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BREAKING

UPDATE: Bruhn challenging Karr for mayor; Verga, Goddard seek re-election to council

By BRETT FRIEDENSOHN Editor
Apr 4, 2022



JASON KARR



ART BRUHN

ART BRUHN



NANCY VERGA



JOAN GODDARD



Morris Plains Councilwomen Joan Goddard, left, and Nancy Verga host a campaign kick-off event Friday, April 1.
Photo courtesy of Nancy Verga

MORRIS PLAINS -Democratic incumbents Mayor Jason Karr and Councilwomen Nancy Verga and Joan Goddard are all seeking re-election to their seats in the 2022 election, the three announced Monday, April 4, the day of the filing deadline.

Verga and Goddard are seeking three-year terms while Karr is seeking another four-year term.

Republican Councilman Art Bruhn, a volunteer firefighter with the Morris Plains Fire Department, filed to run for mayor. Bruhn's term on the council expires in 2023, so his seat on the council will need to be filled if he wins the mayoral race.

For the Republican ticket, Jennifer Meehan and James Myers filed to run for council.

Since no one else filed to run as Republicans or Democrats, Karr and Bruhn are set to face each other in the Tuesday, Nov. 8 general election.

Verga, Goddard, Meehan and Myers are set to vie for two available seats Nov. 8.

Karr said he enjoys doing his job and is looking forward to preserving what Morris Plains has, a small-town feel, while it grows with modern changes but staying “The Community of Caring.”

Karr, who is seeking his second term as mayor, said he’s accomplished quite a bit throughout the last four years. He’s been able to manage the borough through the COVID-19 pandemic which there was no playbook for, he said.

The governing body maintained all the borough’s services and moved the town forward; all the borough’s employees stepped up to keep the borough running efficiently, Karr said.

The governing body didn’t miss a beat as far as meetings and making them available to the public, while making the minute-to-minute changes experienced through the pandemic, the mayor said.

“I look to accomplish more than I did in the previous four years given that we will not have the obstacle of the pandemic hopefully to deal with,” Karr said.

Bruhn, a regional sales manager at Empire Tool Rental in the Bronx, said he enjoys living in Morris Plains and wants to keep the small town feel that his son Jack has enjoyed growing up in and many other families have enjoyed.

“I feel that becoming mayor will also allow me to continue helping our residents,” Bruhn said. “I feel that my degree in accounting and my experience working in finance will give me the advantage to make sure we are being fiscally conservative with our spending. I have five years of experience as a councilman and two of which I have chaired the finance committee. I feel strongly that I can continue to keep our taxes low so that our seniors and young people can live in Morris Plains.”

Bruhn said he has devoted many years of his life helping people through the fire department and through his years of service as a councilman.

He first joined the council in 2018 and served as council president in 2020.

Bruhn has also been a member of the Website Committee since 2020 and was the chairman of the Finance Committee in 2020 and 2021.

"I love living in Morris Plains and want to continue to make the town known as the 'Community of Caring' a special place to live," Bruhn said. "I enjoy the many special events that we offer, athletic fields that our children play on and the parks our residents enjoy. I want to ensure these traditions continue and that the parks and athletic fields are kept in the best conditions possible for future generations to enjoy."

Bruhn said the most pressing issue facing the community is keeping the residents safe and healthy.

"Sadly the pandemic has affected many lives and businesses," Bruhn said. "The governing body will continue to keep our residents informed on how to stay safe. I will work with my fellow council members to bring in new businesses to fill the vacant storefronts."

Verga said she and Goddard ran together their first time being elected in 2019 and are running mates again, already getting to about a third of the way into their fundraising goal.

"I think we are in a unique position, being new on the council, to bring our professional experience as communicators to the role. because We had to find a way to reach residents without face-to-face opportunities and make sure we were meeting their needs and make sure they got the with important information about health and safety issues that so many towns had to communicate about the pandemic and vaccines and ect., and keeping business operating at the borough level so services could continue," Verga said.

Because of that experience, Verga said she and Goddard launched the bi-partisan Website Committee and overhauled the website which hadn't been redone since 2001, added a ton of new content and hired a new webmaster who implemented improvements to the borough's weekly email system which now has about 3,000 subscribers.

Verga and Goddard also initiated a Business Development Committee to help improve the borough's downtown. This process is creating the foundation to welcome new businesses into the community, and create the infrastructure to do that and support small businesses and connect with them on how the council can support them, Verga said.

Verga also said she and Goddard focused on reaching out to residents, communicating with small businesses, improving technology and reducing costs through some technological improvements.

“We really feel during the pandemic, we achieved a lot during our first term, and we’re still learning as we go,” Verga said. “That experience is really going to help us in our second term to bring all of that experience into a lot more accomplishments. We’re really looking forward to that.”

Verga said what’s unique about what she and Goddard have achieved is that while it’s a divisive time in our nation, they have been able to build trust among governing body members so they can all work together to improve the lives of residents.

“I feel really proud that we have that relationship now, and we don’t all agree on everything, but we’ve built a level of trust that really helps us to move forward and to make our decisions that can really listen to all opinions and perspectives,” Verga said. “And I think that any time you can do that, you have better outcomes for residents because we need a diverse set of opinions and perspectives. And I think that any time you can do that, you’re going to have better outcomes for residents because we need a diverse set of opinions, and We also need to welcome new ideas and have a forward-looking lens and how to solve problems. And I think Joan and I really brought that to the group and a respect for each other which is really unique.”

Goddard said she and Verga are thrilled to have the opportunity to run again, feel they’ve made a lot of progress over the past three years, and are proud of the initiatives they helped start with some of their other council members such as the Business Development Committee and the website improvements.

Goddard also said she was excited to be a member of the team that’s working on the Community Park trail grant.

She is also the liaison to the Department of Public Works, a position that is new to her this year, and she works with the Beautification Committee.

“I would say true bi-partisanship and really working together as a team are some of the key responsibilities,” Goddard said. “I think we all really approach our decision-making as what’s best for the residents of Morris Plains, and I think we really work together to do what’s best. And I think for all of us, that is really our driving force for every decision that we make.”

Meehan and Myers could not immediately be reached for comment.

Editor's Note: This story has been updated to reflect new comments by Nancy Verga.

