

# **FREEHOLDER CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**METHODOLOGY:** The Housing Alliance of Morris County is a consortium of two dozen organizations interested in increasing the supply of affordable housing in Morris County. In order to ascertain the positions and ideas of the Freeholder candidates, as they pertain to affordable housing, the Alliance developed and transmitted a Freeholder Candidate Questionnaire, with a deadline for responses in mid May. Ten of the 13 candidates responded to the request. Each individual questionnaire has been included in the following compilation. As each response was limited to 100 words, some responses may have been truncated, in order to adhere to that stipulation.

## **Gary Algeier (Republican)**

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

There is definitely a need for affordable housing. The word crisis is often overused, and is based on the judgment of the specific speaker. As to “why”, please see my next answer.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

I am Mayor of Randolph, and we have been a county leader in affordable housing opportunities. We have cooperated with the Morris County Affordable Housing Corporation (MCAHC) to construct units in town, and established a community park expressly to serve the families of that neighborhood. Randolph has encouraged group homes throughout our town from a number of organizations. Habitat for Humanity established three homes in Randolph, which I believe is the most in any suburban type town in the County. I have always supported each initiative. Currently, we are working with MCAHC to establish additional units in Randolph.

**What role should the County take in addressing affordable housing needs?**

The non profits do the best job. There are too many strings attached to direct government building, too many regulations, and the costs are almost always excessive by the time the project is completed. There are so many benefits to the way that system operates over large scale government projects, that they are too numerous to mention. However, having attended a number of workshops and other events and heard testimonials and “thanks” from residents, the individual touch that the nonprofits bring, is a major plus. The occupant is motivated and stable, usually puts some of his/her own blood into the transaction...

**In last year's Freeholder's race, the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached. Trust funds have been used successfully around the nation to leverage affordable housing. Would you support this concept and, if so, how would you propose to fund it?**

I know nothing about this proposed (if it proposed) trust fund and I have always followed a rule in my governmental service not to comment or offer opinions on subjects I know nothing about.

## **Bill Chegwidden (Republican)**

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

The fact that we are legally bound to provide housing gets my goat to start with and that we don't have a legislator that would work for the people of this state to stop driving out hard working people out of this state and county. The phase affordable housing seems to stir a vision of poor neighbors moving in next to you and bring down the value of your home. There are in fact people that are young professionals, and hard working individuals that are just getting their start or retired seniors looking to downsize to afford to live here.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

Affordable Housing credits should be taken over by county government to help facilitate and help plan (with the approval of local planning boards) areas that are in need of rehabilitation in towns that may not have the funds or personnel to tackle such a project.

**What role should the County take in addressing affordable housing needs?**

Many towns in our county sell their housing requirements (COAH, Council on Affordable Housing) to other towns and cities outside of Morris County. My suggestion is to have the county acquire the housing units and make better use of them here in our county. The county through the housing authority which is an advisory board should give direction and make educated choices for redistributing money into Morris County towns helping our own communities and making it easier for those who want to work and live here.

**In last year's Freeholder's race, the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached. These funds have been used successfully around the nation to leverage affordable housing. Would you support this concept and, if so, how would you propose to fund it?**

There is an advisory committee in place now, if the county put into place a trust fund who would manage it? I am looking for less government not more. If the county agency already in place would manage this I would be in favor. Funding could come from the idea of selling your town COAH credits to the county.

## **Gene Feyl (Republican)**

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

There is clearly a housing crisis in Morris County. The desirability of Morris County's quality of life and economy clashes with restrictive zoning, Highlands legislation and high-end demand to create a shortage. The acceleration of already high land values, and regressive property taxes exacerbates the crisis making it impossible for all but the most affluent to live here. The current trend to tear down \$500,000 homes and replace them with multi-million dollar homes is troubling and a disservice to those of modest means. To assure vitality a community must offer a broad range of housing to citizens of all incomes.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

We have a responsibility to provide housing opportunities to all who desire to contribute to their own improvement and the community. Likewise we must provide housing options for resident seniors and those unable to advocate for themselves. Since becoming mayor in 2000, 64 units of low and moderate senior rentals, 57 units of low-income family rentals opened in Denville and 2 Habitat for Humanity homes are in progress. I was one of the first, to initiate an ordinance requiring developers to provide their fair share of affordable housing on site and not export it to another community or site.

**What role should the county take in addressing affordable housing needs.**

The county should analyze all unrestricted land it owns for potential construction of homes and grant the rights to construct affordable housing to the host community. A comprehensive inventory should be compiled of the homes the county owns that are ancillary to parks for possible multi-family rental opportunities. Financial incentives can be offered to families needing a "hand-up" through social services. The county can create incentives to creating affordable housing by financing through the Economic Development Authority or providing funds for housing rehabilitation. The county should not create a isolated low and moderate-income housing project on the Greystone site.

**In last years freeholder race the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached.**

I support the concept that a county trust fund could be used as a matching fund to municipal contributions. I reject an additional tax, but support a percentage of existing open space and historic preservation funds being made available to municipalities that do not pursue open space monies. It should be limited to a portion of the community's fund contribution i.e., 25%. Acquisition of land for construction or completed homes would be included. Perhaps a bonus could be granted if housing was an element of an open space or historic preservation grant (as we did in Denville with habitat).

## **Edward France (Republican)**

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

Morris County used to have homes under \$200,000. Not today. Why so little affordable housing? “Zoning laws.” Towns created Master Plans, which dictate land use law. They “zoned out” smaller building lots. Builders can’t build housing that people need. New construction is for large parcels, with large homes. Planners fear adding to the school system and its tax cost. Housing for (\$12,000-\$30,000), to (\$31,000-\$70,000) income workers is not constructed. People who grew up here have to leave Morris County! Businesses are having trouble finding qualified, trained, educated workers to fill positions.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

There is “no” affordable housing in Morris County. Affordable housing used to be available in Morristown, Dover, Mine Hill, Netcong, and Jefferson Twp. and Rockaway, etc. Position statement: “Qualified, skilled, working families are finding it hard to be a home buyer in Morris County” “As an elected Freeholder I will seek out solutions” They are found in thinking outside of the box and implementing new ways of action” “The members of the Morris County Freeholder board must become aware of the crisis, they can help”.

**What role should the County take in addressing affordable housing needs?**

It starts with Awareness. Many people in Morris County assume you can buy an inexpensive home here. Not today! The Freeholder Board needs to meet with organizations like the Housing Partnership, Habitat for Humanity and Homeless Solutions. The Freeholder Board will see evidence of a real problem. Business owners also need to get involved. They must educate the board about the problem of keeping and recruiting the best workers. As a Freeholder it will be my role to suggest possible solutions. Funding ideas could be modeled after other successful programs that have worked throughout the USA.

**In last year's Freeholder's race, the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached. Trust funds have been used successfully around the nation to leverage affordable housing. Would you support this concept and, if so, how would you propose to fund it?**

I am open to any creative way to create affordable housing. A new leader such as myself could carry the ball on this issue. I will work hand and hand with advocates to get funding done. For too long we have had Freeholders who are unaware of the problem. I can tell you here today I am 100% aware of the affordable housing issue problem, and I want to be one the leaders in solving it!

## **William “Jack” Hartford (Democrat)**

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

Morris County is becoming unaffordable for senior citizens, for young people who would like to remain in the towns where they were born, and for public employees and volunteers. Desirability has caused valuations to rise, but increasing valuations become the basis for increasing taxes. The attitude of government has been that if you can't afford it, you can always cash in and leave. To me, this type of social Darwinism is wrong, and it also results in rising costs for services as older, affordable homes are torn down and replaced with McMansions.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

As valuations rise, Morris County government has had a “free ride” from rising revenue while claiming constant or decreasing rates. But this “free ride” is at the expense of those who are least able to pay as they see their homes' valuations and taxes rise. The property tax is a regressive tax which doesn't take into account the homeowner's ability to pay. So keeping taxes low is one answer. The other is to promote the development of the economy by encouraging high tech industries which can provide the income growth which can make Morris County affordable for more people.

**What role should the County take in addressing affordable housing needs?**

The County government is in a unique position to assist the municipalities in planning together for affordable housing. The County should encourage the use of regional contribution agreements within Morris County when space for additional affordable housing is no longer available in towns which are already built out. Rather than sending Morris County dollars to other counties, this would ensure that those housing dollars remain in Morris County to develop more affordable housing here.

**In last year's Freeholder's race, the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached. Trust funds have been used successfully around the nation to leverage affordable housing. Would you support this concept and, if so, how would you propose to fund it?**

I would support trying to find ways to create a county wide affordable housing “bank” through deposits from regional contribution agreements. I would reach out to the state government for assistance in developing this concept. This would minimize the impact on county tax payers and increase the likelihood that funds from regional contribution agreements would remain in Morris County.

## **Bob Hofacker (Democrat)**

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

Absolutely true. Due to the Quality of Life in Morris County and its closeness to New York City makes affordable housing very difficult. But those obstacles can be over come as their doing down in Trenton at this moment. Taking old abandon buildings and using volunteers to do the work and also supplies are being donated. To make Affordable housing, I don't see any reasons that this can't take place in Morris County.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

To preserve and improve the quality of life for affordable housing in Morris County

**What role should the County take in addressing affordable housing needs?**

Improvement on grants received from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Morris County Freeholders asked for 7.5 million and received 3.5 million from the Federal Community Development Block Grant this year. One the grants received from the Federal Department of Housing. If elected to the Morris County Freeholder Board, I would be in full contact with our two U.S. Senators to push for a higher level grants for Morris County.

**In last year's Freeholder's race, the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached. Trust funds have been used successfully around the nation to leverage affordable housing. Would you support this concept and, if so, how would you propose to fund it?**

See Question number 3

## **John Murphy (Republican)**

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

A strong job market, our location, our excellent transportation network and our strong quality of life, makes Morris County a place where people want to live. That, coupled with an aggressive open space acquisition program presents us with a problem. The demand for houses can not be met by our supply! This drives the prices up dramatically. Many county residents could not afford to buy their own houses at today's prices, given the spike in market values. First time home buyers are unable to afford most homes in our county because they have nothing to "tradeup" from.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

There is clearly a shortage of affordable homes in our area. As a community, we must attempt to remedy the situation. I do not believe the answer is in instituting a government program that is funded by taxpayers (because they have had enough of increased taxes) but a more collaborative effort with non-profits, private corporations, municipalities and the county government.

**What role should the County take in addressing affordable housing needs?**

The county should continue to support various organizations that provide housing and counseling. I would also like to see the county provide office space at "The Greystone Non-Profit Mall" (to be developed in the next few years) for non-profits that serve the public in this arena.

**In last year's Freeholder's race, the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached. Trust funds have been used successfully around the nation to leverage affordable housing. Would you support this concept and, if so, how would you propose to fund it?**

A fund established with sources such as developers fees or contributions from the private sector is something I would be interested in exploring. I can not support the formation of a fund if it's source of revenue is a direct assessment on the taxpayer. I believe that the climate to raise additional taxes (no matter how noble the cause) is awful right now in the state of NJ. Nationwide, while there have been some success stories, sources of revenue for trust funds like this continue to be a major sticking point.

# James Murray (Republican)

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

There is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County!

- 1/3 third of households are spending over 30% of their income on housing.
- Medium price of a home in Morris County is \$490,000.
- 50% of growth jobs pay < \$30,000.
- Our children and grandchildren cannot afford to live in Morris County
- Businesses are leaving the county because of a lack of affordable housing for their employees.
- This is not only a housing crisis, but a property tax issue when our ratable base is depleted by businesses leaving.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

Not enough effort is being put forth to create affordable housing. Developers should be encouraged through land use regulations to provide affordable housing. Also, municipalities should set aside land for affordable housing. The economic and cultural well being of Morris County is dependent on a mix of residential, commercial, and business uses. Residential units should be available in a range of prices, so that residents of all income will be able to find an affordable home. Anything less is to the detriment of Morris County economically and culturally. Affordable housing should be one of the top priorities of Morris County.

**What role should the County take in addressing affordable housing needs?**

The County should lead the way toward affordable housing by encouraging developers and municipalities to create affordable housing through the advisory and statutory authority provided in the NJ County Planning Act. Also, the County should work with the municipalities in setting aside land for affordable housing. The County needs to promote the importance of affordable housing and the necessity to draw workers to our area to fill jobs that are needed by businesses, hospitals, schools, etc. "Affordable Housing is Economic Development". As Freeholder, I will work closely with the Housing Alliance of Morris County and be an affordable house advocate.

**In last year's Freeholder's race, the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached. Trust funds have been used successfully around the nation to leverage affordable housing. Would you support this concept and, if so, how would you propose to fund it?**

As Freeholder, I would support the concept of creating a county housing trust fund to leverage affordable housing. The main funding should come from developers unless affordable housing is included in the site development. We should encourage corporations and businesses to fund this trust fund and look at specific business taxes for this purpose. In addition, part of the county's surplus should be used for this fund.

# **Christina Mangine Ramirez (Republican)**

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

How could one not think this is a crisis? More and more county residents are spending more of their disposable income on housing requirements. New home developments are very high priced to maximize developers' profits. Many communities shy away from "affordable", themselves wanting to maximize property values. And as Property Taxes escalate along with home values here in Morris County, it is prohibitive for seniors to stay and new families to start out.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

"Morris County's communities should strive to provide affordable housing by working with non profits such as Habitat for Humanity and others. We should continue to work with developers to include "affordable units" where appropriate. The greatest threat to "affordable housing" in Morris County is Property Taxes. As a Morris County Freeholder I will work for Property Tax Reform by maximizing our tax dollars here and also taking a leadership / advocate position with State Government on the issue of Property Tax Reform.

**What role should the County take in addressing affordable housing needs?**

I fully support Morris County Governments' existing efforts to provide affordable housing and support low income families including our senior population. The efforts of the Housing Authority and the Affordable Housing Committee must continue with even more emphasis on "building to sell".

**In last year's Freeholder race, the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached. Trust funds have been used successfully around the nation to leverage affordable housing. Would you support this concept and, if so, how would you propose to fund it?**

Yes, a Trust Fund with the concept of awarding "grants" to applicants under specific guidelines and criteria. The obstacle is the funding. I do not support an additional tax on County residents. However, I support the continued efforts of non profits and revenue sourcing from developers in lieu of affordable units (when not appropriate in a development). Contributions from either the developer or the consumer (when passed on) should be tax deductible.

## **Dana Wefer (Democrat)**

**Many people say there is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County. What do you think and why?**

There is an affordable housing crisis in Morris County and it affects everyone. Young people cannot afford to buy a first home here and businesses cannot afford to pay people the wages required to own a home in Morris County. Thus, the population of the county swells during the day, resulting in heavy traffic. This in turn affects even those who do manage to both work and live here since the wear on the roads inflates property taxes, which is an important part of affordable housing. Homes must not just be affordable to purchase, but also to own.

**What is your position statement on affordable housing in Morris County?**

This is my second time as a freeholder candidate and I believe affordable housing is the most difficult and complicated issue the county must address. New Jersey's property tax system incentivizes municipalities to not develop housing affordable for starter families since children will mean an added expense for the school system. But even though the key to solving the affordable housing problem lies with the state, the county should not develop a fatalist attitude. There are things that the county can and should do to encourage the development of affordable housing and make owning a home here more affordable.

**What role should the County take in addressing affordable housing needs?**

The county should address the issue from several angles. First, the county should lobby for property tax reform and COAH reform regulations so that municipalities cannot outsource their affordable housing requirements; that way you change municipalities' incentive from avoiding affordable housing to searching for ways to develop affordable housing. Second, the county must work with non-profits to better market existing programs and to empower first time home buyers. Finally, the county should organize biannual summits with municipalities and affordable housing activists and professionals so that they may offer their expertise to the government in addressing the affordable housing issue.

**In last year's Freeholder's race, the idea of creating a county housing trust fund was broached. Trust funds have been used successfully around the nation to leverage affordable housing. Would you support this concept and, if so, how would you propose to fund it?**

I support the concept of a housing trust fund, but I advocate searching for extrinsic funding for the program rather than an additional tax on Morris residents. Last year I proposed creating a part time position to search for, apply for and lobby for grants. This could be particularly helpful with affordable housing. There are opportunities for savings in the budget, but I believe that the bulk of these savings should be passed onto Morris taxpayers in the form of either lowered taxes or better services; property taxes are one reason why housing is not affordable in Morris.