

# Atlantic Highlands 2023 Elections: Candidates Questionnaire Review

On October 22, all six Atlantic Highlands candidates were sent a list of about 20 questions on specific subjects requesting their positions on each as it pertains to how they would eventually govern if elected, or re-elected. They were informed that their answers will be compiled and shared. A deadline of October 28 was established, and the only ground-rule requested was that the answers be “short, yet informative”..

On the following pages: Subject Lines head each page, questions follow. Candidate answers were cut-and-pasted directly from their replies, and inserted together. Wherever possible, the individual answers are all on the same page for direct comparison, but that is not always the case. Pages “continued” are noted appropriately.

Apologies for the format; no pretty pictures, just facts. Any comments/clarifications that I have added where necessary are *[bracketed and in italics]*. I took the liberty of correcting spelling and minor grammatical errors where found.

While some answers may seem lengthy, this Review is just a little over half as many pages compared to last-years published Review.

This is the third year that I have made a request of our candidates to answer a questionnaire. Prior to issuing it, there were contacts made to me from some of the candidates, and others, inquiring whether I would be sending it out again this year, so I guess this Review serves a purpose on both side of the election.

I hope the Review helps you as a voter understand the candidate's positions and priorities, but more importantly, helps you choose the three best candidates for the job starting in 2024 for the reasons most important to you.

*I encourage you to forward this Review to your AH friends and neighbors...the more Borough voters that have an opportunity to read these views of our candidates, the better.*

Thank you to all six 2023 candidates for choosing to participate.

*- Mark Fisher*

## 2023 Elections – Your Candidates

### For Mayor

*(vote for ONE)*

Lori Hohenleitner

Jim Murphy

### For Council

*(vote for TWO)*

Jon Crowley *(incumbent)*

Alyson Forbes

Ellen O'Dwyer

Vinny Whitehead

**Election Day is Tuesday, November 7, VOTE!...it's important.**

## SUBJECT: General

**Question: With an eye toward the future, what investments do you believe the borough should place a high priority on now, if any?**

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** Since I have taken on the role of finance chair, the finance committee is now taking steps to make changes that benefit our borough. For example, there has not been a finance committee evaluation of our banking relationships in at least the last six years. We are now developing an RFP process to see if we can improve our rates. It's a no brainer that we should be earning the highest possible amount on the borough's funds. In terms of physical investments, I plan to prioritize a strategic plan for the Harbor to include all structures owned by the municipality. I am proud that we hired a grant writer this year and have directed them to prioritize funding for an infrastructure study with applications to the county, state, and federal government. We're leveraging our close relationship with Congressman Pallone's office to secure additional funding like we recently did for the harbor bulkhead. Our Department of Public Works does an incredible job with the resources they have, but we need to support them by upgrading our infrastructure to accommodate for climate change and the intense storms we have been experiencing.

**Murphy, Jim:** - The first obvious answer that comes to mind is our Municipal Harbor. This is a vital asset to our borough and investing money to attract more businesses, patrons, and revenue to our budget should be a priority. The other investment would be the opportunity for a community center acquired through the Mother Teresa Regional School/St. Agnes purchase. This would enhance the recreation programming for all residents from the youth to seniors, as well as provide an essential location for our residents in times of crisis.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** Infrastructure! Like owning a house, the projects never end, and that's true of our water district, roads, etc. This year, council members requested and approved the hiring of a grant writer to seek outside funds for projects like these to help lessen the burden to our taxpayers.

**Forbes, Alyson:** Climate resilience is key to ensuring a future for the borough of Atlantic Highlands. The CoreLogic Climate Change Catastrophe Report found that one in ten homes in the United States was impacted by natural disasters in 2021. Severe weather events will only become more frequent. Our highest priority should be building or reinforcing infrastructure that will protect our community from the negative effects of climate change.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** With increasing demand on our water and sewer system by new development, we must invest in these systems. I have a lot of experience with wells, septic, and sewer systems, and an excellent understanding of our current setup and what we should prioritize in its upgrading and maintenance. I have a unique way to "save the system" and get the municipality grant monies and other aid to fortify our system. To keep my answer short, it will involve putting us on the map as a Super Sustainable Community, which I have done, with the need to retain its Artesian [well] system as a standalone closed system that it is, because of its added value as a backup system for other communities in times of emergency. In addition, the water quality we have is unmatched due to the aquifers we are tapping, and our iron pipes. I would argue we could even bottle it and sell it!

**Whitehead, Vinny:** Not necessarily in this order but water, sewer, parking, police, first aid, fire department, safety regarding traffic, pedestrians, and bikers.

## SUBJECT: General

**Question:** Major projects are being approved in direct conflict with the Borough's Master Plan, the 'vision' for the future of our Borough. In your opinion, are the projects proposed and approved in the business district getting too large?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** As a sitting member of the Council, I am in a position where I am prohibited from commenting on specific projects as appeals come to Council. Having said that, I am in favor of the changes recently introduced that apply to improvements to our ordinances. I am confident that our Planning Board is acting in the best interests of our town and as Mayor will only appoint volunteer residents to the Planning Board who demonstrate a commitment to our neighbors and community.

**Murphy, Jim:** Simply put, yes. We need to consider our infrastructure, our utilities and the traffic and congestion this overdevelopment brings with it.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** Prior administrations allowed bigger projects to be built intown when empty lots existed along First Avenue; those times have passed and now we need to tap the brakes on density and the size of new projects. Four years ago, I wrote a new ordinance that would charge developers a \$25,000 fee for every parking space they were deficient in providing (as required by law). Those funds redesignated *[are]* to be placed in an escrow account dedicated to traffic and parking issues. Last week the planning board forwarded a new ordinance dealing with density that hews more closely to the Town's Master Plan (as well as some Design Standards). All to say, the ordinance will likely be tweaked and revised, but it is feeling like we are moving closer to some positive solutions for what, left uncontrolled, could become a bigger problem.

**Forbes, Alyson:** I am a resident of Atlantic Highlands who is interested in ensuring that any proposed development fits the character, need, and scale of the borough. I am in favor of making needed adjustments to our Master Plan to allow better control for aspects of development that most trouble our residents: affordability, aesthetics, parking, lot coverage, height, the overuse of impermeable building materials, and assurance that any building sited on First Avenue brings an opportunity for retail.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** When I was an Atlantic Highlands Environmental Commissioner, I stood before the Planning Board regarding the application for the Church on 3rd Avenue, and that the Environmental Commission is committed to stand by certain principles that are outlined in our Master Plan that promote the conservation of desirable community features, restrain future development on scarce un-built land, and guide preservation, restoration and redevelopment efforts. If you look at what was done at this location, the building was saved, and the site plan was overall a great solution in keeping with our Master Plan principles and objectives of retaining the character of the Borough as a small town, and maintaining its heritage goal to "maintain and enhance the Borough architectural, historic and scenic heritage as an asset". I find the proposed revisions in Ordinance 15-2023, Amending Chapter 150 Development Regulations to Further Regulate Development and Design in the Central Business District and Historic Business District to be a good start, one that we can put into effect promptly. It needs more work, but I am pleased to see specifics regarding architectural and building design standards. We need other ordinances enacted that address the purchase of contiguous lots and the conversion of CBD and HBD properties to essentially residential when they may not have been before, and the consequences of their pull on our infrastructure. We have to remember that our systems were built for suburban, not urban, living.

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**SUBJECT: General** *(continued)*

Question: Major projects are being approved in direct conflict with the Borough's Master Plan, the 'vision' for the future of our Borough. In your opinion, are the projects proposed and approved in the business district getting too large?

**Council Candidates** *(Continued from previous page)*

**Whitehead, Vinny:** I feel we bypass the Master Plan at times for special interest groups. The Master Plan should not be changed to accommodate builders or people on Planning Board. People are making money but not our town. One example are movies being made in our beautiful town. I think it is awesome, but the town should be getting a minimum of \$30,000 especially if the film budget is \$3 million or more. Same with builders, town should be getting 10% or more. Example: builder makes \$30 million, our town should be given 3 million. Atlantic Highlands should make profit as well as outside people. I do believe the projects proposed and approved are getting too large or at worst happening too fast. Business or other experienced people should be on the committees, it might be like that now, but I don't know each individual on the board yet.

## SUBJECT: General

**Question:** I have lived along Sandy Hook Bay all of my life and have never seen the level of whale and dolphin deaths as there has been in the last few years. In your opinion, to what do you attribute the large number of recent whale and dolphin deaths?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** I am very saddened by the whale and dolphin deaths. I have read extensive information and reviewed data that shows that the combination of healthier waters and increased activity at the Port of New York and New Jersey has been causing a higher number of boat strikes. Unfortunately, more whales and more boats equals more collisions. I appreciate the efforts of the Ports with their program to offer financial incentives to ships that voluntarily slow down to 10 knots or less as they get closer to shore.

**Murphy, Jim:** This is obviously a discussion being had throughout our community and reasoning for it may vary but what is undeniable are the increased deaths of our sea life. Whether it is the wind turbines or pollution attributing, we as a shore community need to be vigilant in understanding the causes and seeking solutions through different organizations such as MMSC (Marine Mammal Stranding Center) and Clean Ocean Action.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** Mark, I'm unqualified to answer this question and anything I would suggest would only be conjecture. Like you, I'm very concerned with what I see and read so I will continue to learn more until I feel like I can offer help/assistance as either a concerned citizen or councilman.

**Forbes, Alyson:** Whales and dolphins are spending more time in NY/NJ's coastal waters each season because these waters are warmer and cleaner than ever before due to both global warming and conservation efforts. The warmer waters are driving food sources closer to shore. In parallel, there has been a 27% increase in barge traffic to the Port of NY/NJ from 2019-2022 that is attributable to an increase in consumer goods purchased via online shopping. This information indicates to me that whale deaths are primarily being caused by vessel strikes. To help protect our marine mammals, we need stricter regulations on barge traffic and the speed at which barges can traverse known feeding grounds. It's great that the Port of NY/NJ developed a program to financial incentivize ships to voluntarily slow down to 10 knots or less as they get closer to shore, specifically to allow whales and dolphins more time to get out of the way. A step in the right direction.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** This is an environmental issue I would like our Environmental Commission to stay on top of, keeping the borough informed of latest developments, and opportunities to help. When I was on the Environmental Commission, we did discuss the offshore wind farms and the testing that was proposed. My response, and that of others was, "do no harm" to marine life in any activities related to the wind farms. Since then, there are over 30 Offshore Wind Development Leases/Plans in place, with Empire Wind 1 and 2 the nearest to Atlantic Highlands. We can partner with organizations like Clean Ocean Action and the American Littoral Society at Sandy Hook in supporting their efforts to fight this serious issue which will only become worse once any wind turbines are actually built.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** This is so sad, the recent whale death in Keansburg showed fractures and lacerations thought to be caused by a boat of considerable size. Some say offshore wind farms, others marine entanglement or pollution. If elected a person with a passion for this should head up an Environmental Committee.

**SUBJECT: General**

**Question: Will you be an advocate for annual increases to the LOSAP awards for our dedicated and reliable first responder volunteers that keep us safe 24/7?**

**Mayoral Candidates**

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** I have always been a fierce advocate for our first responders and will continue to be.

**Murphy, Jim:** YES, I believe the increase should be in line with COLA (Cost of Living Adjustments). As inflation and other costs increase, we need to consider those that depend on this income source.

**Council Candidates**

**Crowley, Jon:** Yes—it is a well earned, well deserved “thank you” to those who serve.

**Forbes, Alyson:** I believe folks should be rewarded for a job well done.

**O’Dwyer, Ellen:** The LOSAP awards are a very small way to thank our first responders. I was an officer on the Colts Neck First Aid Squad, one of the first to implement the LOSAP system, and was instrumental in designing the program for the town. Our formula included the type of activity and number of calls made by an individual volunteer that could earn them more points. We are not talking a lot of money, so let’s work in annual increases to the program or increasing incentives.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** Absolutely, most do this out of a passion to keep people safe. These are the hero’s that should be rewarded by more than a thank you.



**SUBJECT: General**

Question: The Borough is now involved in FIVE lawsuits/countersuits involving the design, construction and final acceptance by the Borough of the harbor Tow Boat building 2.5 years ago. The next Court conference is scheduled for Jan. 3, 2024, two days after your swearing-in. What will you do to:

- a. Get up-to-date on the necessity for all of this expensive-to-the-taxpayers litigation?
- b. Determine the root cause of how the Borough allowed this building to be accepted and occupied by its tenants with so many flaws and blatant building code violations that required immediate correction?

**Mayoral Candidates**

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** I am up to date on this matter. Please see above regarding my role as a member of Council and whether I may comment as well as my support for updating the Master Plan proactively and thoughtfully.

**Murphy, Jim:** a. As a new member to the Harbor Commission this year, I have been brought up to speed throughout the year. b. I believe root causes are being discussed now and through litigation, corrective actions are being sought out. That said, as Mayor I believe I would have a responsibility to schedule sit down with attorney, Harbor Commission Chair, Harbor Master, and BA to discuss all being done now and how we may move forward more effectively and efficiently.

**Council Candidates**

**Crowley, Jon:** While this is being litigated, it would be unwise for me to comment. That said, I have inquired about all available legal remedies for the borough in regard to repair costs. An accounting of legal expenses is already occurring.

**Forbes, Alyson:** a. Our sitting council members and borough attorney are well-prepared to brief any newly elected officials. b. That might be a better question for the folks who were sitting on the council in 2020. My goal would be to reach an agreeable resolution as quickly as possible. In my experience, ongoing litigation rarely leads to a better outcome.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** If the building is not to code, it needs to be fixed by the municipality for its tenant, and then the municipality will need to chase the money to be reimbursed from the parties responsible. Quite simply, I will need to get up to date on this issue by digging into all the documents, talk to the people involved, and find out what solution needs to be put in place so the current back and forth can stop, and the tenant can operate in a compliant building. There appears to be a lot of finger-pointing between the builder, engineering company, and architect as to who is responsible for any defects, omissions, etc. That tells me there may not have been specific language in the contract as to liability for the above. We can certainly build that into any future contracts so that responsibility is assigned when things go wrong.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** In depth investigation would have to be done by me and discussed with the new mayor and council members. I cannot accept favors to people because of friendships or gifts. I do not know if this was the case but any situation that has code violations should not be used by any tenant until taken care of.

## SUBJECT: Your New Event

**Question:** What NEW notable public event would you suggest to the Chamber of Commerce, Recreation and/or Events Committees to hold in town to promote business for a day (or days) and to put AH on the map as a place to go to this new annual event worth attending and would also help patronizing our local businesses and recreation facilities and as well?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** Prior to the pandemic, there was great energy behind a collaboration between the municipality, harbor, Chamber of Commerce, and Arts Council to have a public art event in the harbor. The event would be a multi-day celebration of the arts, local culinary excellence, and our historic waterfront. We will implement this event in 2024 with public art events at each participating local business, an auction of art created during the event, and family events for everyone to enjoy. We previously had a highly successful culinary event in support of the Atlantic Highlands First Aid and Safety Squad and look forward to bringing it to another level. All of our municipal events are for all residents and are not a venue for politics. Being a public servant is more than a photo op. It's about doing the work. If elected mayor, I will not allow any event to be used for political purposes.

**Murphy, Jim:** One event I have already discussed with our First responder Chiefs I call the "First Responder Challenge." This would involve a day/weekend for our community to get together and support either, Police, Fire, or First Aid in a series of events, such as a softball game, cornhole, and cook off (events for all). This could be done as a tournament style where winners advance to play next group. Our residents and businesses could sponsor and support a team by wearing either red (FD), white (FA) or blue (PD) t-shirts in the crowd. Funds could be raised, and the overall winner (best out of three events) would receive or choose to split among the three groups. This could be a day/weekend all of AH looks forward to, help with recruiting efforts for both FD and FA, and attract visitors from outside communities to patronize our local businesses.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** This August I expanded the Atlantic Highlands Music Festival that I have held for the past three years to also include sixteen food trucks, several artisan vendors and a Beer/wine garden. The event was a great success that attracted more than 5,000 guests to the marina and overflowing to First Avenue. While the Recreation Committee has a budget for sponsoring community events such as this, I negotiated a healthy percentage of alcoholic beverage sales to come back to the borough to make this event self-sustaining. Next year, if re-elected, I will re-negotiate terms for a 50% share of beverage sales – along with additional fees from all vendors -- to be returned to the borough (and recreation committee) to pay for future festivals. Taking things a step further, I would like to suggest a partnership with some of my studio connections and the Smodcastle Cinemas to promote either a major film release or a weekend-long film festival to create a three day celebration of the arts.

**Forbes, Alyson:** First Avenue Fest. Currently, most (but not all) of our special events take place in the harbor, away from our primary business district. I'd like to propose an annual street fair featuring food, drinks, goods, and music from our excellent local businesses on our own main street. A great way to promote Atlantic Highlands's small businesses and introduce folks to our town and all it has to offer.

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**SUBJECT: Your New Event** *(continued)*

**Question:** What NEW notable public event would you suggest to the Chamber of Commerce, Recreation and/or Events Committees to hold in town to promote business for a day (or days) and to put AH on the map as a place to go to this new annual event worth attending and would also help patronizing our local businesses and recreation facilities and as well?

**Council Candidates** *(continued)*

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** There are a number of ideas that come to mind that go along with unifying the community, its residents, businesses, and pets. Since this is a very walkable town, I would like to celebrate the uniqueness of Atlantic Highlands with a "Celebrates" series which would be held maybe 3-times a year in Spring, Summer, and Fall. It would be a half day festival which can be co-located or hosted on the same day as another event, such as the Craft Fair, or the Farmers Market which would help bring more customers for them. They would be located somewhere close to downtown so people can park and walk about. Some themes could be "Atlantic Highlands Celebrates its History" and would include a Sears Homes Tour, and information about the historic buildings along 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, with photos and stories for each building on display. "Atlantic Highlands Celebrates Art" with a big outdoor art show stretched across Hennessy Blvd featuring a variety of artists, and art by children. I have already initiated a new project where we host a temporary art installation of painted figures (like Freehold did with horse statues) that are sponsored by individuals or businesses and are painted and decorated, with awards given. We were considering a bird figure for this. Another could be "Atlantic Highlands Celebrates Pets" where we can bring back the historic "Doo-Dah" dog parade. Like we just did with the Halloween Parade, instead of food trucks, local restaurants set up tables to sell their food and beverages in Veterans Park. There are many ideas we can use to draw visitors from neighboring towns to stop by for a few hours, have some fun, eat some food, visit some businesses, and enjoy our beautiful town.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** I would love to have Annual Summer Olympics to try and create a friendly atmosphere among the residents in town - This is a family/friend event where you get 8 or more people and compete against other families from our town or out of town. Prizes are given out to winners in each category. Our Atlantic Summer Olympics is a family-friendly event that challenges families to work together to get the gold. My idea is to make Atlantic a place where people from out of town come each summer to take part in these Olympics and come back year after year to visit our beautiful town and make this event a family tradition passed down from one generation to the next.

Examples of some games:

- Knock it off: Test your aim during this exciting game. Throw softballs at a target, and the further away you are, the more points you score.
- Wall-Ball: See how long you can keep the rally alive by hitting the ball off the wall during this fun game.
- Hockey Bowling: Knock down as many pins as possible in this blend of two classic games.
- Croquet Soccer: This timed event is all about how many goals you can make. This event is sure to keep your heart pumping during our summer Olympics..
- Teeter-Totter: First, build the perfect team with your family, next get more balls in your bucket than the other team, and win big!

Events can change or stay same each year.

**SUBJECT: 1. Communication and Transparency**

**Question: Communication and transparency between the Council and the public is STILL terrible. How will you improve this ongoing, and some would argue, worsening problem?**

**Mayoral Candidates**

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** In my last few years on council, we made huge improvements in communication and accessibility to our borough processes, including the introduction of a Zoom system and weekly office hours. As mayor, I plan to continue these efforts by reinstating the monthly newsletter communications to all residents, as well as employing social media for timely communication. Residents will be able to opt in to a printed home-delivered version of the newsletter if electronic messaging is not accessible. The newsletter will include updates from our standing committees, as well as updates on local initiatives. The council plans to replace the existing message boards to be more timely in the coming year. In my administration, I will have regular office hours to address any issues residents need assistance with, much like we have implemented office hours as a council this year. With that being said, there are times that items must be discussed in Executive Session. This isn't to keep things from the public, it is to act in the public's interest and to protect the privacy of employees.

**Murphy, Jim:** Communication starts from the top down and transparency is necessary for community confidence. If elected, I will push for less discussions in executive session and if an item is obligated to be discussed in executive session, provide an explanation as to why and strive to provide further details to the public as soon as possible. Secondly, I would look to hire or seek a shared service position for a social media/Website coordinator. Lastly, I would budget for improved mailing notifications to our community regarding any impactful ordinances.

**Council Candidates**

**Crowley, Jon:** I have spent a great deal of my time in office sheparding several different projects that foster more transparency and better communication between residents and local government, including: the design and installation of the new Atlantic Highlands Emergency & Information Radio Station (1690 AM)... oversight for the Borough Livestream system (used by the Municipal Court, Planning Board and Mayor and Council meetings). I also supervised the re-boot of a simpler, cleaner, more intuitive Borough website. Next year, I am hopeful that Comcast will honor its pledge to deliver \$80,000 worth of fiber cable to Borough Hall so we can begin the process of starting an Atlantic Highlands Television Station so that AHES and Hudson students – along with kids using the Atlantic Highlands Recreation Summer Camp – will have an outlet for their creativity.

**Forbes, Alyson:** I'd have to disagree. My experience with the Atlantic Highlands council specific to communication has been positive. I attend council meetings regularly. These meetings are an excellent way to build a deep understanding of how our borough functions. I believe that more residents should take advantage of this opportunity to give voice to their opinions, questions, and concerns. Additionally, council members Vito Colasurdo, Jon Crowley, Eileen Cusack, Brian Dougherty, and Lori Hohenleitner make themselves available on a rotating schedule to residents during "office hours" every Thursday from 5:30–6:30 p.m. in the Public Conference Room at Borough Hall, 100 First Avenue. I'm sure folks value this time to have 1x1 discussions with a selection of our elected officials. I do want to note that, as someone with deep experience in various aspects of business administration, I believe that it is reasonable for information that is part of executive session or considered legally privileged to remain non-public for a necessary length of time.

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**SUBJECT: 1. Communication and Transparency** *(continued)*

Question: Communication and transparency between the Council and the public is STILL terrible. How will you improve this ongoing, and some would argue, worsening problem?

**Council Candidates** *(continued)*

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** The current council dynamic is extremely secretive, and it is unsettling. Ordinances and Resolutions appear on the agenda, are not explained, and simply moved through. This year's film ordinance was something that should have been revised after public comments and suggestions, but instead was pushed through "*just to have something*". There are just a few reasons where discussions must stay in executive session. The rest should be out in the open for the public to know and be able to weigh-in on. I am very proactive in communicating with the public. When Jim Murphy is Mayor, he will run the meetings so that everyone who wants to be heard can be heard, and if the council cannot answer a question, instead of giving that member of the public a blank stare with an uncomfortable silence, they will be given a truthful answer or commitment to follow-up with the truthful answer in short order,

**Whitehead, Vinny:** I Agree 100%. These are the two things I noticed were lacking at the council meetings when I first started to attend and a year later it has not improved. Social media would probably be the best way to improve communication and transparency. I think a twice a month YouTube program talking about town situations or concerns, interviewing independents, democrats, and republicans to get their points of views. We could have representatives that voice concerns for their districts. Another action step would to meet with the heads of departments in town, example, DPW, First Aid, etc. to hear their voice and bring it to the public.

## SUBJECT: 2. Cannabis

**Question:** There has been little to no conversation regarding cannabis during 2023. Of the six segments, what is your position on the various segments being allowed in town?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** In my extensive research on this issue, I learned that New Jersey passed its 2020 Adult-Use Cannabis referendum with the largest margin of any state that brought this issue directly to the voters. In that high turnout presidential election year, 67% percent of New Jersey voters voted yes. Not only was Monmouth County the highest number of votes in favor of the measure of any county in New Jersey, 72.5% of our neighbors in Atlantic Highlands voted yes, a higher percentage than both the county and the state overall. It's a top responsibility of all elected officials to act in the best interest of the community, especially with respect to decisions that impact our tax base, health, and safety. I believe that doing due diligence is key. This includes seeking data-backed, evidence-based, medically accurate information. I also think it's essential that we learn lessons from other towns that have approved licenses. This way, we can create detailed financial analyses of what potential businesses could bring to Atlantic Highlands in terms of revenue and enhancements, and yes, learn from their mistakes. While many residents seem solely focused on retail cannabis businesses, there are five other types of licenses that are a possibility. As a small business owner myself, I am open to speaking with potential businesses as we craft an ordinance. We should hear directly from experts in the field. That's why I intend to schedule a public information session with these experts. Let's all hear the measures that would need to be in place for it to make sense to have retail adult-use cannabis in Atlantic Highlands or any other license types. Clearly the size of our town and lack of large manufacturing facilities would likely rule out some license types. Our current zoning is very limited in locations where retail would be a suitable use and I need to hear, as do residents, if there is community support for cannabis on First Avenue, regardless of the number of establishments that sell alcohol there. We've all heard rhetoric about how legalizing adult-use cannabis and allowing cannabis businesses would destroy communities. Cannabis facilities have now been open for more than a year, and the reality is none of these 'worst case scenarios' have come to pass. Let's make an informed decision on this, using all the facts and data we now have available to us.

**Murphy, Jim:** I do not believe any of the licenses being considered fit in our small community. Personally, I do not see the benefit of these licenses outweighing the potential for negative impact to our families, businesses, infrastructure and borough as a whole.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** Over 72% of our town's voters approved the measure and as your elected representative, I'm bound to honor the results of that election and then set to work to find safe, efficient and practical ways to enact what my neighbors have overwhelmingly said they want in Atlantic Highlands. When a final proposal is brought to council from the Cannabis Committee, we will have townhall meetings to solicit additional public comments, concerns and suggestions. Based on my preliminary conversations with neighbors regarding dispensaries, we'll be finding answers to issues such as: providing ample security and parking... Signage guidelines... and the possibility of appointment hours -- for the first thirty days -- to ease a likely influx of traffic. Lastly, a very comprehensive look/study at zoning restrictions and the Master Plan is needed to see if a manufacturing component is possible in town.

**Forbes, Alyson:** I'm open to opportunities to bring additional revenue to Atlantic Highlands to help offset costs that are being passed on to our residents. However, if that opportunity proves to be some segment of the cannabis industry, we need to be sure any business is planned and sited in such a way to be considerate of our residents. This includes space for appropriate parking, security plan, and management for any additional traffic it may generate.

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**SUBJECT: 2. Cannabis** *(continued)*

**Question:** There has been little to no conversation regarding cannabis during 2023. Of the six segments, what is your position on the various segments being allowed in town?

**Council Candidates** *(continued)*

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** The referendum to legalize the use of cannabis is often mis-cited as justification for cannabis businesses in town. These are 2 different things. Recreational use is legal. In my opinion, this doesn't translate into the action of placing a dispensary in town. Highlands has already granted a license, and Red Bank, 3. It can also be delivered to your home. Because of our small 1.26 sq.mi. footprint, it may be difficult to find space that meets the requirements for setbacks, distance from schools, and other public safety aspects. In addition, cannabis businesses are a CASH business, with customers coming to retail stores with several hundred dollars on hand, and we as a municipality must rely on the business owner's proper reporting of cash receipts to levy our 2% tax. About two years ago, we received the Cannabis Regulatory Rules regarding control over future cultivation, distribution, and retail sales from the state. We have done very little, particularly in the past year to investigate whether or not having any of the six classes of licenses in Atlantic Highlands is worthwhile. Even if we could physically accommodate at least one of the six classes of licenses for recreational use businesses, namely the Class 5 'Retailer', or Class 6 'Delivery' which both involve less space to operate than the other four classes...there are other significant impacts to our community that must be considered. The first priority is public safety, and the second is tax revenues. Licenses will only be issued to businesses who have received support from the municipality, zoning approval, and who can operate in compliance with local restrictions the municipality can establish. The appropriate "fit" for AH will be in keeping with our community's character and public safety. We need to thoroughly explore the impacts upon our community as a whole, to include our children and pets, and address logistical concerns of hours of operation, increased traffic/parking from customers and deliveries, and public safety such as detecting intoxication, appropriate consumption spaces, and consumer protections and prohibitions. The municipality may enact restrictions on businesses that make sense for their communities, and the M&C have committed to determining, with public input, what is right for the AH borough and its residents. I join them in this collaborative process of finding the right fit, if any. I am in favor of any segment that doesn't negatively impact the small-town character and established family-oriented community we have here. I need to see some data showing how well (or not) certain segments have integrated into communities like ours, and receive some lessons learned from them.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** I do not want any licenses in this town. This is one issue where the people who live in town, pay taxes, and participate in various outdoor activities in the community need to let their voices be heard and a vote should be taken and let majority rule and not put it in the hands of 6 council members to determine what is best for Atlantic Highlands. I understand that a majority of people voted for the right to use recreational cannabis but that does not necessarily mean they want dispensaries or other related licenses in their town. We see the differences in the surrounding towns where most have voted not to have licenses in their hometown. In doing some research and talking to Atlantic Highlands residents there are people who do not want cannabis licenses in our town for various reasons. Impact on traffic patterns, safety for pedestrians, cash business which could bring in criminal element, message being conveyed to our children, and a hands-off policy by police can only increase the chances of negative and volatile incidents. Some residents who use cannabis told me how some towns that cannabis licenses have the smell in that section of town. We live in a very fresh air town and to breathe in secondhand smoke should be a concern for users as well as no-nusers in a time where transmittable viruses are a major risk to health and life.

## SUBJECT: 3. School Regionalization

Question: Recently, a PK-12 regionalization referendum, not including Sea Bright students, was passed by the AH and Highlands voters.

- What is your position on the holding the next referendum vote, to include Sea Bright students, as quickly as possible?
- When would you propose the next referendum vote take place in all three Boroughs

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** I believe the next votes should occur as soon as the updated, objective feasibility study required by the Commissioner of Education is completed.

**Murphy, Jim:** a. I feel the sooner this happens the sooner the better. It took long enough to get to the point we are at now, and while momentum is on our side we should continue moving forward. b. As soon as possible.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** Because of the referendum's passage in September, Sea Bright (along with other eligible/interested school districts) is free to join our new school district. At this moment in time Sea Bright is back to Square One: they'll need to file a new petition with the Department of Education and, at that point, likely face new challenges by the Ocean and Shore Regional school boards (as well as Homeowner groups and Teacher's unions). Personally, I would like to see Sea Bright join our new district but as we've been saying for years: "Get your divorce *first*, and *then* we can date".

**Forbes, Alyson:** a. The goal is to create a school district that includes Atlantic Highlands, Highlands, and Sea Bright. b. I am 100% in favor of moving regionalization forward with Sea Bright when Sea Bright can do so. Currently, they cannot.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** I think the voters were confused by the referendum that was voted on in the special election. It was NOT what the three towns had agreed to do when we all met at the Hesse Center to go over the funding formula and cost sharing formula with the financial expert. The next step was to put a 3-town referendum on the general election ballot. A switch was made at the county superintendent level where the 2-town solution went forward and a request for a special election. This was not communicated to the public, and led to mass confusion about voting "Yes" to regionalization at the special election. I have always been a proponent of the regionalization including Sea Bright at TWO expert studies (Porzio and Kean) strongly recommended that Sea Bright be included "*as soon as possible*". Right now, we have what is being characterized as "Step 1" to self-regionalize first. What we don't have are a commitment and a plan to execute on "Step 2", which would be to include Sea Bright. My concern is that the current council were mostly, if not all, against the 3-town solution, and they will simply stop at "Step 1". We need to put a 3-town referendum to the voters so that there is a commitment, timing, and a path to follow through with "Step 2". The council had another executive session where hopefully they voted to contribute Atlantic Highlands' share of the update to the Kean report suggested by the Commissioner of Education, which costs about \$24K. (Highlands and Sea Bright council have been agreeable to pay their \$8K portions already.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** Teaching at Henry Hudson for 44 years, about 35 of them the talk of regionalization was always a topic. To see it finally passed was tremendous progress. The next referendum vote has to include Sea Bright both for the financial gain to Atlantic Highlands and to increase the population of Hudson and one day possibly include other small local towns. I do not know if there is a waiting period for another referendum but if not, we should move it forward right away.



**SUBJECT: 4. Property Taxes**

Question: (two parts)

A high percentage of AH residents are senior citizens on fixed incomes. In the past couple years, cost of living has far-outpaced COLA's in the Northeast, and supply chain issues continue to make everything more expensive.

- a. What do you propose to find new sources of revenue to help decrease property taxes?
- b. What do you propose to decrease costs to the Borough to help decrease property taxes?

**Mayoral Candidates**

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** a. As mentioned above, we are in the process of evaluating our banking relationships. It is clear that an RFP [*Request for Proposal*] could potentially double the amount of interest we collect in the current market. There is no question that retail cannabis sales would provide revenue to Atlantic Highlands. How much tax revenue is unclear. However, information from neighboring municipalities should be readily available to determine its value to the borough. Additionally, the tax revenue generated from EV chargers, which are very much in the works, would offset an increase in costs to the citizens. Lastly, an aggressive review of fees for permits to comport with those of neighboring municipalities should be considered. b. Again, the hiring of a grant writer to pursue opportunities where the municipality can reduce its share of the expense for important projects was a proud accomplishment this year. We are fortunate that our beautiful town is thriving. This has increased property values in every part of town. As always, the finance committee will work hard to pass a responsible budget that does its best to hold the line on taxes while ensuring our infrastructure is sound and won't require expensive emergency repairs that will cost taxpayers.

**Murphy, Jim:** a. I would consider the new ratables we have coming into place from what development has already taken place and approved, first. Then seek other ways to enhance business revenue and Harbor revenue without placing extra burden on either. b. I believe the first step is to evaluate our current budget and determine any costs or "waste" that can be eliminated by creating a tighter budget. Additionally, seek other safe and smart revenue sources. One example would be deferring current costs through seeking more grants and shared services.

**Council Candidates**

**Crowley, Jon:** This is exactly why we engaged a grant writing firm: to help defray rising costs without adding burden to our taxpayers. We'll also continue the conversation regarding an additional boost from the harbor along with other possible shared services agreements with nearby municipalities.

**Forbes, Alyson:** a. The 2023 council retained the services of a grant writer. I plan to continue the current council's roadmap of utilizing grants to help fund projects without impacting our residents. However, I also believe in investing in our community and building the infrastructure needed to make it safer from climate change. If we don't invest in our borough now, we might lose our chance to do so on a manageable timeline when (not if) the next superstorm hits. B. I am the head of a small business that functions on a very lean margin by virtue of its industry. I plan to use this experience to help the council identify savings that can be applied to other areas of borough management. I also believe that Atlantic Highland's ongoing participation in the Assessment Demonstration Program should be stopped. It unfairly targets areas where property values are increasing, but household incomes aren't necessarily keeping up with inflation or rising taxes

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**SUBJECT: 4. Property Taxes** *(continued)*

Question: (two parts)

A high percentage of AH residents are senior citizens on fixed incomes. In the past couple years, cost of living has far-outpaced COLA's in the Northeast, and supply chain issues continue to make everything more expensive.

- a. What do you propose to find new sources of revenue to help decrease property taxes?
- b. What do you propose to decrease costs to the Borough to help decrease property taxes?

**Council Candidates** *(continued)*

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** I would like to look at the ratables formulas and see if they need updating. We are converting what was formerly business buildings into mostly residential buildings. What is the impact to our ratables from that property now? If we are building more residential units requiring more residents to utilize and benefit from our infrastructure, then we need to make sure their contribution is appropriate in offsetting those costs. The biggest problem we have now is to control spending. The latest budget that was passed had over 20 line items beginning with "Other" totaling over \$1M in spend. I asked about that at the council meeting, but was told to OPRA it. The budget does not explain why all these line items were significantly increased from numbers that were consistent over the years. In addition, I was shocked that the \$500K from cancelled debt service was spent, and \$1.1M moved from reserve to the general fund, leaving us inadequate rainy day funds of only \$100K, AND that our property taxes were increased on top of all of that. Careful stewardship by the former finance chair created the windfall of \$562K this year, and it was all spent at the first opportunity this year. When I am on council, and hopefully not all that money was spent, I will look to see what we can put back into reserve, and scrutinize the planned spend that is not being made transparent. If we needed to buy a fire truck, it is not required to buy a brand new one. We could have bought one a few years old, and saved on the depreciation. These trucks are meant to last decades. We also need another ambulance, as we are only relying on one. There is a better way to make our dollars work. So, it's not all about the revenue, although we can find more through the harbor and our ratables. It's easy to raise taxes as was proposed several times by the current team, but until this year, taxes weren't raised, and we were able to negotiate some big contracts with the police and municipal workers without an increase.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** (a) Another great question. We must find creative ways to generate more revenue. Look at Harbor improvements, increase boat slip rentals for out of towners and decrease if you live in town and check new property and see if that provides tax income for Atlantic. (b) It appears that \$ drives decisions in this town at the expense of the welfare of the people. We should apply for bonds and grants if we don't already. Examine our budget to see what type of surplus monies we have or do not have. If we have surplus, we should put it back into any capital development. We should focus on one or two things to decrease property taxes.

**SUBJECT: 5. Mother Teresa School Property Purchase**

**Question: Moving toward the sixth year of proposals and negotiations, we haven't needed the property in that time, so is the purchase of the Mother Teresa even a priority for the Borough at this point? Apart from the Hesse Center building, what is your proposed best-use of the 3-acre property?**

**Mayoral Candidates**

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** The best use for the property is an expansion of the borough's open space. There is no question that more parks benefit our community.

**Murphy, Jim:** I believe it is still a priority. We must finish what we started, and fill continued needs of our community through this acquisition. Apart from the Community/Recreation Center proposed within the Hesse Parish Center, I would be in favor of a passive park, and repurposed use of the current school. As the current thrift shop provides necessary resources for both ours and surrounding communities, I would exhaust all options of maintaining and improving that building.

**Council Candidates**

**Crowley, Jon:** When I originally presented the idea of purchasing the former Mother Theresa school, it was to proactively decide how we, as a community, felt it best to preserve this property (and open space) before an outside developer would swoop-in and likely build a high-density apartment complex that would destroy the feel of the existing neighborhood. Along with others, I also felt that acquiring the gym would give our town a much needed recreation center, polling place and triage center; the possible acquisition of just the gym alone makes this entire process worthwhile as we are unlikely to ever have this sort of opportunity again in our lifetime. We are currently in Executive Session negotiations regarding this property, so I'm not permitted to discuss this topic in much greater detail, but suffice it to say, I remain excited and hopeful that the time we've spent trying to acquire this property will ultimately result in an incredible asset for our town for many, many years.

**Forbes, Alyson:** I'm a strong proponent of affordable housing for families and seniors. I'd like to see it converted to affordable housing with open space for the use of residents.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** The Open Space committee, which I am on, gave their opinion favoring as much open space as possible. In March of this year, we gave our recommendations regarding this property to the Mayor & Council for their consideration, with the preference that the borough acquire 100% of the property with the intention of adding it to the Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI) and that it would remain open space as described above (Parish Center and parking lot remain, intensity of use remains unchanged so no additional parking required, and school building removed, with Thrift Shop evaluated for potential reuse). There is a generous new grant program through the county which I am hoping we will qualify *[for]* that will help with the purchase. We should do what needs to be done to acquire this property and retain it for community use. The Parish Center could be a community center or indoor recreational space, and the grounds to become open space for active or passive recreation. Pending a needs assessment, I am open to discuss the possibilities of housing for seniors or veterans. However, I am cognizant of stormwater issues in that area, and prefer we do not create more impermeable surface there. Regardless, if we don't acquire it, then we know what will become of it – an overdevelopment in which we would certainly lose open space.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** I feel the Mother Theresa property should be a top priority. Open space is hard to come by and we should take advantage of it especially if organizations are making it cost effective for us to purchase it. It would be a great boost to our community and something that can be used and enjoyed by all. I would love to see it as a park and have some exercise stations like they have at Holmdel Park. I would also encourage the Thrift Shop to be renovated using part of it as a welcome and information center another area as a thrift shop and use perimeter space for paid parking. The Hesse center is invaluable for recreational and sports activities. I believe it can also be utilized for seminars, classes, concerts, etc.

## SUBJECT: 6. Business District Expansion

**Question:** Are you in favor of continued Business District expansion toward Hennessey Boulevard as suggested in the Master Plan, or keeping the BD only directly along First Avenue?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** Expansion of the business district will require additional studies and consideration as to the zoning of what the proposed businesses may be. First Avenue is more vibrant than ever with thriving businesses such as Highlander, Strada, Atlantic House, Bungalow Road, Oyster General, the revamped Gaslight, and more. I look forward to encouraging new businesses that fit the feel of our town and meet the needs of our residents. I love seeing our town's families walking to and from school in our safe community.

**Murphy, Jim:** I would need to consider and review all plans to ensure any further expansion fits the aesthetics and needs for the community. Obviously, increased businesses could defer costs of our borough and allow for reduction in property taxes on our residents. Therefore, I would never shut the door to the idea.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** The expansion mentioned in the Master Plan makes sense—and adds another layer of protection (including design standards, Master Plan restrictions, etc.) for maintaining our small town feel for any future business growth (mixed use, too).

**Forbes, Alyson:** I'm in favor of BD expansion and continued implementation of the Master Plan with any additional adjustments to ensure new development meets the scale and aesthetics of the area.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** The Master Plan is a well thought out document. The problem is, we don't always follow it like we should. I am conscious of encroaching into wetlands, but assuming there is buildable space along Hennessey Blvd for continued BD expansion, we should consider it. I do want any new buildings to meet the new design standards that will be in place, and that the size, design, and character of the structures are consistent with the aesthetics we are trying to preserve and that the businesses are a good fit for the community. .

**Whitehead, Vinny:** I want the town to move forward in its development but not lose that Atlantic Highlands feeling. This of utmost concern. I have no problem with business going toward Hennessey Boulevard I want to check and see where development stops. Businesses bring down taxes, but I do not always see that in my tax bill. The type of business and the size of the building should fit into the character and the needs of the town.

## SUBJECT: 7. Parking in the Business District

**Question:** Mayor Gluckstein dissolved the Parking Committee after 2022, sending a strong signal that parking issues either don't exist or don't matter. She claimed the committee had "*completed their mission*", the committee vehemently disagreed with her opinion. Please give your opinion on parking in and around the business district and your plans, if any, to make improvements during your term?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** Having spoken about this issue with residents, it seems that most people are usually able to find a spot within a few blocks of the business they plan to visit on First Avenue. From a quality-of-life viewpoint, as a borough, we should also be promoting walking and biking instead of driving. An active community is a healthier community. For instance, walking groups could be the norm for all Atlantic Highlands residents without movement disabilities rather than the exception. I do believe that we do have a parking signage issue. Better signage to the various parking lots would help guide motorists to areas with viable parking options. We would also benefit from additional spots designated for short-term parking and perhaps consider reserving spots for seniors. In addition to their many other responsibilities, the Atlantic Highlands Police Department works hard to monitor the two-hour parking spots in all weather, which helps a good deal.

**Murphy, Jim:** I believe the parking around our BD has increasingly become more difficult as more people live in and visit Atlantic Highlands. Improvement is never complete, and expert studies and suggestions should be explored further. With more information, smart action can be taken.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** As you know, Mark, I was a member of your committee for several years and the group accomplished quite a bit under your stewardship; I am on record voicing my disapproval of the group's dissolution (along with the cancelation of the Technology & Communications Committee which was responsible for kickstarting the overhaul of the AHNJ.com website and lending their support of the livestream system and Atlantic Highlands 1690AM Emergency Radio station). I would like next year's council to set aside funds for a new traffic study (something not done for many years) as parking and traffic have increased over the past several years. Are we in a "crisis mode" yet? No, but without even a modicum of planning *now*, we're likely to have an unpleasant future on these two fronts.

**Forbes, Alyson:** I know I'm in the minority when I say I have never had an issue parking in Atlantic Highlands! At the same time, I do believe that we need more accessible spots for those with disabilities that prevent them from walking any distance. I'd also encourage an increase in short-term parking spots (with enforcement) so folks running a quick errand aren't unduly inconvenienced. And I would be in favor of introducing a green parking structure to our downtown to manage overflow traffic and provide better parking options for folks and encourage more visits to our local businesses. Lastly, the spots that do exist on First Ave are enormous, far larger than most of the cars I see parked in them. I'd like to understand whether we can redraw those spots to utilize the space we have more efficiently.

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**SUBJECT: 7. Parking in the Business District** *(continued)*

Question: Mayor Gluckstein dissolved the Parking Committee after 2022, sending a strong signal that parking issues either don't exist or don't matter. She claimed the committee had "*completed their mission*", the committee vehemently disagreed with her opinion. Please give your opinion on parking in and around the business district and your plans, if any, to make improvements during your term?

**Council Candidates** *(continued)*

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** The municipal lot is often at capacity, and when I need to stop on 1st Avenue at least once a day, I can find a spot for a few minutes. I can walk a few blocks to get where I need to go, but I don't think everyone can do that, and might keep driving to another town if they can't stop a few feet from the bagel store or coffee shop. With more people returning to work commutes, the parking needs have increased, and as the borough is growing in terms of residential units, we can expect more parking needs for those residents and their daily traffic in towns. As we have explored and mostly exhausted all options for street parking, it is time to move forward on building a multi-level parking solution. I would like a parking committee to be formed with the mission to build a parking deck and finding a way to pay for it. There are some nice designs that don't look like ugly parking decks that have been built in Metuchen and Cranford. I would like to see a brand new green space rooftop park as a vista point for the town, a community space, and I would like it to be built where the current municipal parking is now along Railroad Ave.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** Parking needs to be looked at but how much can our town hold. My plans would be to increase parking and come up with a solution that is Atlantic Highlands friendly. The parking committee should be reformed to investigate, as I'm sure you did, where to create more parking, how to pay for it without raising taxes, and keeping any structure eye friendly.

**SUBJECT: 8. The Harbor, the largest single contributor into the General Fund (\$1.1+ million)**

Question: In the past, an excuse for not increasing the harbors contribution to the general fund is "*we have expenses*". So do the residents of the Borough, so any decrease in property taxes helps. I say, 'pay into the general fund first'; Would you be in favor of increasing the annual Harbor contribution to the General Fund to help decrease the amount of municipal taxes levied against your constituents and businesses?

**Mayoral Candidates**

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** I have a track record of doing just that. As the harbor is a self-liquidating utility, the Harbor Commission will always ensure its solvency and sustainability, then look to see how much can be invested back into town.

**Murphy, Jim:** I would be in favor of increasing opportunities for the Harbor to generate more revenue. By doing so, we would be able to request a greater contribution to our general fund. I would work with the Harbor Commission, administration as well as business tenants in developing said plan. Communication with these entities is critical to creating a successful and sustainable plan.

**Council Candidates**

**Crowley, Jon:** Yes, I am in favor of raising the harbor's contribution to the town—as long as harbor maintenance & safety are not adversely affected.

**Forbes, Alyson:** I would be in favor of working with the Harbor Commission to determine that we're receiving the appropriate contribution level. We also need to be tougher on any illegal charters that are operating from our harbor.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** We have not actualized anything near the full income potential of the harbor which is a huge asset for us. I'd like to become involved in helping us to identify and maximize the income potential at the harbor, to include the use of the Shore Casino and Senior Center as municipal assets that we can better leveraged. Part of this will be investment in upgrades and maintenance in making it more attractive to visitors to enjoy, patronize, and even pay a premium for certain amenities or offerings. I would offer to have the Atlantic Highlands Sailing Education Program [AHSEP] moved back to the harbor area, assuming they would want that. To increase the revenues in the harbor for the borough, it would be beneficial to expand the harbor to the east of the fishing pier and put in 2-3 transient piers for people heading to the south. Creating amenities on that side of the harbor to accommodate those travelers such as a laundromat, shower facilities, and restrooms would attract patronage and increase revenue significantly. Earlier discussions on this idea suggested a revenue increase of ~25%.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** I would be in favor of increasing the Harbor's contribution to the general fund. I mentioned an increase in boat slip rentals for non-Atlantic residents is one way and we need to brainstorm to come up with more idea's and then implement them. The potential of the harbor is tremendous and we need to seriously act on this to generate even greater revenue.

## SUBJECT: 9. Open Space

**Question:** There is limited open space and funding available in the Borough to add to the open space inventory. Are you satisfied with our OS inventory or should more space be added, and, where and how would purchases be financed?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** Very little could make me happier than securing additional open space in Atlantic Highlands. In fact, I founded our Open Space Committee in my first term on Council and we are finally working hard on a collaborative resident-focused process to plan for the acres secured adjacent to Helen Marchetti Park on Center Avenue. As taxpayers, we pay into the Open Space fund every year and we should be using these funds to acquire and improve existing open space. When elected mayor, I also plan to work with the county to benefit from the expanded opportunities now available through the Monmouth County Parks Open Space fund. Leveraging this great resource, as well as grants received through our new grant writer, should allow our borough to continue to add to and improve our open space inventory. In the last few years we have been able to completely refurbish one of our playgrounds and we will continue to pursue funding to continually upgrade and improve our existing playgrounds.

**Murphy, Jim:** Open space prevents over-development of our land and provides a resource to our community. I need to evaluate the current plan based on the needs we currently have along with what is potentially needed for the future to decide *[to]* my satisfaction. With the newly improved Open Space county grant *[is]* available, I would explore that route first for financing.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** Please see my response to Mother Theresa (above, #5) as the possible acquisition of the gym will finally give our town a much-needed recreation center—a much needed asset that will likely never be available again in our lifetime.

**Forbes, Alyson:** I will never believe there is enough open space! I had the opportunity to speak to several parents in town. And they all had the same concern: the quality of our playgrounds is not up to the standard that they expect of our town, nor to the standard set by some of our surrounding municipalities. Because of those conversations, I'm personally interested in working on improving our playgrounds through grants and fundraising efforts.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** Whenever a property becomes available that could be added to our Open Space inventory (in whole or in part), the municipality should make an effort to acquire it. Hopefully Mother Teresa property will be the first in over 20 years to be purchased and added to the Open Space inventory. We collect an Open Space tax every year, and have accumulated monies for this purpose.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** One of the criticism's is there is too much overdevelopment, and the limited open space sits there with no action plans pursued. I feel we need to start looking at ways to give back to our residents so they can further enjoy their hometown. I feel hometown is a very important and may it never be the city of Atlantic Highlands. One thing I am not educated on is the Master Plan and I need to become familiar and understand this document. We need to make sure it is being implemented and not change it unless it is detrimental to Atlantic Highlands. I am not familiar with the Open Space inventory yet but either way purchases in line with the Master Plan should be financed through the county grants for Open Space.



## SUBJECT: 10. Environmental

Question: To you, what are the “Top-3” environmental issues in the Borough and how do you plan on working toward remediating them?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** To me, the top environmental issues in Atlantic Highlands are stormwater runoff, coastal resiliency, and the declining health of many of our shade trees. We are currently securing funding for a comprehensive multi-year study with the hopes of a major upgrade to alleviate the pressure intense water events put on our entire borough. There are water challenges everywhere and we need a study that addresses the whole town. This will require short term measures in the interim, which DPW has been addressing proactively and innovatively.

**Murphy, Jim:** Though, seeking the EC’s opinion/suggestions first is important, I believe we need to address coastal resilience, and the maintenance of our coastline. The flooding throughout our community needs to be addressed through enhanced stormwater management plans, and lastly, our community is being polluted not only along our shore but also in our streets. Developing a plan for the community to assist our DPW is a big step in overall improvement.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** Denholtz soil remediation (and silt retention). Storm water management. Investigating the possibility of moving at least some of the borough’s fleet to low/no emissions.

**Forbes, Alyson:** Water management. Water management. Water management. The storms are not going to get better. Unmanaged stormwater leads to property damage and loss. I plan to work with the council and our grant writers to take advantage of any programs that can offset the cost of a study to help us determine how to tackle the problem effectively. I also urge the planning board to look hard at the building materials and structures proposed by developers to ensure they do not contribute to the problem.

**O’Dwyer, Ellen:** I am not going to put overarching terms like fighting climate change. The world is evolving, and so must we. I don’t believe in building a sea wall to combat rising sea levels. How many times do you see the water flooding behind the wall in neighboring towns? When it comes to the classic literary theme of Man vs. Nature, Nature always wins. If you build in a flood zone, expect that risk to happen one day. My answer will be Atlantic Highlands specific. Stormwater management. When I was on the Environmental Commission, I researched, took classes, and made recommendations for the borough’s stormwater ordinance that was adopted. Not all the recommendations were included at that time, but I will update my recommendations based on the current flooding issues we are facing, to include pervious vs. impervious coverage ratios on properties being developed. Stormwater issues are directly related to development and overdevelopment and must be addressed proactively in the planning stages for each new project. Pollution in our waterways and bay. Some of this is linked to stormwater runoff. Water from Manymind Creek may contain pollutants, chemicals, pesticides from properties far upstream. Now that the creek has undergone remediation, we need to monitor the pollution that is feeding into it from upstream, and take steps to clean it up and prevent further pollution. If pollution is coming from Atlantic Highlands land, I believe the municipality should be on top of it, even if its privately owned land.

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**SUBJECT: 10. Environmental** *(continued)*

Question: To you, what are the “top-3” environmental issues in the Borough and how do you plan on working toward remediating them?

**Council Candidates**

**O’Dwyer, Ellen** *(continued from previous page)*: If there is active contamination occurring, the municipality should be involved, and managing the situation and overseeing cleanup with DEP, county, etc. on behalf of the safety of our residents, wildlife, marine life, and environment. Educating the Community. We need compliance with local ordinances like stormwater, steep slope, and tree maintenance to help protect our properties, the land, and the environment. We aren’t supposed to cut down trees for a view, especially when its roots are holding down the earth on a hill. Someone recently had a landslide for this reason. A person builds a deck that increases impervious surface runoff to now flood their neighbor’s yard. We have a great Green Team that is helping our community to work together as stewards of our home, which is a very unique ecosystem in Atlantic Highlands – one with a mountain, forested lands, and bayside beaches.

**Whitehead, Vinny**: Sewer, water, and flooding. We depend on Middletown for our sewers and pay them, how much stress is being put on our water and are we overdeveloping to the breaking point. In speaking with residents and observing firsthand there are areas in our town where flooding occurs, and it has been that way for years. Remedies – speak with environmental committee members, the town engineer and DPW to see if we can explore new ideas and action plans. I do not know how much 2-way communication goes on between these groups and how often if it is happening.

**SUBJECT: 11. A.H.F.D. Water Delivery Apparatus**

**Question:** The borough lost its opportunity to replace apparatus “cheaply” a few years back prior to supply chain issues and massive cost increases for materials due to the economy. While the Borough and AHFD are close to (finally!) providing its residents a brand-new fire engine at an estimated cost now of ~\$850k, notably the rest of the apparatus fleet is still over 20-years old.

**What will your proposal be to systematically replace apparatus to continue to reduce the average age of the water-delivery fleet?**

**Mayoral Candidates**

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** A required contingency of the borough's contribution towards the newly leased-to-buy fire apparatus was that the Atlantic Highlands Fire Department provide the borough with a ten-year plan outlining their fleet needs. With this in hand, our capital account will allow the Borough to appropriately fund vehicles without the bill becoming due in one large tranche. For reasons unknown, the prior administration did not fund our capital fund despite its existence as a line item in the budget. I am told it was eliminated unilaterally by a former member of the Council.

**Murphy, Jim:** Thanks to full cooperation from our council, a grant writer firm was hired, and this has been designated as a huge priority. Seeking assistance in these costs are vital, but a long-term action plan should be evaluated on a regular basis. I would meet with AHFD representatives and discuss their plans and make suggestions on fundraising ideas and time frames.

**Council Candidates**

**Crowley, Jon:** Mayor and council this week approved the funds for purchasing a new fire truck—something that hasn’t been done for nearly thirty years.

**Forbes, Alyson:** While I do not yet feel qualified to speak for our fire department, I’m certain that the council intends to continue to support the needs of our first responders by making investments that have long been delayed.

**O’Dwyer, Ellen:** When I was Secretary of the Colts Neck First Aid Squad, we had a 5-year vehicle replacement plan for our ambulances, selling them at the 5-year mark and replacing them with new. The formula worked well for us as a small, all-volunteer squad. Every year we set aside monies towards funding the next vehicle purchase. The fire department had different timing, but yes, we should have a set replacement plan in place for all vehicles in the fleet. I propose reaching out to the FASs and FDs with whom we perform mutual aid, and discuss how we can co-manage our fleet inventory to ensure that one of the squads has the newest water truck, another has the newest ladder truck, the third the newest ambulance, so we can reduce the average age of the collective fleet to 15[-years] , and all have access to a mixed fleet where not one town is struggling with the oldest equipment. I think for the same money spent, we could have bought a fire truck that was a few years old, and an ambulance, which is desperately needed, and maybe more. Since our debt service has fallen off, next year we can use some of that money to go towards a fleet replacement program and some better purchase/lease programs where we can leverage the same funds, but apply it to more vehicles.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** I love your question and points Mark; you bring my mind to places it has never been before. It is obvious a plan needs to be put into place to gradually chip away and take care of older vehicles and equipment. Jim Murphy mentioned that a grant writer firm was hired and with increased communications with our fire department we can begin solving these issues. Another point is to not keep vehicles until they are too old, break down, and need costly repairs but sell them while they are still valuable and useful and keep newer vehicles in the town.

**SUBJECT: 12. AH First Aid Squad** (two things going on here)

A few years back membership and lack of response were prime issues. As a result the Borough hired, and continues to employ, a contractor at \$90k/year for M-F, day-time only coverage. Currently, one AHFAS ambulance has been taken out-of-service, is beyond repair and must be replaced by Borough/AHFAS;

Membership and responses are basically back to normal, and with a significant future cost associated with replacing an ambulance pending, at what point would you say it is time to let AHFAS members take-over responding to 100% of EMS calls and the \$90k contract responders no longer be employed by the Borough?

**Mayoral Candidates**

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** First of all, I completely support all of our first responders and their efforts to rebuild the squad. Conversations with AHFAS about their ongoing capabilities have been underway. This is a challenge for just about every municipality in New Jersey and in conversations with the leadership of other towns it is clear we need the County and State government to help with building back emergency management infrastructure. Our AHFAS and Emergency Management leadership must lead these conversations as they are the experts.

**Murphy, Jim:** The answer to this question is based on the safety of our community, first and foremost. Once the AHFA squad feels and can evidence they are adequately able to respond sufficiently to the calls without the assistance of a third party, I would seek to dissolve the contract. Until then, the ability to protect those in need is more pressing than the dollars spent. As a member of the AHFAS, and having close discussions with the line, I believe we are close.

**Council Candidates**

**Crowley, Jon:** We are in Executive Session talks regarding the shared services contract, but I think we are all hopeful that we can return to self-sustaining status soon. Five (5) of our drivers are moving into EMT status and that gives us all a sense of hope—and gratitude to Lance Hubeny and Anne Schoeler for all their hard work on the recruiting front.

**Forbes, Alyson:** As above, I do not yet feel qualified to speak for our first aid squad, I'm certain that the council intends to continue to support the needs of our first responders by making investments that have long been delayed.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** While we have graduated some new EMTs from driver volunteers, we do have better membership who can respond to calls. However, the day shift is usually the one where we don't have adequate coverage. Most people have to work, so their availability is nights and weekends. I don't think we are ready to let the contractor go, and I think \$90K is reasonable for the safety net it provides in coverage for our whole town. We are also growing in terms of population, so the increasing number of calls will only increase more. The response times have also decreased, and when it is a life or death situation, we all know seconds count.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** In matters where seconds can result in life and death, we need to do whatever it takes to make sure our residents have the fastest response and keep encouraging people to volunteer to fill shortages. The AHFAS should let us know when and if they can handle everything on their own 24/7, 365. I would have to speak to these volunteers to see how close we are to being independent.

## SUBJECT: 13. Henry Hudson Springs

**Question:** The wall at Henry Hudson Springs is undermined and in dire need of structural stability to simply preserve what is there. Estimates for that work 3-4 years ago were ~\$350k. If nothing is done, the wall may collapse entirely. The County was asked to help defray the cost or take ownership of the land parcel and they are not interested. What should be done, if anything, with this historic (to us) site, when, and most importantly, how would you propose it be financed?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** I have been looking into state and federal preservation grants that could help fund the restoration of the site, but frankly this is a real challenge. Fundraising could help defray some of the expense, but the amount of funding this restoration requires will require a public/private partnership. Those partners have yet to reveal themselves. I am not giving up hope, though. We are working on our elected officials at every level to get this on their radar.

**Murphy, Jim:** - I believe we need to cherish all historical aspects of our community. The cost to restore this is high but the need is necessary. I would first explore any new grants available then re-engage conversations with the County through my strong relationships with the current County officials to cover costs. Assistance from County is absolutely imperative for a small community like ours.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** When I was on the Environmental Commission this was an issue that we spent time exploring— and now that we have a grant writer, we can present some of the group's solutions to find non-taxpayer funds to put them into action and get the springs looking beautiful again. In the meantime, we'll also keep pursuing the county to help defray costs.

**Forbes, Alyson:** Henry Hudson Springs should be preserved, and the borough council should pursue grant-based funding to help defray the costs of that preservation.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** A couple years ago, I evaluated the proposals for repair, and some of the costs are high due to the use of certain heavy equipment and obtaining access to the site with that equipment. Right now the focus is on finding a way to save Henry Hudson Springs by having it become part of the Henry Hudson Trail or part of the county parks system. Alternately, if the municipality must shoulder the burden for repair, I believe we can be south of the \$350K estimate by using smaller equipment with easier access, and reevaluating the extent of the repairs proposed. I know we approached county back then as well, and they weren't interested in Henry Hudson Springs, however there may be renewed interest at this time, and there may be grants available. An historian provided her research on the site in the hopes of it being accepted as an official historic site. So we do have some documentation that could be acceptable proof. However, if we are planning on repairing it, we should not seek that designation, as it will complicate and likely make impossible, the type of repairs needed. I would definitely like to see it fully restored and then receive the historical designation.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** This is such a beautiful place and structure to those of us in Atlantic Highlands who know about it. My first response would be to see what grants are available. We should check out if there are any agencies or organizations that could help in paying the cost. The trail is used so much it can't hurt to reach out to the county to see if they could assist financially in any way.

## SUBJECT: 14. Bayside Drive

Question: Over \$1.1 million was spent rehabilitating Bayside Drive, currently a dead end road that only the residents that live there use. Should reopening Bayside Drive between Highlands and Atlantic Highlands Boroughs be a priority, not only for local traffic between the Boroughs, but also for emergency response/alternate access and exit purposes?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** I defer to the experts on this question. I am not in a position to make the call on this, but if it is feasible and safe to open the trail, the Atlantic Highlands residents on Bayside Drive are in favor, and our friends in Highlands want to share the expense, I would support this.

**Murphy, Jim:** I believe the safety and quality of life of all residents residing on Bayside Drive should be examined and considered. The road was closed originally for safety reasons, if elected I would like to reexamine the conditions and make a sound decision after reviewing all the data. I would say, at the very least, access for emergency response is needed.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** I will have a conversation with the DPW and Chief of Police about protocols for re-opening in the event of an emergency.

**Forbes, Alyson:** My understanding is it is impossible to reopen Bayside Drive due to necessary work that Highlands has not yet addressed. I would advocate for a study to determine the feasibility of reopening Bayside Drive if Highlands indicated their willingness to make those needed repairs.

**O'Dwyer, Ellen:** I do not think Bayside Drive needs to become the alternate route to Rt. 36 for visitors and non-residents to use. It will become very heavily trafficked, to include heavier trucks. This heavy use will result in earlier deterioration, not to mention safety issues, as it's narrow in places. History tells us it will also become (once again) a back way for *under the influence* drivers to avoid getting caught. However, we could open it up (like they do on the Bayshore Trail) for emergency vehicles only. There are posts and/or gates along the trail that are opened up for this purpose that we could do for Bayside Drive.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** I remember when I first started teaching at Henry Hudson this road went all the way through. It would be great to have access to it again at least for foot and bike traffic. We could also limit it to Emergency Vehicles only but leave it open to pedestrian use.

## SUBJECT: 15. Tree City, USA

**Question:** Would you agree that for every tree removed in “Tree City, USA” (public or private), by ordinance, two trees should be replanted to replace it?

### Mayoral Candidates

**Hohenleitner, Lori:** The Shade Tree Commission is putting forward suggestions for changes to the Shade Tree ordinance that will include new regulations for tree removal and replacement trees and/or payment in lieu. I will support their recommendations when presented. They are a dedicated group of volunteers and are working with the Borough arborist to tighten up the ordinance.

**Murphy, Jim:** I would absolutely agree. A large component of the aesthetics of our borough are the beautiful tree canopies. Taking it one step further, I would also ask the council to exhaust all options prior to removing any mature tree.

### Council Candidates

**Crowley, Jon:** I wrote an ordinance a few years ago that requires an accredited arborist examine any tree proposed for removal in a borough street project (with the hope that trees can be saved from unnecessary removal). Replacing a mature tree with two new plantings is nationally accepted standard.

**Forbes, Alyson:** I would agree that our Shade Tree Commission is doing a fabulous job assessing and preserving the trees in Atlantic Highlands and I would support them in their efforts.

**O’Dwyer, Ellen:** Another passion of mine and why I was a hands-on member of the Shade Tree Commission. We are a proud *[being]* Tree City USA for 42 years, and why we maintain a tree inventory and have a Community Forestry management plan with the mission to create and maintain a tree canopy and outlining 15 stewardship practices of a comprehensive community forestry program. Trees are valuable assets to our community, and every year we manage a tree planting and maintenance program, endeavor to prevent early failure of trees by ensuring proper and early smart pruning and proper placement, planting, and watering until they are established. Healthy trees should not be removed without substantiation, or valid safety reasons, and especially where green solutions or workarounds can be utilized. We should endeavor to create a Heritage Tree ordinance to protect established, mature trees with costly disincentives for removing them if they are healthy. Planting two trees in no way makes up for the loss of one healthy, mature tree. I can see people replacing a large tree with two saplings, just to get around the requirement, and not necessarily ensuring those saplings grow to mature trees some day.

**Whitehead, Vinny:** Unless a tree cannot be reinforced or poses a safety issue a tree should not be removed. Older trees add age and character to a town. Trees should be planted anywhere that there is a space for them. Trees beautify a town and I agree that two trees should be replanted to replace the one if not more.

## 2023 Priorities by Importance Ranking

	For Mayor		For Council			Averages Comparison			3-year Average		
	Hohenleitner 2	Murphy	Crowley 3	Forbes 1	O'Dwyer	Whitehead	2023	2022		2021	
Property Tax Stability/Decrease	2	1	1	Candidate chose not to provide priority rankings	5	3	2	-	2	4	3
Better Council/Public Communications	1	4	5		1	1	2	↑	8	-	5
Mother Theresa Property Purchase	6	3	4		4	6	5	=	5	7	6
Municipal Harbor Contribution Increase	10	5	2		3	5	5	↓	3	7	5
School Regionalization with S.B	8	2	10		2	4	5	↓	3	4	4
Environmental Issues	3	8	3		8	8	6	↓	4	2	4
Cannabis Businesses Discussions	12	14	7		6	2	8	↑	9	6	7
AHFD Apparatus Plan	5	7	-		10	10	8	↑	11	9	9
AHFAS Recruitment & Retention	4	6	12		9	9	8	↓	7	7	7
Parking, Business District	11	10	8		7	7	9	↑	11	9	10
Open Space Increase	7	11	6		14	12	10	↓	9	8	9
Business District Expansion	9	9	9		11	11	10	↑	11	11	10
Henry Hudson Springs Restoration	14	12	11		13	13	13	↑	14	13	13
Bayside Drive, reopen to Highlands	13	13	13		12	14	13	↑	14	14	14
<span style="color: green;">Top 5 Priorities</span> • <span style="color: blue;">Middle 5 Priorities</span> • <span style="color: red;">Low Priorities</span>											

1 "A borough council member's top priority is to listen and address the concerns of our residents. Rather than preemptively prioritize a list of concerns, my pledge to Atlantic Highlands is to set my goals based on my ongoing interactions with our residents." - **A. Forbes**

2 "I will rank these issues, but the rankings become fluid as different issues arise with the public and frankly, the priorities of the residents are how I govern, not by my own. The point is, the needs of residents are the number one priority, period. I often am approached on matters that were unknown to me before a resident brings it to my attention. I do a daily ride around town and discover new challenges (and triumphs) all the time. I appreciate the members of the public who find me approachable and trust me to help them get the answers or direction they need. In the rankings below, remember I am privy to some things in the works that the public is unaware of so something being ranked higher or lower may be based on my personal knowledge of current progress on that matter." - **L. Hohenleitner**

3 "I don't believe a numerical ranking system is the correct lens to view these issues because these are ALL important concerns that we will be tackling this year." - **J. Crowley**

Lowest numbers signify the most-important items



## **END OF THE PRESENTATION**

Thank you for taking the time to read this,  
I hope this helps you to decide which candidates are best for Atlantic Highlands.

**CAST YOUR VOTE ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, or before...it's important!**

**See you at the meetings!**

*“Trust....but VERIFY!”*

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