

JESSE DOWNING - KENOSHA CITY COMMON COUNCIL 15TH DISTRICT

Key findings include:

- **Former Alder:** Downing was a member of the Kenosha City Council from 2000-2014. He lost his seat in 2014 only to win it back in 2016. He then lost his seat again in 2018 and has not sought to return to the council since then.
- **Removed from Ballot in 2018:** In 2018 Downing was removed from the ballot. The Kenosha City Clerk cited he listed the wrong address on petition sheets and had insufficient valid signatures. Downing was eventually reinstated to the ballot after Kenosha County Circuit Court Judge Anthony Milisauskas overturned findings by the city clerk and the Wisconsin Election Commission. Downing went on to lost that race regardless and would not return to the City Council again.
- **Deep Ties to Kenosha:** Downing seems to have deep ties to the Kenosha area; his wife owned a restaurant in the nearby Village of Somers, of which he appeared to take action for (e.g. applying for a liquor license and other permits). Downing also served on the Kenosha Board of Water Commissioners in 2017 and 2018.
- **Running for Open Seat:** Downing is running for the open 15th District Kenosha City Council seat in 2026 as the incumbent, Jack Rose, is not seeking reelection.
- **Republican and Trump Supporter:** Downing is a Republican; he is pictured with a MAGA hat on his personal Facebook, likes several local and state Republican figures on his Facebook, and he has contributed to Wisconsin Republican figures over the years. Downing also likes the page of a Republican candidate for Kenosha County Sheriff who appears to be running to the right of the current sheriff and who supports Kenosha County cooperation with ICE.
- **Contributions to Election Deniers & Conservatives:** Downing has contributed to Wisconsin election deniers, including 2022 GOP nominee for Governor, Tim Michels (including a pre-primary donation), 2023 GOP candidate for Wisconsin State Supreme Court who helped Republicans with a fake electors plan, Dan Kelly, and William Michel, a self proclaimed law and order Kenosha judge candidate.
- **Somewhat Large Contributions:** Downing made a \$500 contribution in January 2024 to William Michel's campaign for Kenosha County Circuit Court, Branch 2 and a \$500 contribution to Scott Walker's campaign in 2010. He also made four other contributions over the years of \$100, indicating somewhat deep pockets that could be used to finance his own campaign.
- **Limited Information:** Despite being a long-time alder, there was very limited information available online relating to Downing or his prior service as an alder. Aside from one article relating to his support of an Amazon facility in his district, there was no policy related information online.
- **Limited Campaign Infrastructure:** As of the writing of this memo, Downing did not appear to have any campaign infrastructure. He had not even announced his candidacy on his personal Facebook.

Kenosha is a mid-sized city on Lake Michigan with 98,000–100,000 residents, a median age near 38, and 42,000 households. The population is diversifying: 62.8% White (non-Hispanic), 10.3% Black (non-Hispanic), and 19.7% Hispanic/Latino, with smaller Asian and multiracial shares [[Census](#), 9/26/2025]. The city maintains an industrial base and increasingly functions as a commuter hub between Milwaukee and Chicago.

Politically, the City of Kenosha leans Democratic, while Kenosha County has trended more competitive/right. The county, long Democratic at the presidential level, shifted right in the Trump era and remains a battleground. At the local level, a GOP-backed majority captured the officially nonpartisan County Board in 2022 and subsequently repealed weapons restrictions in county buildings and adopted a “Second Amendment sanctuary” stance [[Kenosha County](#), 9/26/2025] [[Wisconsin Examiner](#), 4/2/2024]. The political climate has also featured election-denial rhetoric: in May 2022 a county supervisor hosted an “election integrity” event in Kenosha that local media described as promoting debunked 2020 claims; around the same period, then-Mayor John Antaramian was subpoenaed in Michael Gableman’s election investigation, which he criticized as a waste of public resources [[Wis Politics](#), 9/26/2025].

Federal context—2020 and 2024. In 2024, Donald Trump carried Kenosha County (official county results show Trump 52% to Biden 46% in the county), even as Joe Biden narrowly won Wisconsin statewide, underscoring the county’s rightward tilt relative to the state. In 2024, U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil won re-election in WI-01, which includes Kenosha, reflecting continued GOP strength in the district; statewide, Sen. Tammy Baldwin won re-election, demonstrating ongoing split-ticket dynamics [[WPR](#), 11/5/2024]. Kenosha County’s official 2024 results are posted by the clerk (including the Nov. 5 general), and the Wisconsin Elections Commission certified statewide 2024 results at the end of November [[Kenosha County](#), 9/26/2025].

Harris won this district 51-49 in 2024.

BACKGROUND

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Downing is employed in the food distribution industry. His 2026 Statement of Economic Interest lists “Lipari Foods” (a wholesale food distributor) in Warren, MI as his employer [[Kenosha](#)]. There are two LinkedIn accounts for a Jesse Downing, one of which lists him as an Account Sales Manager with Dr. Pepper Snapple Group and the other lists him as a District Sales Supervisor and previously a District Manager with Keurig Dr. Pepper Inc.

An obituary from a Debby Downing lists Jesse Downing of Somers (immediately north of Kenosha) as her surviving husband. The obituary lists Debby Downing is survived by three children and three grandchildren.

Downing’s late wife Debby owned and operated a restaurant, Tarbender’s Grill, in neighboring Somers, WI. The restaurant is now closed [[Legacy Obituary](#)]. Jesse Downing appeared at a Kenosha County Commissioners meeting in 2005 to speak in support of Downing Holdings LLC’s request for a conditional use permit to install volleyball pits and other outdoor recreational activities in the county [[Kenosha County](#)]. Downing also requested a liquor license for Tarbender’s Grill in 2016 in the Village of Somers [[Village of Somers](#)].

POLITICAL & CAMPAIGN BACKGROUND

Downing is a veteran Kenosha politician. He first won election to the Kenosha Common Council (alderman) in 2000 and served continuously until losing his seat in 2014. He ran again and won in 2016

but then again lost his seat in 2018 to challenger and current alder, Dominic Ruffalo [[Kenosha News](#)]. In 2012 he ran an unsuccessful bid for Kenosha Mayor losing 69-31 in the general election.

Downing served on the Kenosha Board of Water Commissioners as recently as 2017 and 2018 [[Kenosha Agenda](#), [Kenosha Agenda](#)].

Downing's campaign infrastructure appears modest: he has no known campaign website or social-media accounts.

Downing received a \$100 contribution from the WI PEOPLE Conference, AFSCME's Wisconsin PAC, in 2014 [[WI Campaign Finance](#)].

Downing is a Republican and a Trump supporter, posting a picture of him in a MAGA hat on his [personal Facebook](#). He has also contributed to Wisconsin Republicans, including two \$500 donations, one in 2010 and one in 2024, indicating he may have deep pockets to finance his campaign. Some contributions were also to [election deniers](#).



ON THE ISSUES

SUPPORTED AMAZON WAREHOUSE

In 2013 Downing backed a proposed \$250M Amazon distribution center in his Kenosha City Council district, arguing it would create more than 1,000 jobs and that city tax subsidies (TIF) would be paid back within about 7–10 years [[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#)].

VULNERABILITIES & ADVERSE FINDINGS OF NOTE

LIKES REPUBLICAN SHERIFF CANDIDATE

Downing likes [James Beller](#), candidate for Kenosha County sheriff. Beller is challenging incumbent Kenosha County Sheriff, David Zoerner. Both Beller and Zoerner are Republicans, but Beller said he would enter Kenosha County into a controversial 287(g) agreement with ICE during a campaign statement on January 7, 2026. Almost a week later, Zoerner announced Kenosha County would be entering a 287(g) agreement with ICE, even after saying his department would not enter into an agreement with ICE in September 2025 [[ACLU WI](#)]. These events may signal Beller is an upstart, far-right candidate who is pushing Zoerner to the right.

REMOVED FROM BALLOT IN 2018

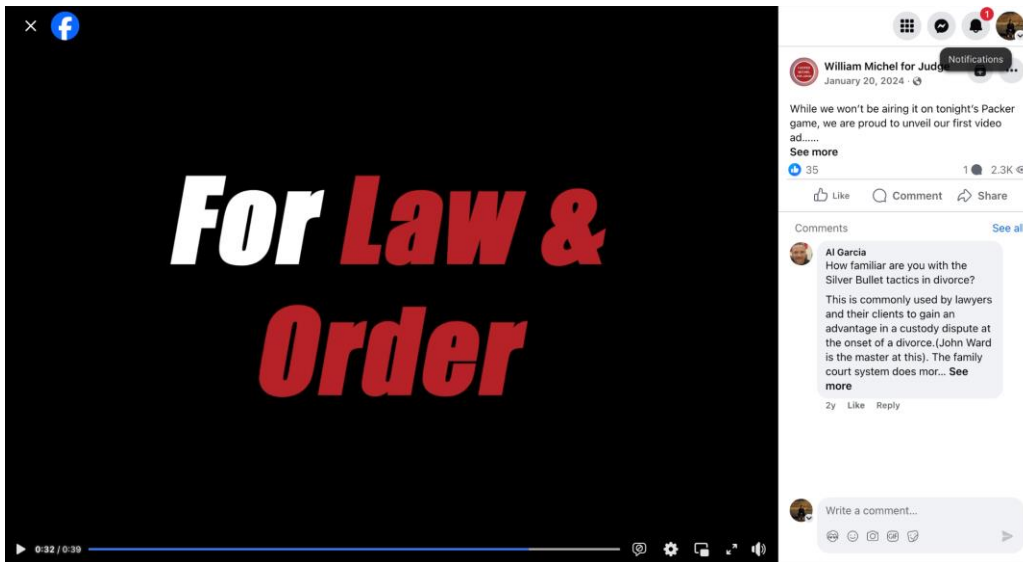
The most recent issue Downing faced was a recent ballot-access controversy. Before the spring election in Wisconsin in 2018, the Kenosha City Clerk rejected Downing's nomination papers for district 16, citing he listed the wrong address on petition sheets and had insufficient valid signatures. The state election commission initially upheld the disqualification, temporarily keeping him off the April 2018 ballot [WGTD]. Downing sued, and a Kenosha judge later ruled his compliance was "substantial" and ordered his name restored [WGTD]. Downing eventually lost that race to current Alder Dominic Ruffalo.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ELECTION DENIERS & CONSERVATIVES

Downing made two contributions to Tim Michels, the 2022 Republican candidate for Governor and [election denier](#) in Wisconsin. Downing made a \$100 contribution before the GOP primary in August 2022, indicating he was an early supporter of Michels, and \$100 after the primary in October 2022.

Downing also contributed to Friends of Justice Daniel Kelly, the supreme court justice campaign for Daniel Kelly in 2023. Kelly advised Republican party officials on a plan to have fake electors vote for Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election [Wisconsin Watch]. AP also reported Kelly was paid by state and national Republicans to advise on election issues, including the plan to have fake GOP electors cast ballots for Donald Trump even though he lost the state [AP].

Downing also contributed to William Michel's unsuccessful campaign for Kenosha County Circuit Court, Branch 2. Michel's campaign portrayed him as the law and order candidate in a campaign ad on his Facebook. The contribution was for \$500, indicating Downing may have deep pockets for his campaign.



SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS

[Personal Facebook](#)

[LinkedIn 1](#)

[LinkedIn 2](#)

