

A blue banner for the Visiting Nurse Association of Northern New Jersey (VNA). On the left, a woman in a blue VNA uniform stands behind an elderly couple. On the right, a woman in a blue VNA uniform stands behind an elderly woman. The text "Highly recommend" is at the top in large white letters, with five yellow stars below it. A list of services is in the center: Skilled Nursing • Hospice • Certified Aides, Physical, Occupational & Speech Therapy, Elder Care • Family Caregiver Services. A yellow button says "Request a free, no obligation consultation". The VNA logo is on the right, with the text "Visiting Nurse Association of Northern New Jersey", "1-800-WE VISIT", and "vnannj.org".

“Highly recommend”

★★★★★

Skilled Nursing • Hospice • Certified Aides
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https://www.newjerseyhills.com/morris_news_bee/news/meet-the-candidates-morris-plains-mayor/article_c66a4432-aa05-4c24-bf55-15be32b2cd66.html

Meet the candidates: Morris Plains mayor

By MERCER SANTOS
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MORRIS PLAINS



MAYORAL CANDIDATES

MORRIS PLAINS – Two candidates are running for mayor in Morris Plains.

Independent candidate and incumbent Mayor Jason Karr is running against Democratic candidate and current Morris Plains Borough Councilmember Nancy Verga for the full four-year term.

The Morris NewsBee sent identical five-point questionnaires to each candidate asking them about their qualifications, their motives for running, and their priorities for Morris Plains and its communities. Their responses have been edited for clarity only.

Jason Karr [I]:

Why are you running for Mayor of Morris Plains?

I am running for re-election because Morris Plains is my home, and I care deeply about its future. I have lived here for more than 55 years. My wife, Donna, and I raised our children, Matthew and Nicholas, here. I want other families to have the same opportunity to build their lives in a safe, welcoming community.

As mayor, I have worked to keep taxes stable, lower municipal debt, support our police, fire and public works departments, and preserve open space. Our downtown businesses, parks and neighborhoods all contribute to what makes Morris Plains special.

There is more work to do. We must continue managing development responsibly, supporting local businesses and maintaining dependable municipal services while being careful with taxpayer dollars.

My commitment is to serve all residents. Whether someone is a Democrat, Republican or Independent, their concerns deserve to be heard. I am asking for another term so I can continue bringing people together and working to keep Morris Plains the “Community of Caring.”



Photo courtesy of Jason Karr.

What experience or qualifications have uniquely prepared you for this position?

My experience combines a lifelong connection to Morris Plains with 11 years of service on the borough council and eight years as mayor. Those roles have given me a practical understanding of municipal budgets, public safety, public works, development and the everyday responsibilities of local government. They have also taught me that effective leadership requires listening, preparation and follow-through.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and major storms, I worked closely with borough departments to help coordinate our response and address residents' needs. Those experiences reinforced the importance of clear communication and dependable leadership when people are facing uncertainty.

Our financial record also reflects my approach: careful planning, keeping budget increases low and reducing municipal debt by more than 40%. Beyond Morris Plains, I serve as first vice president of the Morris County League of Municipalities and was appointed to the Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital Board of Trustees in 2025. These responsibilities provide additional opportunities to work with other public officials and understand challenges that extend beyond our borough. Most importantly, I understand that experience only matters if it translates into service. Residents deserve a mayor who is accessible, understands their concerns and follows through.

What is the single biggest challenge facing the borough right now, and how do you plan to address it?

I believe our biggest challenge is managing development while protecting the character of Morris Plains and the services residents depend on. Development decisions affect more than individual properties. They can influence traffic, infrastructure, open space, municipal costs and the quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods. We must meet our obligations while making the strongest possible case for what is appropriate for our community.

My approach is to work closely with the Council, our planning professionals and residents to evaluate proposals carefully, address infrastructure needs and pursue opportunities to preserve land. We should examine both the immediate effects and the long-term costs before making decisions. Preserving open space has been a priority during my tenure, including land adjacent to streams, property at the entrance to Community Park and the Old Idlewild Pool property. I want to build on that work.

We must also support a healthy business community. A strong downtown contributes to our tax base and gives residents places to shop, gather and connect. My goal is to make thoughtful decisions that protect our neighborhoods, respect taxpayers and leave Morris Plains stronger for the next generation.

As mayor, how will you work alongside members of the borough council to achieve goals in residents' best interests?

I will continue working with every council member, regardless of political affiliation. Democrats, Republicans and Independents all have a role in making Morris Plains a better place. Good working relationships begin with respect and communication. Council members should have the information they need to evaluate proposals, ask questions and understand the financial and practical consequences of their decisions. I believe in identifying shared priorities early, discussing disagreements openly and keeping the focus on what residents need. We will not agree on every issue, but we should always be able to explain our positions, listen to one another and look for common ground.

I will also continue drawing on the knowledge of our department heads, borough professionals and residents. The people who deliver municipal services and those who rely on them bring valuable perspectives to our decisions. Whether we are considering a budget, improving a park or responding to an emergency, our responsibility is the same: serve Morris Plains effectively and responsibly. Residents deserve a mayor and council who do the work, follow through and put the community first.

What actions would you take to ensure Morris Plains continues collaborating with Morristown, Morris Township and other neighboring communities?

Morris Plains benefits when neighboring communities communicate and work together. Traffic, emergency preparedness, infrastructure and other regional concerns do not stop at municipal boundaries. I would continue building relationships with elected officials and municipal staff in Morristown, Morris Township and surrounding communities, maintaining regular communication about shared concerns and upcoming projects. One priority would be coordinating on projects that could affect

traffic or infrastructure across municipal borders. Discussing those impacts early gives communities a better opportunity to identify problems and consider solutions together.

I would also support continued coordination among our emergency services, including preparedness, mutual aid and communication during major storms or other emergencies. Where appropriate, I would explore shared services, joint purchasing and cooperative grant opportunities. Any proposal should be evaluated carefully to ensure it provides a clear benefit to Morris Plains residents, maintains service quality and uses taxpayer dollars responsibly. My work with the Morris County League of Municipalities provides another opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from neighboring communities. Regional cooperation should produce practical results. My goal is to maintain strong relationships and turn those relationships into better service for our residents.

Nancy Verga [D]:

Why are you running for Mayor of Morris Plains?

Public service is a way for me to give back to the community where I raised my family. I first ran for council in 2019 because to me, loving your community means caring enough to ask how you can help make it even better.

During the past seven years on the council, I've learned a lot about how our borough works, what we do well, and where I believe we can do better. I'm running for mayor because I want Morris Plains to be more proactive in addressing the challenges ahead — keeping our community affordable, managing traffic and development, and planning for the future while protecting the character of the community we love.

I've shown that I can listen to residents, bring people together and turn ideas into results. I'm ready to bring that same approach to the job of mayor.

What experience or qualifications have uniquely prepared you for this position?

I'm serving my third term on the borough council and my second year as chair of the Finance Committee, where I work closely with our CFO, tax assessor, clerk, and other borough professionals. I've chaired committees overseeing public safety, ordinances



Photo courtesy of Nancy Verga.

and utilities, and served as council president in 2024. These experiences have given me a broad understanding of borough operations, budgets, and the challenges ahead.

I think the best measure of experience is what you accomplish. I helped create our first Business Development Committee, which brought residents and councilmembers together to help our downtown businesses. That work led to outdoor dining, recruitment of Morris Plains' first microbrewery and the creation of Downtown Morris Plains.

I started our Green Team to improve sustainability and resiliency in the borough. This dedicated group has helped secure grants to build a rain garden to reduce flooding, identify energy savings opportunities, and

reduce greenhouse gases. And I used my professional communications experience to help modernize how the borough communicates and delivers services, including a new website, our first official Facebook presence, and online payments and registration for residents.

That's the kind of leadership I will bring as mayor. I listen, bring the right people together, develop a plan and then work to get it done. I'll bring that same approach to planning, communication, fiscal responsibility and accountability.

What is the single biggest challenge/issue facing the Borough right now and how do you plan to address it?

The biggest challenge facing the borough is keeping taxes stable while the cost of providing municipal services continues to rise.

We're facing significant increases in employee health insurance, utilities, fuel and the goods and services the borough purchases. We can't control all of those increases, so we have to be disciplined about the costs we can control while finding sustainable ways to grow revenue.

That means aggressively pursuing grants for our parks, pool and infrastructure; scrutinizing major contracts; looking for appropriate shared services; and continually asking whether we're delivering services as efficiently as possible.

It also means growing our tax base intelligently. Morris Plains is largely built out, so we need to be thoughtful about the businesses and development we attract. A new ratable isn't a win if it creates traffic, safety or infrastructure problems that diminish residents' quality of life.

That's why I want our master planning process to look comprehensively at development, traffic and circulation, sustainability, parks and public spaces. We need residents involved in making those choices so we're not simply reacting to proposals one at a time, we're working from a plan for what we want for Morris Plains' future.

As mayor, how will you best work alongside members of the borough council to achieve goals in the best interest of Morris Plains residents?

Residents should be proud to know that the people they elect on the borough council work together in a non-partisan way to make decisions that are best for our community. As mayor, I will build on the trust I have already earned from fellow councilmembers by sharing information, encouraging dialogue, and working together to provide the best possible solution for residents.

I will improve the training and onboarding process so every councilmember understands borough operations, their responsibilities and the procedures that ensure our decisions are transparent and aligned with the vision of Morris Plains that our residents want to see.

What actions would you take to ensure Morris Plains continues to collaborate with its neighboring areas like Morristown and Morris Township?

Regional cooperation is increasingly important because many of the challenges facing Morris Plains don't stop at our municipal borders.

Since joining the council, I've built relationships with elected and appointed officials throughout Morris County with whom I regularly exchange ideas and best practices. These relationships have produced real results.

For example, when Morris Plains was preparing its trash collection bid, I learned about an approach Chatham Borough had recently used to attract competitive bids. I incorporated elements of it into our bid specifications and ultimately achieved multi-year savings with our existing vendor.

Traffic is an obvious opportunity to expand that type of collaboration. I will work for stronger coordination with neighboring communities, the County and the state on traffic and circulation. I'd also like to explore a regional mobility plan, including opportunities for safe bicycle connections between our communities.

And I would continue to explore shared services that may lower costs or improve service without sacrificing the responsiveness residents expect from their local government.

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