

# **League of Women Voters of Teaneck Voters' Guide for Town Council Election 2020**

Our voters' guide questionnaire and letter of invitation to the Candidates' Night, co-sponsored by LWV/Teaneck, were hand-delivered to each of the candidates for Teaneck Township Council on March 9, 2020 with a deadline date of March 31st. In addition to asking them about their Teaneck residency, occupation, education, family & community involvement, we asked them to answer the following questions and to limit their three answers to a total of 500 words or less:

- 1. What suggestions do you have for improvement of maintenance and upkeep of parks and recreation spaces in Teaneck?**
- 2. What changes would you recommend for future development projects in Teaneck and what role should council take in the oversight of its statutory boards?**
- 3. What is the role of Town Council members to help improve intergroup relations and dialogue in Teaneck (race, religion, public vs. private schools, neighborhoods, etc.) and can you provide specific suggestions to encourage better relationships in our diverse community?**

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

## **Gina Gerszberg, 1308 Taft Road**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 25

**Occupation:** Realtor/Licensed Real Estate Agent

**Education:** Montclair State University

**Family:** Married for 28 Years to David Gerszberg

3 Children: Daughter, Addie (20) attending Underwood International College/Yonsei University, S.Korea; Son, Don (17) attending Bergen County Technical School – Teterboro; Son, Eli (15) attending Teaneck High School

**Community Involvement:**

- Temple Emeth, Parent Teacher Association President
- Teaneck Community Charter School – Teaneck Charter School Community Organization (TCSCO) Chairperson
- Greater Bergen Realtors (Regional Real Estate Board) Chairperson, Advocacy and Communications Committee
- Greater Bergen Realtors – member Government and Legislative Affairs Committee
- Democratic Committee of Bergen County/Teaneck Democratic Municipal Committee
  - Elected District 9 Female representative
  - Corresponding Secretary

**1.** We have 11 Advisory Boards to the Council and 9 Statutory boards; I would like to see more collaboration between the various committees and the council. Projects need to be examined by

these various groups to determine the benefits and impacts on our community and our environment. We need to make sure that we have ample funds to maintain the structures and parks in existence before creating new structures that may not be beneficial to or necessary for most of the residents of Teaneck. For example, the roof and exterior of the Rodda Center has been neglected and not properly maintained, and because of the deterioration it will now cost the town more to make these necessary repairs.

2. As a resident, homeowner and real estate professional, I fully understand the need for and the importance of development and the lack of available housing. I feel we need to take a holistic approach in growing the town. We need to consider the needs of various age groups, a mixture of available housing to own and rent, integrating mixed use properties to increase walkability and decrease encroachment on residential neighborhoods, and study the impact of development on our schools, traffic, commuting and the environment. Our master plan must be reviewed and revised to take into consideration the change in our population which includes growth, current social and environmental needs and lifestyle changes.

The boards need to be filled by council with residents that are representative of our communities and diverse neighborhoods and not chosen to represent the interests of the council.

3. We seem to have various and splintered groups about town that have a similar goal of unification and improving relations across race, religion etc. These initiatives need to come from the town council collaborating and communicating with these various organized groups to work with advisory boards and on town appointed committees, in an attempt to maximize residents' input. The council needs to be unified and accessible and willing to engage with the towns various communities. Crucial information needs to come from one place and then in turn could be shared from that one message through email and on social media platforms. The message of unity, inclusion and acceptance must come from the leadership of the council as one entity.

### **Karen Orgen, 1090 Lambert Road**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 47

**Occupation:** Pharmacist

**Education:** BA Biology, CUNY Queens College  
BS Pharmacy, St. Johns University

**Family:** Husband – Eric Orgen; 2 Daughters – Allie Orgen and Jamie Orgen

**Community Involvement:**

- Teaneck Planning Board
- Teaneck Volunteer Ambulance Corps -- Life Member & former President
- Congregation Shaare Tefillah – former president, Board member and numerous committees
- Ben Porat Yosef – numerous committees

1. Due to limited word count requirements, readers are encouraged to find more comprehensive statements regarding our platforms on our website: [www.movingteaneckforward.com](http://www.movingteaneckforward.com)

Our parks and open space are tremendous resources for our entire community. Together as candidates of Moving Teaneck Forward, we are dedicated to increasing varied recreational options for all ages and abilities. We will also continue to ensure capital repairs are included in budgets as we enhance active and passive offerings for residents.

**2.** Teaneck has managed to see several smart development projects created in recent years, which have been tailored to our needs. Through feedback and community input obtained at public hearings, Teaneck has created projects that maintain our quality of life for residents. Now, it is time to move to the next level, with a comprehensive look at our entire community; one that charts a path for today, as well as our future.

Our business districts will soon start to see the benefits that come from mixed use facilities and foot traffic.

Taxes have been kept stable (on the municipal side) over the past six years, in part due to development. We have also been able to invest in additional recreation, police and fire services. We now need to capitalize on that momentum - and help set a plan which will help our small businesses succeed.

Appropriate fiscal decisions set us apart from our neighbors. Continuing to adhere to those principles will be critical in allowing us to weather many of the ramifications challenges (including those brought by COVID-19). At a time when other communities worry about being able to make payroll, Teaneck just introduced another zero levy increase.

Community input will be critical - and we look forward to having discussions about our future with all our stakeholders.

**3.** Teaneck has a long history when it comes to being a visionary and making strides towards inter-group relations. From the voluntary integration of our schools, the creation of an advisory board on community relations & clergy council, as well as other joint ventures, Teaneck is well positioned to continue the great work that has come before us.

We are one Teaneck. Whether young couples looking for an affordable apartment to stay and raise their family in the town where they grew up, or seniors that choose to live here on fixed incomes, we each contribute to our township in various ways and are better for the collective effort.

There's always a need to break down silos within our community, so we can reach further, tapping into our true potential. Community meetings are a good way to jumpstart that healthy constructive dialog. We would also encourage additional senior programming, youth events (e.g. SAT prep and sports) as well as community events that can bring various groups together.

The candidates of Moving Teaneck Forward are dedicated to always being available for conversations with any members of our community. When we communicate with each other in good faith, we will always find more in common than which sets us apart.

## **Michael Pagan, 665 River Road**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 33 years

**Occupation:** Bergen County Public Information Officer

**Education:** Temple University (BA, Journalism); Bergen Community College; Teaneck High School; Benjamin Franklin Middle School; Whittier Elementary School

**Family:** 4-year old son, brother, parents

**Community Involvement:**

- Teaneck Planning Board
- Teaneck Senior Citizens Advisory Board
- Bergen County Latino Advisory Board
- Teaneck Rotary

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## **Mark J. Schwartz, 641 Cumberland Avenue**

**Years residing in Teaneck: 25**

**Occupation:** Real Estate Management Consultant

**Education:** Left high school after 11<sup>th</sup> grade, got GED.

Later got an associates in business at age 26

**Family:** Wife Naomi (35 year resident); 4 children – Benjy (19), Aiden (17), Kayla (14), and Shayna (12)

**Community Involvement:**

- Deputy Mayor 2018-present
- Councilmember 2012- present
- Planning Board member 2006-2012
- Council liaison to: Planning Board 2014-present, Cedar Lane Management Group 2016- present. Parks Playground Recreation Advisory Board 2014-2018
- Teaneck Volunteer Ambulance Corp- member 2002-present
- River Edge Volunteer Fire Department- member 1998- present
- Yavneh Academy, Paramus NJ. Board member 2006- present, Vice President 2014- present
- Torah Academy of Bergen County, Teaneck board member 2015-2019
- Congregation Shaare Tefillah, Teaneck- founder and President- 2003-2012, 2016-2018
- Teaneck Baseball Organization, Teaneck Junior Soccer League- approx. 27 teams 2004-2013
- Jewish Link of North Jersey- Co-founder, Co- Publisher- 2014- present

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**Ardie D. Walser, 350 Johnson Avenue**

**Years residing in Teaneck:** 24 years

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

**Education:** PhD (Electrical Engineering), City University of New York

**Family:** Wife (Patricia); Two Sons (Jarrett and Khari)

**Community Involvement:**

- Lowell School PTO
- \* Thomas Jefferson PTO
- \* Teaneck PTO Council
- \* Volunteer for Morning Math Tutoring Program at Thomas Jefferson Middle School
- \* Created After School Math Program “Math Munchies” at Lowell ES
- \* Cofounder and Director of the Free Math and Writing Program “Math Adventures and Word Play”
- \* Day Laborers English Tutoring, “ESL To Go” Program
- \* President, Vice President, Numerous Committees on the Teaneck Board of Education
- \* Music School Committee Member for the JCC on the Palisades (Thurnauer School of Music)
- \* Community Advisory Board Member for WNET, Channel 13
- \* Advisory Board Member for the Teaneck Community Chorus
- \* Served on the Vestry of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church
- \* Teaneck “Building Bridges”
- \* Teaneck Community Project “Pathway To The Future” Visioning Project

1. To improve the maintenance and upkeep of our Teaneck parks and recreation spaces, it is important that the council work as a cohesive unit with the Town Manager, community stakeholders and the Council’s Parks, Playground & Recreation Advisory Board (PPRAB) to implement some of the recommendations stated in the Teaneck Township Open Space and Recreation Plan (updated October 31, 2019 by The Land Conservancy of New Jersey). In 2019, the Municipal Open Space Trust Fund Committee (MOST) proposed the following one of many updated goals:

- a. Maintain and upgrade the existing system of parks, recreation and open space to provide Township residents of all ages, abilities and disabilities consistent with current and projected community needs for recreation and open spaces.

From this goal the Council, the PPRAB and the Township manager and all other relevant committees and agencies would create a comprehensive maintenance plan for all 25 municipal parks and the single county park in the Township of Teaneck, then execute that plan based on a prioritized list of scheduled maintenance projects.

2. The Teaneck Township Master Plan (MP) and the updated Township of Teaneck Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) are two documents that should be used by the Council when considering any major developments. When appropriate the Council should work with the municipality’s statutory boards such as the Zoning Board of Adjustment and the Planning Board

to ensure that members of these boards are well versed in the goals and vision stated in the MP and the OSRP. The Council would use these documents as tools to promote a vision that is consistent with the desires of the residents of Teaneck such as to attract developers who are willing to help make that vision a reality.

**3..** Teaneck has a population of about 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). Teaneck prides itself on its 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 the township. Ways to strengthen the positive relations between groups are:

- a. 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 and Teaneck Farmers Market.
- b. Effectively use the Youth Advisory Board (YAB), the Advisory Board on Community Relations, the Senior Citizens Advisory Board, etc.
- c. Work with township religious leaders to create opportunities for residents to visit the many houses of worship to learn how we each worship.
- d. Work with the Teaneck School board, private and charter schools to re-create a public school event called “Building Bridges” that will include all Teaneck schools. Students will learn what they have in common and appreciate each other’s differences.

### **Denise S. Belcher, Bogert Street**

**Years Residing in Teaneck:** 36 years

**Occupation:** Licensed Real Estate Broker and Educator Director

**Education:** Morgan State University (BS, Marketing)

**Family:** Married to Eric Belcher for 27 years; 2 Daughters – Chloe (23), Graduate of University of Hartford, Marketing and Elmira (16), THS Junior

#### **Record of Community Involvement:**

- Planning Board Member
- Teaneck Public School Parent and Advocate
- Founding Member, TRBCA-Teaneck Road Business Community Alliance
- Affordable Housing Forum organizer hosted for Teaneck Residents 2018 2019
- Chair of Economic Empowerment *Coalition of 100 Black Women (Bergen/Passaic Chapter)*
- Former President of Teaneck Chamber of Commerce
- Minister at Christian International Church

**1.** Teaneck is known for its coveted parks and recreation programs consisting of a rich lineup of services unrivaled by neighboring towns. It’s important to regularly access the residents use of our Parks and Recreation and how it’s valued. Clearly Teaneck has a large cross session of multigenerational programs that residents use. Improve the Rodda Center by addressing the deferred maintenance on this heavily used community resource. This building is the most used

of any of our buildings in town (short of education buildings) and deserves to be not only maintained but “continuous improvement” of its’ services and infrastructure to township residents. Implement Open Space initiative is important to Teaneck. Much of the work has been done and presented. It’s up to leadership to implement the plan now. The Open Space initiative is a value added to our residents not only now, but it lays the foundation for future generations.

**2.** Future development projects in Teaneck needs a model that our statutory boards use as “Best Practices to Development”. The Master Plan should be the guide that we use to filter all development projects. Over the years, boards have made inefficient attempts to review and update the Master Plan. The resulting problem has been few reviews of Master Plan or its use as a litmus test to development decisions. What’s at issue is our statutory boards needs to sit with other stakeholders to understand Township Development Planning. Community members as stakeholders and Subject Matter Experts need a seat at the table to give input on development best practices. We must not allow variances to guide development, but our Master Plan and By-Laws must guide responsible and strategic development.

The Statutory boards are very powerful boards and should be required to report each quarter to the council and community of the applications passed and in progress. How did/does these approved/pending applications build upon the Master Plan?

There must be oversight and transparency in the boards specific to By-laws (in some instances there are no By-laws). By-laws cover issues such as attendance, council approved members, etc. Since these boards are guided by Land Use Laws, oversight is crucial. The Town Council also needs to review the terms limits of many members that have sat on statutory boards (some for decades). It’s important to encourage residents to serve that have rich talents and are reflective of our township and not just select those who serve the special interests of the council.

**3.** Leadership comes from the top. Teaneck has a history of diversity but currently lacks in Inclusion. There are some that only interact with other communities behind angry posts on social media. The role of Town Council members is to bridge the gap between ALL communities. One area of improvement is to respect residents when they come before the council or boards to speak during meetings, fostering dialogue between communities to encourage understanding, collaboration and consensus building. It’s important that the council seek out communities and purposely facilitate community building. This can be done by hosting Community Retrospectives and Town Hall meetings. When the Council leads this effort, it will help to leave a legacy for our children to build upon.

# TOWN COUNCIL ELECTION DAY

## Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup>

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

**For this election only, there will be no option to vote in person at the polls.**

***Paper ballots will be mailed to all registered voters during the week of April 13<sup>th</sup> and must be mailed back by Election Day (Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup>).***

## **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 works to improve our government; study local, state and national issues; and engage all citizens in the decisions that impact their lives.*