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Morris Plains candidates ready for general election campaign

By BRETT FRIEDENSOHN Editor
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Morris Plains Republican Council candidate Jim Myers, right, talks to Morris Plains resident Bill Griek during an event held at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post Thursday, June 23.

MORRIS PLAINS – The Republican candidates for mayor and council held a party at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post Thursday, June 23 to meet residents and speak about their platforms.

About 200 people attended, according to Bruhn.

The GOP candidates in the borough are Councilman Art Bruhn who is running for mayor, and council candidates Jennifer Keating Meehan and Jim Myers.

Bruhn is challenging for Democratic Mayor Jason Karr's seat, and Myers and Meehan are challenging Democratic Councilwomen Joan Goddard and Nancy Verga.

All candidates ran uncontested in the primary Tuesday, June 7, and the general election is set for Tuesday, Nov. 8.

In the primary, Karr earned 481 votes while Bruhn earned 447. There were three write-ins for mayor for Democrats, and there were four for Republicans.

Verga earned 494 votes, and Goddard earned 492.

Myers earned 486 votes while Meehan earned 464. Three write-in votes were cast.

Bruhn noted his background in financial accounting and how he has an accounting degree from Rutgers University and has worked at Ernst & Young, Goldman Sachs and Delta Dental.

"Having my accounting background and past work experience has allowed me to excel in my role as council liaison to the finance department for two years," Bruhn said. "I look forward to continuing working with our finance department to put our taxpayers first and to continue to be fiscally responsible as your mayor."

Bruhn, a volunteer firefighter in the borough, said he has enjoyed helping residents over the years and will continue to support first responders as mayor.

"I have also truly enjoyed the extended family I have gained through my fellow Morris Plains firefighters," Bruhn said. "I enjoy helping people and working hard. Some of you know me from coaching your children in Morris Plains little league, Morris Plains rec soccer, Morris United travel soccer and Morris Plains Rec basketball. Some of you know me as having a small part time landscaping business and have seen me cutting lawns throughout Morris Plains."

Bruhn also said he will listen to all residents' concerns and suggestions and considers himself approachable and likable.

"I want to be as transparent as possible and will bring back the Zoom portion to our council meetings, so our seniors do not have to travel out at night, or our young parents with your children can participate without spending money on a babysitter or anyone who is not able to attend in person," Bruhn said. "I want all of our decisions that are made in our council meetings to be open for discussions at all times."

Meehan, who was introduced by Morris County Sherriff James Gannon, said this election is about electing the right candidates, candidates who will take action and work to resolve the issues impacting the quality of life in the community.

"Though a subjective measure which varies from person to person, some of the quality of life factors that play a role specific to the community starts with good governance, a governing body that well works together for the greater good, commerce, education, infrastructure, public safety and community interaction," Meehan said.

Meehan also said that the services residents enjoy are second to none; these include the Department of Public Works, the Volunteer Fire Department and Police Department.

"What can't be ignored is the state of our downtown and the number of vacant businesses," Meehan said. "As candidates, one of the many issues we agree on is the critical need for a plan to revamp, beautify and revitalize our downtown, to explore options and work with the landlords to prospect and attract diverse businesses that will improve the shop-local experience. Our downtown deserves better; our community deserves better. And we need to do more to celebrate our small business owners who give back to our community."

Myers said that most of those in attendance decided to come to Morris Plains because of the way of life that the residents have had for the past 96 years.

Myers also said that was once a "bright" and "vibrant" downtown is now at risk.

"While we've had some wonderful newcomers, it's not enough," Myers said. "It's not enough. I'm committed to working with Art, Jen and the rest of the council to breathe new light into our downtown and to provide our neighbors, old and new, the same town vibe I grew up with."

Myers also said that the borough doesn't need micromanagement in local government.

He said he will work with his fellow candidates to maintain the borough's services so the community will continue to stand out as an example to the surrounding towns. Myers, Bruhn and Meehan will be "the voice of all of Morris Plains," Myers said.

"Through common sense and knowledge of our past, fresh ideas, and an open ear, we will represent all of our community and guide our path to collective understanding," Myers said.

Democratic Candidates

Goddard, the council president, said after the event that since taking office, she and Verga have worked hard to address concerns they heard from residents about revitalizing downtown, modernizing communications and preparing Morris Plains to meet the realities of the 21st Century.

"We were the first council members to form a bipartisan committee to enhance our downtown and commercial districts and support our valued small business owners," Goddard said. "We initiated the first reevaluation of 'permitted uses' in our business zones in more than 35 years to ensure that we welcome the kinds of modern businesses that our residents want to see. As a first step, we passed an ordinance permitting microbreweries in Morris Plains and we will soon welcome our first ever microbrewery to the borough."

Goddard also said that despite the pandemic forcing the closure of some businesses, new businesses have opened in the borough. These include the Scoop Station ice cream shop, Alphagraphics and Abby's Consulting. The Merchant Block will soon boast a new florist, and after more than a decade of existing as an empty storefront, 650 Speedwell Ave. will soon open as a Koren barbeque with a unique winery space, Goddard said.

Verga said that between magnet stores like Arthur's Uncle Giuseppe's, and Chick-Fil-A and the opening of Cryport Systems and Cigna in the borough's commercial zones, business is booming in Morris Plains.

Verga said she and Goddard look forward to continuing to work in a bipartisan manner to maintain Morris Plains' small town values while ensuring the borough is 'future ready,' walkable, sustainable and inclusive.

"We first tackled the critical need to improve communications and outreach to residents by overhauling the Borough's website," Verga said. "We added new content and resources, and the convenience of online forms and online payments for residents who can't get to Borough hall in person during business hours."

During a similar event held by the Democrats Friday, June 10, Mayor Karr said two of his four years as mayor were "engulfed with Covid." He added that acquiring the role as Mayor has its challenges, but the addition of COVID-19 was an added challenge. However, he remains proud of the work he's accomplished.

Karr said that while he has been mayor, more than 25 businesses have opened in Morris Plains. The same day as the party, a cookie business called Crumbl Cookies held its grand opening in the Kohl's shopping center on Route 10. Karr called it "a vibrant shopping center," and noted how other strip malls and small businesses are closing.

Karr mentioned that Cigna Insurance will move into one of Morris Plains' office buildings, which would bring 2,000 jobs to the area. About 86 jobs were also created with the opening of Crumbl Cookies, he said.

Even though Covid caused plans to change in some aspects, Karr has visions for the future of Morris Plains if re-elected. He's looking to provide some new playground equipment, update municipal buildings with funding money, and install broadband within the town center to play music and for parade speakers.

Karr explained the role of the mayor and what people expect from someone in this position, such as attending events around town and being involved.

"I was a councilman for 11 years prior to being mayor," Karr said. "And I've always tried to be at all the events . . . It shows that you care."

Providing support to local events and organizations is important to Karr, and he enjoys the sense of community, as well as campaigning. He also said he loves going door to door and tries to hit every door in the borough.

"People have ideas. People want to talk. People want to get stuff off their chest and give you pointers, ideas, concerns, and complaints as well, which is good," Karr said. "So, it's been a good excuse to get around and really talk to anybody and get a real feel for what the town's

feeling.”

Editor’s Note: Danielle Pecci contributed to this story.

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