighbors, or, or kids can all voice those concerns to us. Cause that'll govern the direction we go in.

Bryce McAuliffe ([14:56](#)):

What is a virtual town hall?

Alderman Vasquez ([14:58](#)):

Like, it's kinda like this, you know, like we do the zoom calls. It's happens every Monday night from six 30 to seven 30, along with other various times.

Alderman Vasquez ([15:10](#)):

So we'll just, it'll kind of be like a coffee chat, so to speak some there where we'll do we'll do, I'll just be here and then whatever the neighbors bring in questions they ask, we'll just have the conversation. Sometimes we'll have things like we just had the Metra, uh, train station development, like the subject matter of like that night. Sure. Okay. We try to do what I always want to make sure that we're, we are as accessible. So people know how to find us where to find us and that we're easy to find. That's excellent. Yep. What is one of the the most unexpected challenges about being an alderman, but you could not have anticipated when you were running. Mmm.

Alderman Vasquez ([15:57](#)):

There's a lot of them, right. There's a lot of ch every day has got its own challenges and every day. Right. I enjoy that because it doesn't keep the job monotonous.

Bryce McAuliffe ([16:06](#)):

Sure.

Bryce McAuliffe ([16:06](#)):

Um I do think there is this challenge of like when you're outside of government and let's say your principal, then you're an activist. Like I was right. There tends to be a tendency of wanting to point out everything that's wrong in a system. And who's who's to blame for it being wrong when you suddenly become the person in that system, whole different ball game. Right. Because as being inside the system and trying to point it out, it's really unproductive because you become the person that people just don't want to associate with because you're just complaining. Sure, sure. I think it's a lack of recognition of the power we hold in the seat.

Alderman Vasquez ([16:58](#)):

Meaning if you're in the system and you got problems with the system, you should probably work on trying to fix that system as opposed to pointing out what's wrong with it all the time. Yeah. And that's a, that's a very difficult struggle because there's still the people outside of that system, still yelling and pointing at the problems. Yeah. You're in the middle of it going. I agree. There's a problem. I can't also just scream about there being a problem. So I'm kind of the way the problem goes because you're outside and you don't think it's, you've got a problem with some in general, anything I do is going to be viewed as insufficient. Right. And that's a very tough thing to kind of like, like manage and then you got, people just don't have the same kind of anger towards the system in general. And they're just like, yo, fix these potholes, whole different. Yeah.

Bryce McAuliffe ([17:51](#)):

What has been the easiest thing that you anticipated to be incredibly difficult?

Alderman Vasquez ([17:58](#)):

Uumm. I think that I, not that I thought it was going to be incredibly difficult, but I was a little bit anxious about the challenge. I had worked in retail my whole life and been doing like customer service. So to me, I did look at part of this role as being like, okay, it's customer service, the customer is our neighbor, but the scale is larger. It's 50,000 people, even though I was managing a state when I was at and T okay. It's different from, these are your neighbors. There's 55,000 of them. Good luck.

Bryce McAuliffe ([18:36](#)):

Right, right, right. Yeah.

Alderman Vasquez ([18:38](#)):

Well, what I recognize is the principles are the same. If you listen to people, you work as hard as you can to fix those issues. You apologize. And let people know when you drop the ball and just being caring. Right. You're, you're taking into consideration how stressed everyone else is. Yeah. I think people give you the credit. And so we've been able to really effectively do that. And now that we were in our first year in, we're actually putting out, and this is my customer service brain, a survey to let everyone know like, Hey, how have we been doing great us? And I think that'll help us gauge what we need to improve on.

Bryce McAuliffe ([19:12](#)):

That's an interesting way to frame local politic. It's customer service, but with the little higher stakes.

Alderman Vasquez ([19:18](#)):

Yeah, definitely. Definitely city councils. Like the state is a little bit different, cause they're not on the ground in the same way, but city council on your alders, that's, that's a majority of it and legislation is the other part of it.

Bryce McAuliffe ([19:31](#)):

Were you Chicago born and bred.

Alderman Vasquez ([19:35](#)):

Yeah. I was the earliest, I recall when I was a kid, it was Wicker park before it was nice. And then, yeah. And then my parents they're immigrants from Guatemala. My, my mom worked at an envelope factory in like the midnight shift. My dad was working shoe repair. Okay. so we were broke and every couple years we would move somewhere else on the North side of town. And I ended up here in the 40th nine years ago because I met my wife. Yup. Yeah. Chicago all day

Bryce McAuliffe ([20:06](#)):

Chicago day. Lisa told me that you used to do rap battles.

New Speaker ([20:13](#)):

Yes. I was a battle rapper for about 15 years.

New Speaker ([20:16](#)):

That's pretty wicked. How did you get involved in that?

Alderman Vasquez ([20:21](#)):

So I was just, I was a very socially awkward kid. I was really in my head a lot, my parents, because they were immigrants. Wouldn't let us go out. Lot of concerns. So I was very socially awkward and I was a kid who would write poetry. Right. And,ul think I started meeting kids in high school that listened to rap music and were rappers. And back in 1994,uthe people who like hip hop were like the outcasts. Like it was the Island of misfit toys, like look at God kids or whatever else. So it was easier for me to fall into that crowd and go from writing poems to like, okay, let me try some raps. And also, you know, a lot of people feel this way, when you're a kid, I just remembered the cafeteria room. Everybody cracking jokes at everybody.

Alderman Vasquez ([21:18](#)):

And like the way I, because I knew jokes were coming my way I would be like, I'm just going to be faster. Like I'll just crack jokes. And so you put that together with the poetry writing and all of a sudden it creates this like skill set of being able to be really quick on your feet improvise and say things that are to be frank, insulting. Oh yeah. I started getting notoriety at being good at that to the point that I ended up on HBO, MTV, I would tour nationally. Yeah. And like, well, here's, what's problematic about it. It was really cool to kind of develop myself confidence, learn to be on stage, to talk in front of people. But when you're being applauded for insulting people. There was a lot of things that I said that were like to be really Frank homophobic, misogynistic, toxic.

Alderman Vasquez ([22:11](#)):

And so part of, part of me coming to office and even before coming to office, it's like, I understood what was wrong. And I made it, I changed who I was. Yeah. But when you run for office, they don't forget. No. So a lot of our race was cool. Roll the tape. You know, it took a lot for me. It was hard to be on the other side of it. Cause we live in a society where they shame you for every mistake you've ever made. But because I knew that's what the attack was going to be. I just needed to be honest with people to say, yeah, I did stuff that was wrong. I was ignorant, but I've learned what it means to, to, to live your true, authentic life. And if we want to create a community in a coalition where we all look out for each other and we really take on corporate interests and like these things that keep us down, we, it's not about us creating these small groups of people. It's like, how do I bring people in? So they could be who they are. And we have a shared understanding. So it was a tough, tough journey to have to revisit all those

mistakes. What I think it was, it was necessary for me to have been able to communicate that understanding.

Bryce McAuliffe ([23:28](#)):

Yeah. To be able to look at yourself and look at the growth that you made and would need to make. And I think it's, it's huge to be able to look at your past self with, and go, and say like, I did this and I am still this person, but I'm looking at these things and I'm growing from that.

Alderman Vasquez ([23:51](#)):

Yes. Huge. Yeah. I think, I think the, there's a lot of terms that like bounce on my head and like, I always thought of like, we're all works in progress. Like you don't start out where you should be, yeah. You keep growing. Right. You know, we beat ourselves up about things because we live with it or a lot of, a lot of being able to be open and public about it gave me a chance to really reassess and like be able to talk to people in a manner that is productive.

Bryce McAuliffe ([24:23](#)):

That's huge. Hmm. I'm just like thinking about your progress as from a shy kid to a battle rapper on HBO and then to that journey, that journey is so interesting to me and very nontraditional, but also there's something that makes sense about it, about that progress.

Alderman Vasquez ([24:38](#)):

Yeah. No, I, I, I appreciate that. I do think that was definitely something I thought about running because I was always of the understanding or false understanding potentially of, of who should be in office. Yeah. Like I picture someone in this suit that had been a lawyer or knew a family who was in government and I never pictured somebody from my background to ever be able to be in government. And so I don't take that lightly. And I know that I have an example to set because I've been able to be in this position. Yeah. Do that as a unique opportunity. Yup. And if I mess it up

Bryce McAuliffe ([25:22](#)):

And methods their fabric and wants a more profits, that seems like a lot of weight on your shoulders that you don't really need to carry.

New Speaker ([25:33](#)):

(Laughing) That's the weight right now I'll make sure every other rapper, can run for president.

New Speaker ([25:39](#)):

Any battle rappers should be able to run for president.

Alderman Vasquez ([25:45](#)):

That's right yeah. I mean what's really crazy about that is it did build me up to be here, like puff skin where people and people insult you all the time, yell in your face, all that. Like it made it when I was running for office, I did have skillsets that allow me to maneuver a little bit better because of that.

Bryce McAuliffe ([26:04](#)):

Yeah. Your ability to take, uh, criticism duly or unnecessarily aggressive is probably greater than somebody who went to, uh, business school or law school and graduated and started running for office.

Alderman Vasquez ([26:18](#)):

Oh yeah. Like, like debates. Yeah. Right. Like someone's has not been used to getting rattled in real time in front of a crowd. Right. Debates can go a whole different way for me. I mean, I had, and you might be able to look it up. There was a lot of stuff that got said to me on stage or on camera, during debates where I had to just be like, okay, cool. I'm not, I'll just wait until it's my turn to answer. But it was wild.

Bryce McAuliffe ([26:53](#)):

Well, I know you've got a busy schedule, so I don't want to keep you too much longer. I just wanted to say thank you so much for, again, being a part of this and offering your little bit of knowledge about city government and, and a little bit of yourself with me and our audience. So thank you so much.

Alderman Vasquez ([27:12](#)):

Yeah. No, thank you for doing it. As somebody who was working on a podcast and recording stuff on my end, like I know how, how at moments. It feels like nobody's listening but yourself, but it's super important to be able to record that stuff because all it takes is one person to learn from it and you can change the trajectory of a life. So I thank you for doing that. Thank you so much. And thank you, Lisa. Alright. I'll see ya.

Bryce McAuliffe ([27:43](#)):

Have a great weekend. Thank you. Bye bye.