

## Candidate Questionnaire Responses

### **Montgomery Township Committee (three year term)**

The League of Women Voters of the Princeton Area is publishing the verbatim responses of candidates to questions asked by the League. Responses were limited to 150 words.

#### Kacey Dyer, Republican

I am a lifelong Montgomery resident, a University of Vermont graduate, and a successful businesswoman, having worked in the financial industry for over eight years. I am an Assistant Vice President at Merrill Lynch, with the business skills to get taxes and borrowing under control and bring needed change.

#### Keith L. Hovey, Democrat

I am an attorney specializing in general real estate, redevelopment, and construction litigation. Prior to law school, I worked as a nurse in open-heart intensive care and now serve on Montgomery 's Board of Health. My wife, Rebecca, and I are homeowners and taxpayers and are expecting our first child.

**Are you satisfied with the township's approach to developing Skillman Village? If yes, please explain why. If no, please explain what should be done differently.**

Ms. Dyer:

No. Of the Township's staggering \$63 million debt, \$27 million was borrowed for the Skillman Village property. The current Democratic leadership is wedded to a so-called "village in a park" plan for high density residential -- at least 271 units -- and commercial development on the property. That would bring with it more traffic, more COAH obligations, more children in township schools, and, as surely as day follows night, more taxes. Worse yet, no developers bid on the project. Unless an alternative is found, Montgomery taxpayers will be saddled with this enormous debt for years to come.

That's why I was the first to call upon Somerset County to purchase the Skillman Village property for use as a south county park facility. A purchase would provide much greater proceeds than mere open space funding, provide immediate tax relief, preserve Montgomery's beautiful open space and provide county park facilities.

Mr. Hovey:

Yes. With broad, bi-partisan support from the community, the Township purchased the 256 acre site from the State. After extensive public meetings and consultation with various experts, the Township conducted timely and safe demolition and clean-up of the site surrounding the Village Elementary School. Given my experience in construction and redevelopment, having accomplished this without incident or significant delay is an enormous achievement.

I strongly support the township's efforts to secure county funding for a park of at least 200 acres at Skillman Village. I also support pursuing alternate sources of funding like the \$1.5 million grant the Township received from the NJ Hazardous Discharge Site Remediation Fund. If the County comes through with funding for the site, it will be important to carefully negotiate terms and conditions to protect the best interests of nearby neighbors and taxpayers throughout the community.

**What should Montgomery Township be doing to ease the local impact of a worsening economy?**

Ms. Dyer:

Very simply, pay down the debt to reduce taxes and require a voter referendum for extraordinary borrowing. The \$27 million borrowed for Skillman Village would not have happened if the voters had been given a chance to vote on it.

Under the current Democratic leadership, the township has borrowed irresponsibly -- the township has \$27 million in annual revenues, \$63 million in outstanding debt and annual interest payments of over \$2 million. Also, the Democratic leadership has raided and nearly depleted the township's surplus. And this year, on top of the school taxes, the township imposed a 16% municipal tax increase -- one that Mayor Birge called "modest".

The fiscal irresponsibility of the current Democratic leadership must stop. The township must reduce taxes and explore alternatives for Skillman Village including a successful purchase by the County. And the voters must have the opportunity to reign in borrowing by voter referendum.

Mr. Hovey:

As residents try to conserve and make financial sacrifices during these tough times, the Township must do the same. Now, the Township must prioritize expenditures, look for alternate forms of funding, regionalize more services, and call for greater civic involvement.

In the interim, the Township may need to postpone certain capital projects, such as road projects. The Township must also continue reaching out to government and private groups for additional revenue through government aid and various grants. While on the Board of Health, we entered into an agreement with South Brunswick for shared services for animal control to help reduce costs. We may need to enter into similar shared service agreements with other municipalities to help reduce costs. Finally, we will need people to be more involved in our community to help us come together and weather these difficult times.

**New COAH standards would require Montgomery to add 400 subsidized housing units. The township has joined a lawsuit challenging this. What is your position on the COAH standards and the township's handling of them?**

Ms. Dyer:

Promoting diversity is laudable, but the new COAH standards impose onerous burdens on small, rural towns like Montgomery. Adding 400 units to Montgomery's 7,200 households will increase traffic, necessary township services and children in township schools. It's even worse if the units are added by private development. Assuming a developer could profit by building market-rate and affordable units in an 80/20 ratio, that would still require an additional 2,000 housing units in Montgomery!

I support the township's joinder in the COAH lawsuit, but the Democratic leadership wrongly delayed public discussion of its COAH plan until post-election. If the lawsuit fails, the township must find ways to satisfy COAH other than development of thousands of new homes at Skillman Village or elsewhere. Other possibilities include group homes for the disabled, age-restricted housing and using existing housing. Long-term planning should seek to reduce developable land in Montgomery by preserving open space.

Mr. Hovey:

The COAH standards, as presently constructed, are fundamentally flawed for several reasons. First, COAH's standard for calculating Montgomery's obligation includes land which cannot be developed, such as embankments, school yards, landscaping in developments, etc. The overly burdensome and impractical calculation leads to a much higher COAH obligation. Meeting that obligation would result in overdevelopment causing a greater strain for Montgomery.

In addition, COAH is not adequately funded by the State and, therefore, places an undue burden on municipal taxpayers. Implementation of the new standards will cost approximately \$18.6 billion statewide. The 2.5% development tax on commercial development will still leave \$4.3 billion to be paid by local municipalities, including Montgomery. Due to the lack of adequate funding, Montgomery taxpayers will again be burdened with higher taxes unless the COAH rules are changed. At present, the only recourse is to challenge COAH's standards in the Courts.

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