

League of Women Voters of Teaneck Voters' Guide Town Council, 2024

Our VOTERS GUIDE questionnaire and letter of invitation to the Candidates' Forum was mailed and emailed to each of the candidates for Teaneck Town Council on August 30th. In addition to asking them about their Teaneck residency, occupation, education, family & community involvement, we asked each candidate to answer the following questions and to limit answers to a total of 500 words or less:

- 1. Homeowners' property taxes have just gone up, yet Teaneck residents still ask for improvements to its streets, sidewalks and parks and to continue maintaining police, fire, recreation and other services. Tell us about your spending priorities for the Township and how you will balance that with the need to keep property taxes rates from soaring?**
- 2. Teaneck has long been a heterogeneous community but recently has been experiencing tensions between various groups. What leadership actions as a town council member would you recommend to help improve relations in our community?**

The candidates' responses follow unedited, and are in the order received:

Michael Pagan, 668 River Road

Years residing in Teaneck: 38 years

Occupation: Senior Community Relations Specialist with the Bergen County Planning & Engineering Department

Education: Teaneck High School (Class of 1994); Temple University, BA in Journalism

Family: 9-year old son, mother (76), father (76), brother (52)

Community Involvement:

- * Teaneck Town Council (2020-present); Mayor (2022-present)
- * Senior Citizens Advisory Board
- * Planning Board
- * Latino Action Network
- * United Service Workers Union Local 755
- * Bergen County Military Draft Board

1. The Teaneck Town budget should be on the forefront of all our minds regularly. After serving four years on Council, I have seen how we finish one budget just to start another budget a few

months later. We have not been forecasting our budget consistently and are looking at it one year at a time. I plan to work with our new manager, our CFO, our auditor, and the budget subcommittee to implement a budget forecast so we can properly plan for future spending and revenue. Also, we should continue to explore shared services with our neighboring towns to bring costs down for our residents. Lastly, we also need to explore more options for reoccurring revenue to help keep taxes down. We cannot just be focused on one source of revenue, because every bit counts. Our residents are hurting, and they deserve the best leadership possible that will work for them.

2. As a Councilman and Mayor, it really pains me to see any tension in our hometown. We need to see each other as neighbors and talk to each other more. Teaneck is stronger together with our common bonds, and we cannot let anything break us apart. Every family wants a safe community to raise their kids in, just like all older adults want to find a way to age in place in the town they love. We need to focus on the issues that unite us. I am happy with the way our Advisory Board of Community Relations is taking complex issues and not afraid to discuss them so they can help our residents and advise our council.

We also need to remember that we have great events where the diversity of Teaneck really shines. The crown jewel of Teaneck, our library, has amazing events, and we also have our annual 4th of July parade, National Night Out, and Teaneck Day, and I look forward to creating more opportunities for our residents to come together for Teaneck. As a Council member it is important to be in constant communication with residents, civic group leaders, and religious leaders, and that is something I work hard on every single day and will continue.

Mark Schwartz, 641 Cumberland Avenue

Years residing in Teaneck: 29 years

Occupation: Real Estate Management Consultant

Education: Associates Degree

Family: Married 27 years; 4 children ages 23, 21, 19 & 16 plus one daughter in law, all residing in Teaneck

Community Involvement:

- * 13 years on town council
- * 6 years planning board prior
- * 26 years River Edge volunteer firefighter
- * 22 years TVAC
- * Jewish Link newspaper founder and co-publisher
- * 9 years TBO/ Teaneck Junior Soccer coach- 27 teams
- * 16 year Yavneh Academy board (Paramus, 800 students), 8 as VP
- * 4 year Torah Academy of Bergen County board (Teaneck)
- * Founder and 10-year president, Congregation Shaare Tefillah (Teaneck)

1. Every year municipalities in NJ fall behind the rising costs of union contracts and benefits. To balance a budget there are two ways to procure the funds- from the

existing taxpayers or from new revenue. There are many small ways of sourcing new revenue but frankly those are rounding errors. \$20,000 here and there is important, but won't add up to the \$1m- \$2m needed annually to avoid a hike. The only new way is development. Whether it be retail/commercial or residential, they bring in the hundreds of thousands in new fees. And that is recurring revenue. Beginning with the new projects that commenced construction in 2017, we now see almost \$9M annually in revenue. We must continue to do it smartly yet efficiently. Talking projects to death will just cause the tax burden to grow on the single-family homeowner. This answer is NOT what you want to hear, but I'm not the candidate to lie and tell you what you WANT, but rather what you NEED to hear.

2. I strongly believe we need to leave our echo chambers and walk the town. I go to churches and mosques, walking and talking. You've seen me. The place I am needed is not the place I blend in but rather where I stand out. Events must be attended by all walks of life and not relegate ourselves to remaining in our silos. Only by integrating ourselves in other parts of the community will we make the community one.

Duane Harley, 114 Bogert Street

Years residing in Teaneck: 33 years

Occupation: Attorney

Education: J.D. 1999 Quinnipiac University School of Law;
BA English 1992, Hampton University; Teaneck HS Class of 1988

Family: Married with two children, ages 13 & 15

Community Involvement:

- Adult Advisor -Teaneck Youth Advisory Board
- Teaneck Planning Board
- Vice President, Friends of Teaneck Charter School Board
- Vice President, Male Usher, Board of First Baptist Church of Teaneck
- Basketball Coach -Teaneck Junior Basketball
- Baseball Coach -Teaneck Southern LL Baseball
- Speaker - Benjamin Franklin Junior High School Career Day

1. Ultimately the spending priorities will be subjected to community input corroborated with a comprehensive data analysis. However, from where I sit it appears that the spending priorities should be invested into infrastructure, upgrading our sewage systems and pipes. Certain areas in Teaneck (i.e. Belle Avenue) experience heavy floods on a consistent basis. That habitual condition simply is not practical. Teaneck also needs upgrades to our roads. Many road arteries are unsafe, congested and overburdened. Our roads will not meet the demand of our expanding population. Another priority will be public safety, insuring Teaneck has the appropriate size police force and emergency services keeping the residence safe. Third, environmental sustainability, invest in renewable energy projects and green spaces. Fourth, invest in smart city

technologies which will improve services and efficiency. Fifth, affordable housing will increase the chances of ensuring community stability, Lastly, economic development attracting businesses and supporting entrepreneurs.

We can achieve the priorities while subsidizing the tax burden in various ways. One way is to establish Teaneck as a cultural destination where people are encouraged to spend time and money in Teaneck by maximizing commercial benefit from culture and arts -- such as establishing heritage tours that will illuminate Teaneck's distinct history, creating unique dining experiences corroborating with Teaneck's restaurants, partner with local hotels to establish a tourism package. Also, we can increase revenue from grants, constitute a community foundation where its sole purpose is to raise revenue for the benefit of Teaneck, confirm we are collecting the necessary levels of all fees for licenses, permits, and fines; engage a township compliance officer which will ensure all codes and regulations are being followed.

2. As a town council member, I recommend that we work to effectuate a culture where all residents feel they are included. In that effort we would need to establish collectively a visioning process rather than advocating for narrow viewpoints resulting in a full buy-in from all residents. Encourage greater resident participation in township decision making process through greater transparency and notice of township business decisions. Therefore, residents will feel respected and will have a sense of ownership in the direction of the township. In addition, strengthen relationships between diverse people by engaging through community activities such as district mixers where residents participate in events within districts they do not live. Partner with the Community Relations Board to introduce programs to fortify relationships between the diverse communities. These initiatives will always be subjected to the willingness and commitment of the community as a whole.

Ardie Walser, 350 Johnson Avenue

Years residing in Teaneck: 28 years

Occupation: Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for Graduate and Undergraduate Studies
Professor of Electrical Engineering

Education: City College of City University of NY, Electrical Engineering (BE, ME, PHD)

Family: Jarret (34), THS 2008 & Rutgers University (BA and MA)
Khari (29), THS 2013 & Syracuse University (BA)

Community Involvement:

- Lowell School PTO Member
- Thomas Jefferson School PTO Member
- Thomas Jefferson Math Tutor
- Teaneck PTO Council Member
- English Tutor for Day Laborers "ESL to Go" Program
- Created "Math Munchies" a free math tutoring program
- Co-founded "Math Adventures & Word Play" a 20-year old free enrichment program
- Teaneck BOE: President, Vice President, Various Committees
- Thurnauer School of Music at the JCC, Music School Committee Member

- WNET, Channel 13, Community Advisory Board Member
- Teaneck Community Chorus Advisory Board Member

1. Municipalities in the state of New Jersey are required to adopt a balanced budget. The budget accounts for recurring revenues (e.g., property taxes, state and federal aid, licensing, permit fees) and recurring expenditures (e.g., salaries, health care, maintenance, supplies, debt service). It also accounts for one-time expenditures like a capital project (e.g., a major repair) and one and done revenues like a grant and the selling of public properties. The municipal budget defines a financial framework for municipal spending during the year that should reflect the services that are needed and desired by its residents and that the municipality can adequately fund. My spending priorities will be dedicated by those things that will either maintain or improve the quality of life for Teaneck residents such as maintaining the services of our schools, police, fire and recreation departments.

To offset the rising cost of these services I will work with our town manager, chief financial officer and fellow council members to develop strategies that would include shared services between other municipalities, similar to those the township currently has with Paramus, Hackensack, and Bergen County. We would also look to private/ public partnerships with business and community organizations. It is also imperative to consider how development is done in our town and to demonstrate clearly any additional value in terms of additional revenues or an improved quality of life for current residents with any new building project.

2. Teaneck has a population of over 41,000 people who are representative of a number of ethnic, race and religious groups and who identify themselves as male, female, lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, straight and so on and who belong to a wide range of generational groups (e.g., Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z). The social and economic status of our residents is wide-ranging as well. We pride ourselves on our diversity and being an inclusive community. There is no role more important for a council member than to help improve the relationship between the various groups that constitutes the citizenry of our township. A few ways to strengthen the positive relationship between groups are:

1. Support current organizations, groups and events that already promote inclusiveness and diversity such as the Teaneck International Film Festival, the Teaneck Community Chorus, A Taste of Teaneck, Teaneck Farmers Market, and Teaneck Day
2. Effectively use the Youth Advisory Board (YAB), the Advisory Board on Community Relations, the Senior Citizens Advisory Board
3. Work with township religious leaders to create opportunities for residents to visit the many houses of worship to learn how we each worship
4. Work with Teaneck public, private and charter schools to create interschool events similar to *Building Bridges*, a Teaneck public school project that provided the opportunity for young people to learn about each other's culture and what they have in common and to appreciate each other's differences.

Karen Orgen, 1090 Lambert Road

Years residing in Teaneck: 50 years

Occupation: Pharmacist

Education: City University of New York, Queens College – BA, Biology;
St. John’s University – BS, Pharmacy

Family: Husband: Eric Orgen; Daughters: Allie Orgen & Jamie Orgen

Community Involvement:

- * Councilmember
- * Planning Board Member
- * Life Member and Past President, Teaneck Volunteer Ambulance Corps
- * Past President, Congregation Shaare Tefillah

1. Ensuring security for residents by supporting first responders with the necessary resources and equipment is crucial. We also aim to maintain and enhance the recreational activities we enjoy while improving our parks, fields, and roads each year. These goals have always posed challenges, especially now with inflation and the difficulties our purchasing agent encounters in sourcing products. To prevent taxes from rising sharply, we must generate additional revenue.

While we can explore creative solutions—such as the potential cannabis project on Alfred Avenue—it’s the developments that have yielded high permit fees and taxes, or payments in lieu, that have kept our taxes low. These developments have also helped us meet our state’s affordable housing requirements, contributed to addressing the current housing crisis, and welcomed new neighbors to our township.

By utilizing MOST funds and, hopefully soon, PSEG settlement funding, we can initiate improvements to our fields and parks. We will continue to engage our grant writers and leverage our relationships with State and Federal partners to uncover innovative funding opportunities for our projects.

2. Teaneck is a wonderfully diverse community, and yet, when you engage with residents, common ground often emerges. Sitting down for coffee, taking walks, and gathering in groups allow us to humanize one another, fostering connections that serve as a foundation for collaboration and improved relations. In contrast, social media, letters, and impersonal communication can lead to misunderstandings and conflict, as people may express thoughts online that they wouldn’t voice in person.

Bringing in outside voices can complicate matters further. However, we’ve witnessed inspiring grassroots events blossoming in our town—groups of women seeking connections, clergy building bridges, and houses of worship hosting picnics and speed-friending events to help residents bond quickly.

While this has been a challenging period for our community, there is much to be hopeful about

as residents emerge from their silos to connect out of necessity. There may not be a quick fix, but often the efforts we invest yield the most meaningful and lasting results.

Reshma Khan, 140 Hillside Avenue

Years residing in Teaneck: 18 years

Occupation: Small Business Owner

Education:

- Bachelor of Commerce - Business, Accounting and minor in Economics – University of Madras (<https://www.unom.ac.in/>)
- Master of Business Administration in Marketing - Manipal Academy of Higher Education, India (<https://www.manipal.edu/mu.html>)
- Master of Science in Integrated Marketing Communications – Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern U (<https://www.medill.northwestern.edu/>)

Family: Husband Arif and 3 children

Community Involvement:

- Volunteer, Activist and Petitioner/Plaintiff – “One Town One Vote” movement to move council elections from May to November
- Founder, *The Nightingales* Junior choir and *American Changemakers* youth engagement groups
- Appointed member, Advisory Board for Community Relations (ABCR)
- Appointed member, Municipal Open Space Trust (MOST)
- Member, League of Women Voters
- PTO mom & President, Academy of Greatness and Excellence (2017-2018)

1. As a leader on the council, I will use resident input as the guiding principle for spending priorities along these major themes, which are also the top reasons why residents pick a place to live:

- a) Safety: Infrastructure maintenance and essential services should be prioritized so residents feel safe and catered to in Teaneck. Some savings can also be gained through shared services (e.g. recycling) with neighboring towns.
- b) Education: Focus should be on enhancing the quality of our public schools by not only keeping the current allocation to the district but also, fostering a collaborative partnership with the school board.
- c) Wellness: Parks and open spaces to be refreshed to ensure residents and families have adequate access to sports and leisure activities, along with improving and beautifying streetscape for business districts. This will enhance visitor spending and increase foot-traffic encouraging local and new retail businesses to thrive.
- d) Environmental sustainability: With an eye on the future (and the climate crisis), we have to improve its attention on renewable energy options and green initiatives (grant options abound) to not only help the environment but also secure a prosperous future for all.
- e) Economic development: We can explore emerging revenue sources for development including making Teaneck an innovation hub due to proximity to NYC, neighborhood-friendly mixed-use building to revitalize downtown areas, etc. We can partner with non-profit organizations to maximize the rich diversity of Teaneck’s

natural (Argonne Park is one of the largest at 54 acres), historic (civil rights era milestones and markers) and cultural landmarks (jewels like the Teaneck International Film Festival and the Teaneck Farmers Market).

2. Community relations is a primary responsibility of the Teaneck council and as leaders we must own it! Harmony in Teaneck must begin with the council decision-making and policies. As a councilwoman with a multi-cultural background who has now spent most of my adult life as a Teaneck resident, I believe we must make a conscious effort to promote equity and inclusion for all so everyone feels welcome here. We must in fact, make inclusion a goal that is measured so we stay accountable to our residents. The motto should be “think global, act local” – with a concentration on universal decision-making that caters to the greater good of all people.

We can capitalize Teaneck’s rich diversity through events and festivals that promote all cultures at public events. Every neighborhood should be encouraged to run block parties, which are a great breeding ground for lifelong friendships. This will also galvanize the youth (our future) and encourage civic engagement. As a member of the Advisory Board for Community Relations, I have experienced the joy of (ongoing) dialog and the amalgamation of different ideas. And we must continue this in smaller circles promoting dialog in safe spaces. An inter-faith community group (previous clergy council) can have tremendous impact on outreach and leaders can act as ambassadors in building bridges and bringing people together.

Chondra Young, 229 Irvington Rd

Years residing in Teaneck: 40 years

Occupation: Controller

Education: B.A. Accounting (Stockton University); MA in Government Accounting, (Rutgers University); CPA candidate

Family: Husband(married for 25 years); Daughters Jade (24) & Deja (20)

Community Involvement:

- Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (30 years)
- Brownie Girl Scout - Troop Leader in 2006
- Leadership Teaneck graduate (2011)
- Co-Sponsor w/Lizette P. Parker on Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move Initiative” for Teaneck (2011)
- Volunteer Tutor - Math Adventures & Word Play (2010-2012)
- BOE District Advisory Team (2011-2014)
- PTO President - Bryant School, Hawthorne Elementary School, Thomas Jefferson Middle School and Teaneck High School (2012-2022)
- Teaneck Democratic Committee District 18 Representative (2014-2018)
- Teaneck Road Business Community Alliance (2016-current)
- Co-Founder of Windbreakers Teaneck Track and Field competitive team (2013)
- Member of League of Women Voters (2014-current)
- Current Teaneck Library Board Treasurer (2 years)
- Current Board member for Center for Food Action (2 years)

- NAACP executive board member - Chair of Political Action Committee (2 years)
- Member of Bergen WeDo (Women Empowered Democratic Organization) (2 years)
- Teaneck Garden Club member
- Bergen County Citizens Police Academy graduate 2024

1. Homeowners' property taxes have just gone up, yet Teaneck residents still ask for improvements to its streets, sidewalks and parks and to continue maintaining police, fire, recreation and other services. Tell us about your spending priorities for the Township and how you will balance that with the need to keep property tax rates from soaring?

In addressing spending priorities, I will focus on maintaining the critical services Teaneck relies on while finding innovative ways to prevent property taxes from increasing significantly.

My priority is to improve essential areas such as street and sidewalk repairs, especially where residents have pointed out accessibility challenges. Parks are another key focus, with a vision for green spaces that are energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable. For example, stormwater management upgrades and eco-friendly designs will help reduce long-term maintenance costs.

I understand the importance of supporting our law enforcement and first responders. Through my experience at the Bergen County Citizens Police Academy, I gained a firsthand understanding of what it takes to protect and serve our community. I will continue advocating for strong funding for the police and fire departments to ensure they are equipped with the tools and training they need to keep Teaneck safe.

I also have a deep commitment to Teaneck's cultural and educational resources. As the Treasurer of the Teaneck Library Board, I've seen the incredible impact our library has on the community—it's more than just books. The library is a space for learning, connection, and civic engagement. I will advocate for ensuring its proper funding to keep expanding programs and building stronger relationships with our residents.

In balancing the need for essential services with controlling taxes, I will draw on my years of experience as an Accountant/Analyst to propose a thorough review of the budget. I'll push for identifying areas of waste and inefficiency, while also seeking grant funding and public-private partnerships that could help fund parks and infrastructure improvements without burdening homeowners.

2. Teaneck's diversity is one of its greatest strengths, and it's important that we embrace that. Unfortunately, tensions between various groups have arisen, but as a town council member, I will actively work to foster unity and understanding.

Through my involvement with the Teaneck Race Amity group, I've been part of ongoing efforts to promote cross-cultural understanding and unity. I would expand the reach of this initiative, which received a proclamation and date designation from the Teaneck Council, by encouraging more community-wide participation. These events foster relationships and trust that help reduce divisions.

Through my 26 years plus in community service roles, I have always been focused on building connections. As a council member, I'll continue that focus by fostering open, honest communication and creating platforms for dialogue across different groups, helping to bridge gaps and resolve conflicts.

I will ensure that town hall meetings and community forums are accessible to all voices in Teaneck, where residents can express their concerns and ideas in a productive manner. By embracing this approach, we can foster mutual respect and work toward solutions that strengthen our community.

I believe by engaging all residents, educating them on the issues, and empowering them to take part in the decision-making process, we can build a more cohesive and understanding Teaneck.

ELECTION DAY
Tuesday, November 5th
Polls Open 6AM to 8PM

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!

This Voters Guide has been prepared by the League of Women Voters of Teaneck, a nonpartisan group of local residents, assuring that all eligible voters have the opportunity and the information to exercise their right to vote. Our organization provides opportunities for voter registration each year; works to improve our government; studies local, state and national issues; and strives to engage all citizens in the civic decisions that could impact their lives.

For information on all candidates, poll locations & registration information, go to www.VOTE411.org