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Morris Plains Borough Council Democratic candidates answer questionnaire

By SAL DiMAGGIO Editor
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NANCY VERGA



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MORRIS PLAINS – Borough Council Democrats Nancy Verga and Michael Ivey face Republican candidates Ann Bono and Anthony Tonini for the two, three-year council seats at stake in the Tuesday, Nov. 4 election.

All candidates in the contested race were asked to answer a questionnaire via email. Below are Verga's and Ivey's responses. Bono and Tonini's responses can be found [elsewhere in this publication](#).

How long have you lived in Morris Plains?

Verga: My husband John and I have lived in Morris Plains for over 27 years. We raised our four children here, all of whom attended the borough's public schools.



Ivey: My wife and I first moved to Morris Plains in 2013, and in 2017 we settled into our current home as our family grew. When it came time to find more space, we never considered leaving Morris Plains – it was already home.

What is your occupation?

Verga: I retired in 2022 from a distinguished career in corporate communications – including running my own consulting firm – to dedicate more time to our community on the Borough Council.

Ivey: I am the director of engineering and technology at a Morristown-based company that provides turnkey fleet electrification solutions, including EV charging infrastructure and electric truck leasing. I oversee the design and construction of charging systems and manage the enterprise software that supports our operations. Before this role, I spent 13 years at Picatinny Arsenal as a project manager and solution architect for a logistics system used by U.S. Army personnel worldwide.

Where else might people know you from?

Verga: I'm a former chair and member of the Morris Plains Municipal Alliance, and have volunteered as Little League coach, religious education teacher, and active member of the Morris Plains Home & School Association. I have also been an active volunteer helping to enhance the Morris Plains Farmers Market.

Ivey: I'm a proud father of three – ages nine, seven and four. Many know me from coaching Little League over the past four years or cheering from the sidelines at soccer, field hockey, basketball, and softball games. On summer Saturdays, my family and I love visiting the Farmers Market for fresh produce – and picking up a beignet with coffee while walking downtown.

Why are you running for election/re-election?

Verga: I'm seeking a third term to continue delivering on the issues residents care about most – affordability, safety, and preserving our small-town quality of life. I have a proven track record of serving integrity, representing all residents regardless of political affiliation, and engaging in open, respectful debate to achieve the best outcomes for our community.

Ivey: I was appointed to the Borough Council in January to fill a vacated seat. Since then, I've focused on building strong relationships with Borough staff, getting to know more residents, learning how the Borough operates, and supporting Public Health Committee events. With that experience under my belt, I'm excited to make an even greater impact in the next three years.

Why are you the best candidate for the job?

Verga: The choice is clear – I have six years of experience on the Council in which I have earned a reputation for integrity, collaboration and results. I've worked in a bipartisan way to improve services, safety and quality of life. I stay informed through training offered by the NJ League of Municipalities and by connecting with professionals and other elected officials across Morris County.

My opponents have chosen a negative campaign rather than presenting constructive ideas. This community deserves experienced, responsible leadership – people who know how to get things done transparently and with respect for all residents.

Ivey: I believe I'm the best candidate for this seat for several reasons. Without a Business Administrator, many day-to-day operational responsibilities fall directly to the Council. My leadership experience with the U.S. Army and in the private sector has equipped me with skills in project management, procurement, budgeting, and process improvement – tools essential for managing Borough operations effectively and efficiently.

Just as important, I'm committed to working in a bipartisan way. We are one Morris Plains, and our shared values far outweigh our differences. I believe in collaboration, respect, and listening to every resident who wants what's best for our community. Unfortunately, my opponents have chosen to focus on divisive politics rather than unity – and I think our town deserves better.

What are some of your top accomplishments while on the council so far?

Verga: Affordability – Since 2020, we've kept the average municipal tax increase to 2.25% while maintaining services and making necessary infrastructure improvements to our roads, parks, and facilities. In 2025, we strategically paid down \$1.9M in debt to interest costs and fund key projects responsibly.

- Grants – We saved hundreds of thousands of dollars by securing grants for road paving, lighted crosswalks, a Route 53 pedestrian walkway, playground equipment, community center upgrades, and open space preservation.
- Public Safety – We established a shared service with the school district to add a police officer in our schools and approved a dedicated police traffic patrol unit to enforce traffic safety. We passed an ordinance to require fire inspections for all apartments in the Borough, while procuring necessary police and fire equipment.
- Business Development – As a founding member of the Business Development Committee, I helped launch outdoor dining, zoning for the Borough's first microbrewery, and Downtown Morris Plains – a nonprofit to enhance our business communities.
- Resident Engagement – I worked to empower residents and make our local government more accessible and accountable through a redesigned website, new resident advisory boards, and a more welcoming Council meeting schedule.

Ivey: It's been a busy year for hiring – I helped bring on exceptional new team members, including our clerk, recreation director, three police officers, and soon a new teen center supervisor. I also renewed our recycling contract and am working to pass an occupancy ordinance by year's end.

Thanks to Clean Communities grant funding, we will be ordering smart garbage receptacles that will feature artwork from Mountain Way and Borough School students. These receptacles can be monitored remotely to reduce unnecessary pickups and waste. I'm especially excited to visit the schools' STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) classes to show students how the receptacles' cloud connectivity and data systems demonstrate real-world engineering concepts.

What is your message to Morris Plains residents that are voting in the Borough Council election in November?

Verga: Council decisions affect people's safety, finances and quality of life – experience matters. I've built trust by listening, collaborating, and delivering real results for Morris Plains. My opponents lack that record of service and have outlined no concrete plans.

If re-elected, I'll continue working hard to keep Morris Plains safe, affordable, and responsive to residents.

Ivey: First, I want to thank the voters for paying attention to this election and taking the time to read our responses. Morris Plains has long been an outstanding place to live and raise a family, and I'm committed to keeping it that way.

That said, we can't rely on the status quo as the world changes around us. For too long, some officials prefer to govern in a vacuum – without truly listening to residents' concerns and ideas. Morris Plains is full of talented, passionate people who want to share their expertise for the good of our community. I look forward to seeing more residents involved in shaping our future and to fostering open, respectful dialogue that leads to thoughtful, collaborative solutions.

What does success for Morris Plains look like to you?

Verga: My vision for Morris Plains is a thriving downtown and business centers with walkable and bikeable connections to our residential communities where young families, seniors, and veterans can all afford to live. Success means maintaining quality schools and public safety as well as the small-town spirit that makes Morris Plains a place where neighbors truly show up for one another.

Ivey: I've always admired how generations of families continue to call Morris Plains home. The fact that so many return to raise their own families here speaks volumes about our quality of life, community spirit, and the true meaning of a 'Community of Caring.' To me, success for Morris Plains means children who love growing up here, families who want to return, and parents who can afford to stay in their homes through retirement. We can achieve that by keeping taxes steady amid rising costs, continuing to support beloved family programs, ensuring our children's safety as they walk or bike through town, attracting high-quality businesses to our downtown, and preserving the Borough's small-town character as we manage new development.

What is the biggest issue(s) facing the Borough?

Verga: The most important challenge facing Morris Plains is keeping the Borough affordable for our senior citizens, families and residents in the face of rising costs. We must continue exploring shared services, cost-saving measures and alternative funding sources to maintain the high level of services residents expect.

Ivey: Like most municipalities, the biggest challenge facing Morris Plains is development – whether it's undeveloped land on the west side of Route 53, redevelopment of existing parcels, or meeting affordable housing mandates. Development in nearby towns also brings added traffic to our streets. These decisions must align with the Morris Plains Master Plan to protect the Borough's integrity, character, and safety. Previous leadership has forced us to accept heavy traffic as part of our way of life, but I refuse to let that become our identity.

We're also facing rising costs for goods and services. For example, the Borough experienced a significant increase in State Health Insurance premiums for employees this year and expects another in 2026. To keep taxes stable, we must carefully monitor spending and aggressively pursue grants and other funding opportunities to continue improving our buildings, grounds, and infrastructure.

If elected, what would be some main priorities and goals that you would set out to accomplish?

Verga: Affordability – Confront rising costs by exploring shared services and alternative funding sources.

- Better Planning – Revise zoning to attract businesses that reflect our community's character and add a Sustainability Element to our Master Plan to build a more responsible and economically viable future.
- Traffic – Advance a Complete & Green Streets policy to prioritize pedestrian and cyclist safety while reducing speeding through town.
- Public Safety – Use feedback from the police facilities ballot question to balance compliance issues for officer safety and victim privacy with fiscal responsibility as we plan future improvements.

Ivey: If elected, below would be my main priorities:

1. In the wake of rising costs as I just mentioned, one of my top priorities is to reduce operating costs of the Borough by increasing efficiency and finding the best value for the taxpayer dollar. A particular area of focus will be on the Community Pool to stabilize annual costs and to establish a five year plan to ensure the pool's existence is sustainable for years to come.

2. Implement the Complete and Green Streets (CGS) policy in early 2026 followed by the implementation of the first pilot project by the end of 2026. These pilot programs will be small scale applications of the CGS principles to increase awareness and buy-in from residents and other stakeholders.

3. Modify the allowable uses in the B-2 (downtown) zone to increase demand for our downtown storefronts to improve the quality of the Merchant Block and Speedwell Avenue, while keeping with the character of the Borough.

MORE INFORMATION



Morris Plains Borough Council Republican candidates answer questionnaire