

REBECCA BOWKER REPORT



JUNE 2022

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BIOGRAPHY

Name: Rebecca Bowker (Karis)

Birth: Jan. 26, 1974

Family: Divorced; Two sons

Education: Bachelor's degree, Western Illinois University
MPA, Kaplan University

Military: None

Professional Experience: Executive officer at the Iowa State Penitentiary

Political Experience: Fort Madison City Council (2019-Present)

TIMELINE

Jan. 26, 1974	Born in Marengo, IA
1993	Son born in Wisconsin. Paternity case filed in Wisconsin
1995	Moved to Fort Madison
2001	Second son born
2003	Divorced William Bowker
2008	Hired as Executive Assistant at Iowa State Penitentiary
2013	Divorced Scottie Niggemeyer
2019	Elected to Fort Madison City Council

AVENUE H

Editor's Note: The plans to repave and reconstruct Avenue H were initiated before Rebecca Bowker was a member of the Fort Madison City Council.

- **Rebecca Bowker is the owner of the property located at 827 Ave. H, Fort Madison, IA**
 - According to the Lee County Treasurer, Score Properties, LLC, with the address of 827 Ave. H, apt. 3, Fort Madison, IA is the owner of the property located at 827 Ave. H, Fort Madison, IA.¹
 - According to the Iowa Secretary of State, Rebecca Bowker is the registered agent for Score Properties, located at 827 Ave. H, #3, Fort Madison, IA.²
- **When her sons moved out, Rebecca Bowker sold her house and moved into her downtown building at 827 Ave. H, which has several apartments. The lower level is leased to the Hidden Beauty salon and she is hoping to one day have a restaurant or neighborhood bar next door near the ground level entrance**
 - In an Oct. 9, 2019, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “She is no stranger to community projects and causes, but this is her first pursuit of a public office.

“Does freshman class president in high school count?” joked Rebecca Bowker who is seeking the first ward seat at the Nov. 5. city/school election.

“When asked what is on her to-do list, if elected, she says she really doesn't have some set, predetermined agenda, but that she believes she can bring a needed approach to the council’s decision making.”³
 - According to the same article, “In closing, Bowker says she has a personal investment in the community. When her sons moved out, she sold her house and moved into her downtown building at 827 Ave. H, which now has several apartments — and Bowker lives in one of them. The lower level is leased to the Hidden Beauty salon and she is hoping to one day have a restaurant or neighborhood bar next door near the ground level entrance.

“I want to see Fort Madison soar, but I want to do it based on data and facts, and not by micromanaging city departments,’ she added.”⁴
- **In March 2021, Rebecca Bowker voted to award a \$3.3 million contract for the Avenue H reconstruction project, from 6th Street to 10th Street, which called for**

¹ Parcel Details: 827 Ave. H, Lee County Treasurer, Accessed June 10, 2022

² Business Entity Summary: Score Properties, Iowa Secretary of State website, Accessed June 10, 2022

³ Robin Delaney, “Bowker says she’ll bring a data-driven voice to council,” *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 9, 2019

⁴ Robin Delaney, “Bowker says she’ll bring a data-driven voice to council,” *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 9, 2019

water mains, storm sewers and sanitary sewers in that area to be replaced, in addition to the road reconstruction

- According to the minutes of the March 2, 2021, Fort Madison City Council meeting, concerning Public Improvement Project 2020-05, Reconstruction of Old Highway 61, 6th to 10th Street, Rebecca Bowker voted to award a construction contract in the amount of \$3,324,777 to Jones Contracting Corp., of West Point, Iowa, and approving contract and bonds of Jones Contracting Corp., pending receipt of the documents (Passed 6-0).⁵
- According to the March 2, 2021, city council packet, “That the following bid for the construction of certain public improvements described as Public Improvement Project 2020-05, Reconstruction of Old Highway 61 – 6th to 10th Street is, be and is hereby accepted, the same being the lowest responsible bid received for said work, as follows:

“Contractor: __Jones Contracting Corp._____

“Amount of Bid: _ \$3,324,777_____

“Portion of Project: _ All construction work__”⁶

- In a March 3, 2021, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “No comments from the public were given at a public hearing on the next phase of the Avenue H reconstruction project at Tuesday night’s meeting of the Fort Madison City Council.

“However, Councilwoman Rebecca Bowker did ask whether sewer separation issues could interrupt the work.

“Public Works Director Mark Boussetot said the project calls for water mains, storm sewers and sanitary sewers in that area to be replaced, in addition to the road reconstruction.

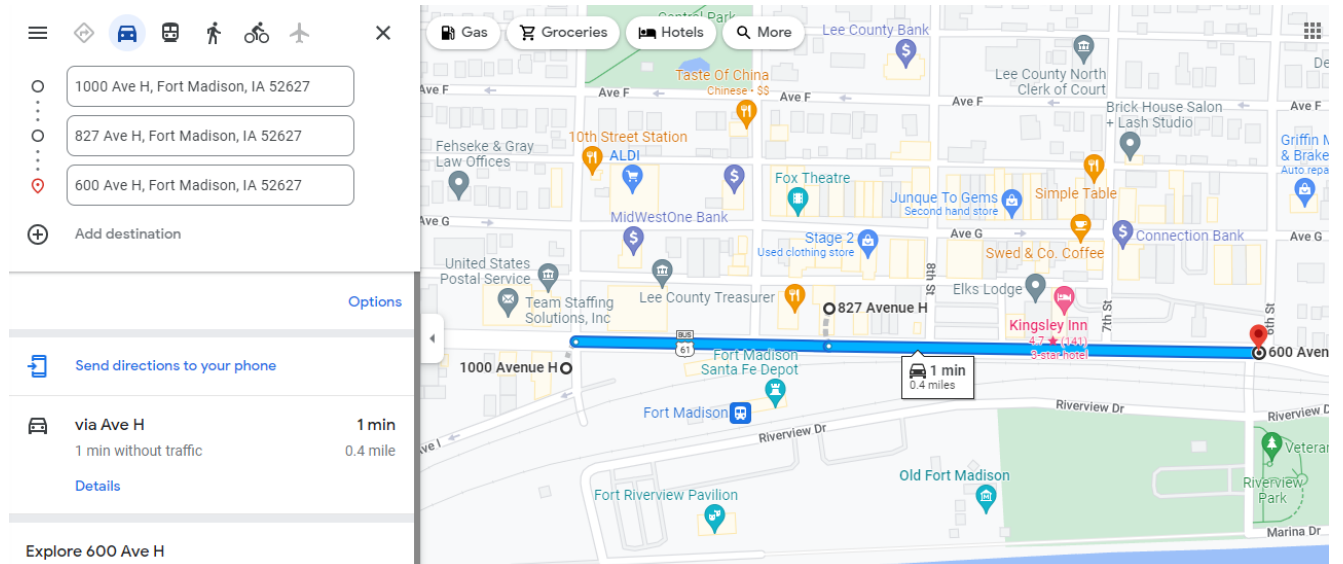
“City officials opened two bids on the project last week. The engineer’s estimate on the project was \$3,893,951 and both bids were below it.

“The lowest bid was \$3,324,777 from Jones Contracting Corp out of West Point and the council voted 6-0, with Councilman Chad Cangas absent, to award the contract to that firm. The other bid was for \$3,643,451 from Langman Construction of Rock Island, Ill.”⁷

⁵ Minutes, Fort Madison City Council, March 2, 2021

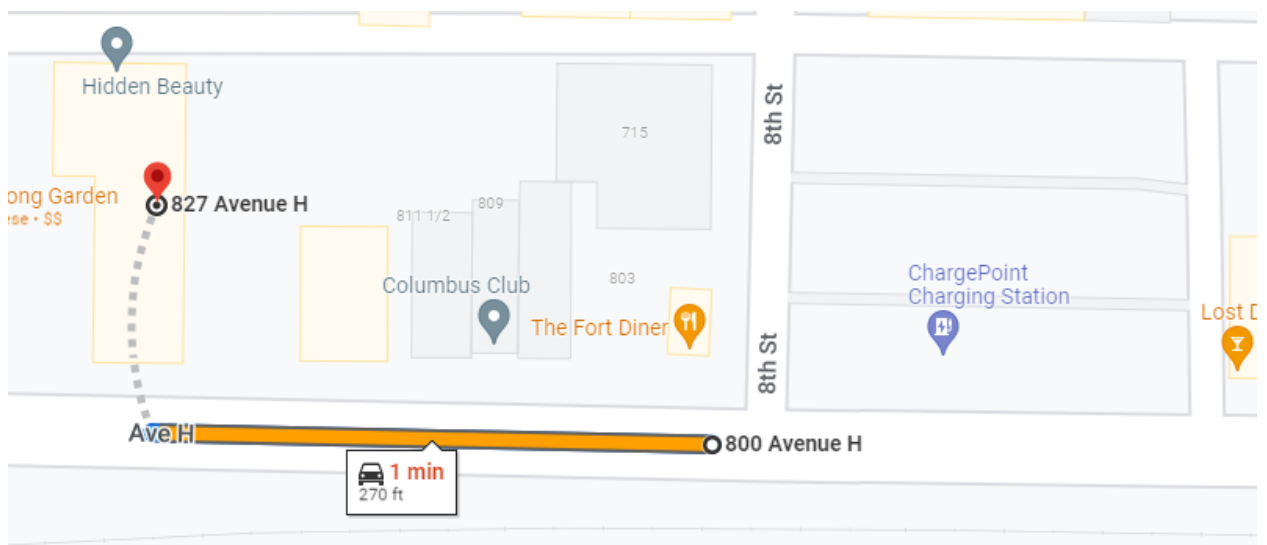
⁶ Packet, Fort Madison City Council meeting, March 2, 2021

⁷ Robin Delaney, “Highway project awarded to WP firm,” *Daily Democrat*, March 3, 2021



➤ **In November 2020, Rebecca Bowker voted to adopt plans for the second phase of the permeable paver project which included the parking area in front of the Pen City Parking Lot at 8th Street and Avenue H**

- According to the minutes of the Nov. 17, 2020, Fort Madison City Council meeting, Rebecca Bowker voted to adopt plans, specifications, form of contract and estimate of cost for PIP 2020-08, Phase 2, Parking Lot Reconstruction and Storm Water Improvements. Public Works Director Mark Boussetot said the project was the second phase of the permeable paver project which includes the parking area in front of Council Chambers and the Pen City Parking Lot at 8th Street and Avenue H (Passed 7-0).⁸



⁸ Minutes, Fort Madison City Council meeting, Nov. 17, 2020

➤ **In September 2021, in regard to the Pen City parking lot at 8th Street and Avenue H, Rebecca Bowker said that two charging stations for electric vehicles were being installed, which could be a boost to businesses and tourist attractions, adding, “It’s going to take 3-4 hours to charge so what else are there going to do? It will sort of hold them captive”**

- In a Sept. 2, 2021, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “It was like a state of the union (or city) address – an overview of a variety of current and future projects – from streets and the marina project to the development of the old prison.

““There are 55 structures on 40 some acres. It’s a very complex old site to take on all by one entity,’ First Ward Councilwoman Rebecca Bowker said about reuse of the historic prison.”⁹

- According to the same article, “With regard to the Pen City parking lot Eighth Street and Avenue H, Bowker said two charging stations for electric vehicles are being installed, which could be a boost to businesses and tourist attractions.

““It’s going to take 3-4 hours to charge so what else are there going to do? It will sort of hold them captive.”¹⁰

⁹ Robin Delaney, “Councilwoman gives overview of city projects, issues,” *Daily Democrat*, Sept. 2, 2021

¹⁰ Robin Delaney, “Councilwoman gives overview of city projects, issues,” *Daily Democrat*, Sept. 2, 2021

SCHOOL BOND

➤ **In 2007, Rebecca Bowker advocated for a yes vote on the Fort Madison school bond referendum**

- In an Oct. 10, 2007, letter to the editor in the *Daily Democrat*, Rebecca Bowker wrote, “Fort Madison is very fortunate to have school administrators that have the foresight to plan in advance and to act instead of react.

“Many people have questioned the logic of buying land before a bond issue has passed. The fact of the matter is that Fort Madison has two very old (over 80 years) buildings that will need to be replaced. Eventually these buildings will pose safety issues for the nearly 800 children who attend those schools.

“Luckily the school administrators have the foresight to recognize this and have chosen to act now while the land is available and the timing is right.

“The school district’s fiscal responsibility has shown through by being one of the few districts in the State of Iowa with NO capital debt. Great job! However, an investment in our educational infrastructure is necessitated now, not only by frail buildings, but by showing a positive commitment to Fort Madison's future.

“I applaud the ability of the school board and superintendent to realize that Fort Madison’s glass is half full, not half empty as some people would like to think. A positive vote is a vote of confidence in Fort Madison and its children.”¹¹

➤ **The bond referendum would have meant a tax increase of \$15.75 per month for the first year of the debt. After the first year, the tax increase would have potentially dropped to \$7.29 per month on a \$70,000 home**

- In an Oct. 4, 2007, op-ed in the *Daily Democrat*, managing editor Robin Delaney wrote, “While members of the Building For Success Committee were asked for more details about the proposed K-8 school in Fort Madison and criticized for not having them all, its presentation Tuesday night in West Point did address many of the most commonly-asked questions about the upcoming bond issue.

“Voters in the Fort Madison school district are being asked to go to the polls Oct. 16 to consider passing a \$16 million bond issue to construct a new K-8 school to replace the existing Denmark Elementary School and Fort Madison Middle School on 97-plus acres of land on the west end of Fort Madison near Bluff Road and 48th Street.”¹²

¹¹ Rebecca Bowker op-ed, “Foresight and fiscal responsibility should be rewarded with a Yes vote,” *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 10, 2007

¹² Robin Delaney op-ed, “Committee fields most common questions about proposed K-8 school,” *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 4, 2007

- According to the same op-ed, “For the construction of the new K-8 school the bond referendum would provide \$16 million with a tax levy of \$2.70 per \$1,000 of property valuation - for the first year. Dean said the average residential home in the school district is valued at \$70,000 which would mean a tax increase of \$15.75 per month for the first year of the debt.

“After the first year, Marang has said school officials plan to use any unused portion of the district's local sales tax revenue to lower the tax levy by as much as \$700,000 annually. Doing this would mean a tax increase of \$7.29 per month on a \$70,000 home.”¹³

➤ **Fort Madison voters rejected the new school referendum by a nearly four-to-one margin**

- In an Oct. 17, 2007, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “Voters in the Fort Madison School District soundly struck down the \$16 million new school proposal on Tuesday night by an almost 4 to 1 margin in every precinct.

“Voters turned out to the tune of 32 percent, defeating the new school referendum with a final tally of 2,796 ‘no’ votes to 729 ‘yes’ votes.

“Marty Dean, chairman of the ‘Building for Success’ committee, feels that the committee needs to start over with a new approach to the citizens in the Fort Madison Community School District.”¹⁴

¹³ Robin Delaney op-ed, “Committee fields most common questions about proposed K-8 school,” *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 4, 2007

¹⁴ “School bond? Voters scream No!” *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 17, 2007

FRANCHISE FEE

- **In November 2019, the Fort Madison City Council appointed Rebecca Bowker to head up a small group charged with gathering more information on a potential franchise fee and to come up with the best way to educate citizens as to why it is needed**
 - In a Nov. 20, 2019, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “Residents can expect to hear the words ‘franchise fee’ often in the upcoming months.

“At a work session following its regular meeting Tuesday night, the Fort Madison City Council appointed newly-elected Rebecca Bowker, who will be sworn in as the first ward’s representative on Jan. 7, to head up a small group charged with gathering more information on the subject and to come up with the best way to educate citizens as to why it is needed.”¹⁵

- **In September 2020, the Fort Madison City Council discussed the potential of adopting a franchise fee on electricity and natural gas. The fees are passed through the utility companies as add-ons to customers’ bills**
 - In a Sept. 17, 2020, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “Doing nothing is not an option.

“That was the general consensus of Fort Madison officials when given a less than positive overview of the city’s financial future at Tuesday night’s meeting of the City Council.

“City Manager David Varley said the city’s monthly bills require about \$500,000 from the general fund, which pays for 8-9 city departments, with the bulk of that amount being police and fire.”¹⁶
 - According to the same article, “The second option presented to council was not a new suggestion. Varley said the council could adopt a franchise fee on electricity and natural gas as it discussed as recently as last January. The fees are passed through the utility companies as add-ons to customers’ bills.

“Cities are able to adopt franchise fees of up to 5%, however Varley limited his projects to 1-3%.”¹⁷

- **At the meeting, Rebecca Bowker said that the council had no other choice on the franchise fee**
 - In a Sept. 17, 2020, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “Councilwoman Rebecca Bowker said she empathized with local business and industries that consume the

¹⁵ Robin Delaney, “City Council decides to eye franchise fee,” *Daily Democrat*, Nov. 20, 2019

¹⁶ Robin Delaney, “Council eyes franchise fee,” *Daily Democrat*, Sept. 17, 2020

¹⁷ Robin Delaney, “Council eyes franchise fee,” *Daily Democrat*, Sept. 17, 2020

bulk of utilities and was concerned about the impact on low-income residents, but agreed the council had no other choice.”¹⁸

➤ **In October 2020, representatives of local industry brought their concerns about a proposed franchise fee to the city council, saying the proposed 1.5% to 5% franchise fee on gas and electrical usage would disproportionately impact local industries**

- In an Oct. 6, 2020, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “Representatives of local industry brought their concerns about a proposed franchise fee to the Fort Madison City Council at its meeting Tuesday night.

“Representing Fort Madison Economic Development Corporation, Bob Huffman said the proposed 1.5% to 5% franchise fee on gas and electrical usage disproportionately impacts local industries.

“Fifty percent or more of the revenue will be realized by just 5 of our industries,” Huffman said. “There is concern that 1.5% is just the tip of the iceberg.

“Huffman thanked Mayor Matt Mohrfeld and Councilwoman Rebecca Bowker for their meetings and updates with local industry officials, but he encouraged them to find alternative measures ‘that isn’t predominantly on the backs of local industry.’

“At its Sept. 15 meeting, the city council decided to pursue a franchise fee, in addition to other options, to offset a \$400,000 annual deficit in the city’s general fund that pays for 8-9 city departments, with the bulk of that being for fire and police services.”¹⁹

➤ **Fort Madison resident David Van Ginkel said the fee was “taxation without representation” because residents were not being allowed to vote on it, adding, “This town is made up of a lot of senior citizens. A lot of these people are on fixed incomes. You’re throwing amounts – 1.5% or 5% – is really going to crippled [sic] this town. It’s not helping the citizens. It’s going to hurt them in the long term”**

- In an Oct. 6, 2020, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “Fort Madison resident David Van Ginkel said the fee ‘is taxation without representation’ because residents are not being allowed to vote on it.

“This town is made up of a lot of senior citizens. A lot of these people are on fixed incomes. You’re throwing amounts – 1.5% or 5% – is really going to crippled this town. It’s not helping the citizens. It’s going to hurt them in the long term.”²⁰

➤ **In November 2020, Rebecca Bowker voted to set a date for public hearings that would pave the way for a 1.5 percent franchise fee to be implemented on gas and electric consumed in the city**

¹⁸ Robin Delaney, “Council eyes franchise fee,” *Daily Democrat*, Sept. 17, 2020

¹⁹ Robin Delaney, “Industry reps, resident object to franchise fee,” *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 6, 2020

²⁰ Robin Delaney, “Industry reps, resident object to franchise fee,” *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 6, 2020

- According to the minutes of the Nov. 2, 2020, Fort Madison City Council meeting, Rebecca Bowker voted for a resolution setting public hearing on a proposed ordinance repealing the current electric franchise, granting a new franchise to Interstate Power and Light, and imposing a franchise fee (Passed 5-0).²¹
- In a Nov. 2, 2020, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “The first reading of a resolution prohibiting parking on the south side of Avenue E, between Second and 24th Streets, will be considered tonight by the Fort Madison City Council.”²²
- According to the same article, “Also on tonight’s agenda is the setting of a date for public hearings that will pave the way for a 1.5% franchise fee to be implemented on gas and electric consumed in the city.

“At its Sept. 15 meeting, the city council decided to pursue a franchise fee to offset a \$400,000 annual deficit in the city's general fund that pays for 8-9 city departments, with the bulk of that being for fire and police services.”²³

➤ **In December 2020, Rebecca Bowker voted to implement the 1.5 percent franchise fee in Fort Madison**

- According to the minutes of the Dec. 15, 2020, Fort Madison City Council meeting, Rebecca Bowker voted approve the third reading of an ordinance repealing the current gas franchise, granting a new franchise to MidAmerican Energy Company, and imposing a franchise fee.²⁴
- According to the minutes of the Dec. 15, 2020, Fort Madison City Council meeting, Rebecca Bowker voted to approve the third reading of an ordinance repealing the current electric franchise, granting a new franchise to Interstate Power and Light, and imposing a franchise fee.²⁵

***Editor’s Note:** a one percent fee on electricity would have added \$1.25/month on a resident’s monthly bill.*²⁶

²¹ Minutes, Fort Madison City Council, Nov. 2, 2020

²² Robin Delaney, “Ave. E parking, franchise fee on tonight’s agenda,” *Daily Democrat*, Nov. 2, 2020

²³ Robin Delaney, “Ave. E parking, franchise fee on tonight’s agenda,” *Daily Democrat*, Nov. 2, 2020

²⁴ Minutes, Fort Madison City Council, Dec. 15, 2020

²⁵ Minutes, Fort Madison City Council, Dec. 15, 2020

²⁶ Robin Delaney, “Industry reps, resident object to franchise fee,” *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 6, 2020

FEES

➤ **In 2022, Rebecca Bowker voted to double the cost of pet animal licenses in Fort Madison**

- According to the minutes of the Jan. 18, 2022, Fort Madison City Council meeting, Rebecca Bowker voted to adopt a resolution to set animal license, impound and penalty fees effective February 1, 2022 (Passed 7-0).²⁷
- In a Jan. 20, 2022, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “Discussion about increasing animal-related fees and upping compliance among pet owners caused the fur to fly briefly at Tuesday night’s meeting of the Fort Madison City Council.

“The cost of pet animal licenses will double as of Feb. 1 and, if warranted, an owner can be charged a \$50 impoundment fee per incident, in addition to other expenses.

“Police Chief Mark Rohloff said it has been 15 years since the fees were increased.”²⁸

²⁷ Minutes, Fort Madison City Council, Jan. 18, 2022

²⁸ Robin Delaney, “FM City Council increases pet-related fees,” *Daily Democrat*, Jan. 20, 2022

SPENDING

- **In 2020, Rebecca Bowker voted to approve a contract for construction of a \$2.7 million train platform, even after the president of the Southeast Iowa Building and Trades Association asked council members to reject the bid and rebid the project. He said doing so would allow another bid that would have been \$300,000 lower than the one that was ultimately accepted**

- On March 17, 2020, Rebecca Bowker voted to approve a resolution awarding construction contract for the project in the amount of \$2,704,811 to Iowa Bridge and Culvert, L.C., of Washington, Iowa, and approving contract and bonds of Iowa Bridge and Culvert, L.C., pending receipt of the documents (Passed 6-1).²⁹
- In a March 19, 2020, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “In what should be the final hurdle, the Fort Madison City Council approved the construction of the platform for the \$2.7 million depot project with a 6-1 vote Tuesday night.

“As a result, the city council will have to find \$176,000, which was earmarked as the city's match for grant funds and has been included in past budgets during the 12-year project.

“Ryan Drew, president of the Southeast Iowa Building and Trades Association, again asked council members to reject the bid in front of them and to rebid the project. He said another bidder ‘made a good faith effort’ and submitted a bid \$300,000 lower than that from Iowa Bridge & Culvert, but was then told by the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) it had to be registered by a date that was two days prior to the project being put out for bids.

“He told the council that rebidding the project might delay the project 30 to 60 days, but it would likely result in significant savings.”³⁰

²⁹ Minutes, Fort Madison City Council, March 17, 2020

³⁰ Robin Delaney, “Council votes 6-1 to construct depot platform,” *Daily Democrat*, March 19, 2020

PAY RAISES

- **Rebecca Bowker has received a pay raise every year from the state of Iowa from 2009-2021, and her salary has increased by more than 56 percent**
 - According to the Iowa State Employee Salary Book, Rebecca Bowker has been paid the following bi-weekly salary from 2009-2021. According to the Salary Book website, the salary represents the employees base pay at the end of the fiscal year.³¹

Year	Biweekly pay
2009	\$2,006.40
2010	\$2,096.80
2011	\$2,138.40
2012	\$2,302.40
2013	\$2,500.00
2014	\$2,612.80
2015	\$2,798.40
2016	\$2,888.00
2017	\$2,953.60
2018	\$2,983.20
2019	\$3,045.60
2020	\$3,109.60
2021	\$3,144.00

- **In 2009, the Iowa Department of Corrections decided lay-offs would be heavy after Gov. Chet Culver decided upon a 10 percent across the board budget reduction for the state**
 - In a Nov. 13, 2009, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “The employment fate of dozens of correctional workers at the Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison has still not been solidified, according to ISP spokesperson Rebecca Bowker.

“The Iowa Department of Corrections decided lay-offs would be heavy after Gov. Chet Culver decided upon a 10 percent across the board budget reduction for the state. During the last budget cut, Culver spared public safety from the cuts. This time he did not.”³²
- **In 2010, Rebecca Bowker said two of 17 counselors would be laid off from the Iowa State Penitentiary, one of which was the only counselor in the sex offender clinical care unit**
 - In a Jan. 13, 2010, article, the *Hawk Eye* reported, “A political standstill at the state level will have a real-life impact in southeast Iowa when 10 employees who work to

³¹ State Employee Salary Book, Iowa State Legislature, Accessed June 12, 2022

³² Joe Benedict, “Layoff numbers at ISP remain uncertain,” *Daily Democrat*, Nov. 13, 2009

rehabilitate sex offenders at the Mount Pleasant Treatment Center are laid off at the end of the week.

“The move will cripple the sex offender treatment program at the Mount Pleasant Correctional Facility, which also will lose four full-time management positions as a result of state budget cuts.”³³

- According to the same article, “There also will be counselor layoffs at the Iowa State Penitentiary. ISP spokeswoman Rebecca Bowker said two of 17 counselors will be laid off, one of which is the only counselor in the sex offender clinical care unit.”³⁴

➤ **In 2017, a medium security unit at the Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison was shut down due to budget cuts enacted by the state Legislature**

- In a Feb. 10, 2017, article, the *Cherokee Tribune* reported, “A medium security unit at the Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison has been shut down due to budget cuts enacted by the state Legislature.

“The John Bennett Correctional Center, which was built adjacent to the old Fort Madison prison, currently houses about 180 inmates.

“The Department of Corrections absorbed \$5.5 million in cuts to this year’s budget due to a \$110 million funding shortfall at the state level.”³⁵

³³ Christina Crippes, “Cuts hurt sex offender program,” *Hawk Eye*, Jan. 13, 2010

³⁴ Christina Crippes, “Cuts hurt sex offender program,” *Hawk Eye*, Jan. 13, 2010

³⁵ Elizabeth Meyer, “Medium security unit at Fort Madison prison closes due to budget cuts,” *Cherokee Tribune*, Feb. 10, 2017

EVICTION

- **Rebecca Bowker filed an eviction lawsuit against her tenants on Dec. 20, 2018, five days before Christmas. According to the case, service of the tenants was posted on their door on Dec. 22, 2018**
 - According to the Lee County Clerk of Courts, on Dec. 20, 2018, Rebecca Bowker and Score Properties filed a small claims lawsuit against Rachel Kracht and Caleb Settles on Dec. 20, 2018. According to the lawsuit, the defendants were served on Dec. 26, 2018, with the service posted on their door on Dec. 22, 2018. According to the case docket, the property was vacant on Jan. 9, 2019.³⁶

³⁶ Score Properties v. Rachel Kracht & Caleb Sales, Case no. 08562 SCSC026291, Lee County Court, Dec. 20, 2018

PRISON DELAY

➤ **Rebecca Bowker is executive officer at the Iowa State Penitentiary, and in 2010, she was leading the transition team for the new Iowa State Penitentiary facility**

- In a July 16, 2010, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “The new Iowa State Penitentiary construction is underway, but has been somewhat hampered by the endless rain Fort Madison has seen this Spring and Summer.

“Executive Officer Rebecca Bowker has been leading the transition team for the new facility. She said the dirt work is about 90 percent complete at the site. The utility digging is a little behind because wet conditions have caused delays with big earth moving equipment. She said that portion is about 60 percent complete.

“Bowker said more crews should be on the site soon. The completion for phase one of the construction was estimated to be about Aug. 1. She said completion should be pretty close.”³⁷

➤ **In 2008, Rebecca Bowker was appointed as the executive assistant in the Iowa State Penitentiary warden’s office, where she was to be responsible for media relations, communication and the liaison for the construction of the new prison**

- In a Sept. 28, 2008, article, the *Hawk Eye* reported, “Warden John Ault has recently added several members to the management team at Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison:

“Julie Johnson has been appointed associate warden of administration. Johnson previously was the human resource director at Van Buren County Hospital in Keosauqua. Her duties will include managing the institution's \$47 million budget and overseeing several service areas of the institution.

“Heather Brueck has been promoted to associate warden of treatment. Brueck, who has a doctorate degree, has worked as a psychologist at ISP, the Mount Pleasant Correctional Facility and the Iowa Medical and Classification Center. She also worked for one year as a psychologist at the Federal Correctional Institution in Morgantown, W.Va.

“Rebecca Bowker has been appointed the executive assistant in the warden's office. She will be responsible for media relations, communication and the liaison for the construction of the new prison.”³⁸

➤ **In October 2011, the \$130 million prison was expected to be completed in December 2012, with prisoners moving into the facility by 2014**

³⁷ “Update on FM’s new prison,” *Daily Democrat*, July 16, 2010

³⁸ *Hawk Eye*, Sept. 28, 2008

- In an Oct. 11, 2011, article, the *Daily Gate City* reported, “The new Iowa State Penitentiary, being built on top of Burlington Hill off of 330th Avenue, is on schedule.

“The plan is to have a substantial portion of the construction finished by December 2012, according to state Rep. Jerry Kearns, D-Keokuk. The inmates are scheduled to be moved into the new facility by 2014.

“Kearns provided several aerial shots of the prison construction.

“Executive Officer I Rebecca Bowker at ISP said the dry weather over the summer was beneficial to the construction, but the contractors are staying with the target dates laid out at the start of construction.

“There is a transition team organized among the staff at ISP. Bowker said the team has made significant progress on the tasks that need completed before the move is done.

“‘The ‘move plan’ itself is just a small piece of all of the work that has yet to be completed,’ Bowker said.

“The project is expected to cost about \$130 million and is part of a \$250 million corrections bill that will also make improvements at other Iowa prisons.”³⁹

➤ **In March 2014, Rebecca Bowker said they were still planning to move to the \$132 million prison before it was officially summer**

- In a March 30, 2014, article, the Associated Press reported, “Iowa’s new maximum-security prison in Fort Madison is nearly ready to house prisoners.

“Prison officials expect to move into the new facility sometime in the next few weeks once the State Fire Marshal approves, The Burlington Hawk Eye reported Sunday.

“But Rebecca Bowker, executive officer of the penitentiary in Fort Madison, said the moving date won’t be announced ahead of time for security reasons.

“‘We are still (planning) to move before it is officially summer,’ she said. ‘However, we are still working through several issues with the state fire marshal regarding occupancy.’

“The new \$132 million prison was built about a mile north of the current Iowa State Penitentiary in the southeast corner of the state. It has 800 beds, which is 250 more than the current facility.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Christina Crippes, “Prison plan offers freedom,” *Hawk Eye*, May 18, 2011

⁴⁰ “New Iowa prison nearly ready for prisoners,” Associated Press, March 30, 2014

➤ **Less than a week later, Rebecca Bowker said that the new facility would start to take inmates by the end of summer**

- In an April 3, 2014, article, the Dale Gate City reported, “The new Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison is almost complete. Although the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison was held in November of 2013, the facility is not yet housing inmates.

“According to Rebecca Bowker, executive officer at the Iowa State Penitentiary, other than a few minor issues, such as last-minute adjustments to heating and air, the facility is almost ready for use. The \$130 million project was officially started with a ground-breaking ceremony in April 2010. After just over four years, the project is expected to be complete.

“Bowker said the new facility will start to take inmates by the end of summer, but added she would not be more specific because the exact date or type of transportation would not be released for safety reasons.”⁴¹

➤ **Later in April 2014, the prison move was indefinitely delayed following problems with the heating and cooling system**

- In an April 24, 2014, article, the *Hawk Eye* reported, “Prisoners will stay in the pre-Civil War penitentiary until problems with the heating and cooling system at Iowa’s new state-of-the-art, maximum-security penitentiary are resolved.

“Fred Scaletta, a spokesman for the Iowa Department of Corrections, said recent tests with the geothermal systems revealed the new system cannot provide the required heating and cooling levels needed to adequately house more than 560 inmates expected to be housed there.”⁴²

- According to the same article, “Last month, Rebecca Bowker, executive officer for the prison in Fort Madison, said work on the new facility is complete, but she said officials were awaiting approval from the Iowa State Fire Marshal’s Office for an occupancy permit.

“‘We have heating and cooling issues, as well as some life-safety systems issues (that need to be addressed) before we can move,’ she said at the time. ‘Technically, the prison is completed.’

“Bowker said officials expected to have the inmates transferred to the new facility before the beginning of summer. However, Scaletta said that time frame has been delayed indefinitely.”⁴³

⁴¹ “Iowa State Penitentiary inmate-ready at summer’s end,” *Dale Gate City*, April 3, 2014

⁴² Andy Hoffman, “Prison move is delayed indefinitely,” *Hawk Eye*, April 24, 2014

⁴³ Andy Hoffman, “Prison move is delayed indefinitely,” *Hawk Eye*, April 24, 2014

➤ **As of September 2014, repairs were still not done, and there was no timetable for when prisoners would occupy their new cells**

- In a Sept. 8, 2014, article, the Associated Press reported, “Repairs are still not done at the new Fort Madison prison built to house 800 inmates in maximum security, and there is no timetable for when they will occupy their new cells.

“The new, \$132 million Iowa State Penitentiary was expected to be occupied in March, but officials said the geothermal heating and cooling system was improperly designed and did not work as planned. It was approved after two inmates escaped from the existing facility in 2005.

“We haven’t been given a completion date by our contractors,’ Rebecca Bowker, executive officer at the Iowa State Penitentiary, told The Des Moines Register. ‘They are doing what they need to do’ to finish the work, she said.”⁴⁴

➤ **In April 2015, a new problem was reported in a ventilation system in one of the buildings of the new prison, which was now priced at \$166 million**

- In an April 3, 2015, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “And the hits just keep on coming. When it comes to the \$166 million maximum security prison in Fort Madison, the facility can’t seem to catch a break, not being able to pass some inspections. This time a new problem has been reported in a ventilation system in one of the buildings. Rep. Bobby Kaufman, chairman of the House Government Oversight Committee, said Thursday a building at the prison has a problem with its air ventilation system. According to Kaufman, this is separate from issues involving a smoke evacuation system and roof work at another building. A geothermal heating and cooling system problem has been repaired.

“Iowa State Penitentiary Executive Officer Rebecca Bowker said the outside air leaks Kaufman is referring to have been discussed in the past. The problem is not a new one and has already been addressed.

“‘There is nothing new about this and it will not delay the prison from being used,’ Bowker said.”⁴⁵

➤ **House Oversight Committee Chairman (Republican) Bobby Kaufmann on the delays, “The spiraling costs are a huge concern, and there’s no way to know whether there will be more costs”**

- In an April 2, 2015, article, the *Gazette* reported, “The discovery of yet another problem threatens to further delay the opening of a maximum-security prison at Fort Madison and make the Legislature’s budget process even harder, according to lawmakers looking into issues surrounding the prison construction.

⁴⁴ “Repairs still not finished at new Iowa prison,” Associated Press, Sept. 8, 2014

⁴⁵ Jeff Hunt, “Oversight committee rep says new prison has new problem,” *Daily Democrat*, April 3, 2015

“The spiraling costs are a huge concern, and there’s no way to know whether there will be more costs,’ House Oversight Committee Chairman Bobby Kaufmann, R-Wilton, said Thursday.

“The challenge has been just when we think we know everything, something else goes wrong,’ added Rep. Vicki Lensing, D-Iowa City. ‘It’s a very impressive building if it would work.’”⁴⁶

➤ **In August 2015, a year later than originally stated by Rebecca Bowker, prisoners were transferred into the new prison, whose price tag was now \$182 million**

- In an Aug. 1, 2015, article, WQAD reported, “Prisoners were transported from the old Iowa State Penitentiary to the new, \$182 million maximum security state prison on Saturday, August 1, 2015.

“507 offenders from the previous location at #3 John Bennett Lane were moved two miles up the road to 2011 330th Avenue. The entire operation started around 6:30 a.m. and was finished by 12:40 p.m. the same day.

“Over 215 law enforcement officials helped in the move, including five other prison guards, Iowa State Patrol, Fort Madison Police Department, the Lee County Sheriff’s Department of Transportation, and Illinois Department of Corrections.

“Rebecca Bowker, a spokesperson for the Iowa State Penitentiary, said the move was a successful one and the inmates are adjusting well. Bowker also said they don’t know when visitors will be allowed at the new facility and they hope to have more information on the adjustments sometime next week.

“Since its unveiling in October 2013, the new state prison has been sitting unused. Multiple problems with the new facility delayed its opening date, such as freezing pipes and a failure with the building’s new system to remove smoke in the event of a fire.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ James Lynch, “Air flow problem may further delay use of new Fort Madison prison,” *Gazette*, April 2, 2015

⁴⁷ Caroline Reinwald, “Prisoners at Iowa State Penitentiary have new address,” WQAD, Aug. 1, 2015

PRISON JOBS

- **When announced, the new state prison in Fort Madison was billed as a way to provide 300 to 400 good-paying construction jobs in southeast Iowa, but 2013 data showed that nearly half of those jobs - paid for by Iowa taxpayers - went to workers from Illinois, Missouri and other states**

- In an Oct. 12, 2013, article, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “When Gov. Chet Culver broke ground on a new \$132 million state prison in Fort Madison in April 2010, it was billed as a way to provide 300 to 400 good-paying construction jobs in southeast Iowa.

“But as completion nears on the 800-bed Iowa State Penitentiary project, data obtained by The Des Moines Register show that nearly half of those jobs - paid for by Iowa taxpayers - went to workers from Illinois, Missouri and other states.

“I am disappointed, but not surprised. We had warned of that outcome, and unfortunately there were a lot of Iowans who didn’t get to work on that project,’ said Scott Norvell, president and chief executive of Master Builders of Iowa, a construction industry group representing 2,000 Iowa businesses.”⁴⁸

- **Rebecca Bowker said that Iowa union shops sent as many workers as they could to the new prison, but it was not enough to keep up with demand**

- In an Oct. 12, 2013, article, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “Rebecca Bowker, executive officer at the Iowa State Penitentiary, said Iowa union shops sent as many workers as they could to the Fort Madison project, but it was not enough to keep up with demand. ‘It was my understanding there were other projects competing for the same union workers,’ she said in an email.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ William Petroski, “Many prison project jobs went to non-Iowans,” *Des Moines Register*, Oct. 12, 2013

⁴⁹ William Petroski, “Many prison project jobs went to non-Iowans,” *Des Moines Register*, Oct. 12, 2013

UNIONS

- **In her campaign for state house, Rebecca Bowker said that she wants to assist corrections officers in obtaining the bargaining rights they had before that section in the state code was changed. The changes made in 2017 stripped collective bargaining rights from most of the state’s public sector unions, including AFSCME Iowa that represents correctional officers**

- In a Jan. 27, 2022, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, “Fort Madison City Councilwoman Rebecca Bowker has decided to throw her hat in the ring for election to the Iowa House representing District 100, which includes most of Lee County.

“Bowker has represented the first ward of Fort Madison since 2019 and says she is anxious to give working families a voice in the statehouse.”⁵⁰

- According to the same article, “But she says her experience in corrections will also benefit her constituents.

“‘Absolutely. I want to assist my fellow corrections officers in obtaining the bargaining rights they had before that section in the state code was changed,’ Bowker said, referring to changes made in 2017 to Iowa Chapter 20 that striped collective bargaining rights from most of the state’s public sector unions, including AFSCME Iowa that represents correctional officers.

“In 2019, the Iowa Supreme Court upheld the new law and ruled 4-3 in favor of state in lawsuits filed by AFSCME and the Iowa State Education Association.

“Under the changes, public employees not working in public safety are unable to bargain for insurance, hours, vacations, holidays, overtime pay and health and safety matters unless their employers agree to negotiate those items. Legislators included law enforcement and firefighters among those working in public safety, but did not include those working for the state's penal institutions.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Robin Delaney, “Bowker announces bid for Iowa House seat,” *Daily Democrat*, Jan. 27, 2022

⁵¹ Robin Delaney, “Bowker announces bid for Iowa House seat,” *Daily Democrat*, Jan. 27, 2022

POLICE

➤ **In 2022, while the city of Fort Madison expressed the need for a new detective, Rebecca Bowker expressed concern that boosting the FMPD's budget would tie the city's hands in the future because of the state's new Back the Blue law**

- In a Feb. 18, 2022, article, the *Daily Democrat* reported, "It appears the Fort Madison Police Department will be gaining another detective in the next fiscal year.

"At its meeting Tuesday night, the Fort Madison City Council indicated unanimously support for adding a department detective to assist the FMPD's detective supervisor.

"This adds \$90,000 to the city's proposed 2022-23 budget, which still must go through public hearings and a final council vote."⁵²

- According to the same article, "Although Councilwomen Rebecca Bowker has repeatedly voiced support for adding the second detective, she expressed concern at the Feb. 3 workshop that boosting the FMPD's budget would tie the city's hands in the future because of the state's new Back the Blue law.
- "City Manager David Varley said he looked over the Back the Blue legislation and doesn't believe it will be a problem, but the law does bring some restraints.

"It could make it a little dicey. The legislation states that if you reduce the budget, you can't reduce the police department at a greater percentage than the rest of the city budget,' Varley explained. 'If at some point you wanted to eliminate the position, we'd probably be okay with the numbers because this is a one-time thing, but if you wanted to reduce it in the future it could make it a little more difficult.'

"For example, Varley said in the future if the city were to reduce the police department's budget by 8% and only reduce other departments by 5% that could be an issue.

"I don't think it would play into it, but there's a possibility,' Varley added."⁵³

Editor's Note: *When a straw poll was taken on adding the detective, Rebecca Bowker voted yes.*

⁵² Robin Delaney, "Another detective to be added to FMPD," *Daily Democrat*, Feb. 18, 2022

⁵³ Robin Delaney, "Another detective to be added to FMPD," *Daily Democrat*, Feb. 18, 2022