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## Candidate profiles: Bill Houston and Tyler Pontier

By ANDREW DUTTON Editor  
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At right, Bill Houston, who is a candidate for one of two Morris Plains council seats, sits down with **Morris NewsBee** editor running as a democrat.

**MORRIS PLAINS** – Four candidates are vying for the two three-year seats at stake on the Borough Council in the Tuesday, Nov. 5 general election.

Candidates Bill Houston and Tyler Pontier are running as Democrats. Candidates Cathie who is an incumbent, and Adam Tyburski are running as Republicans.

The **Morris NewsBee** invited the four candidates to discuss their platform and overall vision for the town in an in-person interview.

At the time of publication, only Houston and Pontier responded to a request for an interview.

Kelly responded to our request by emailing two photos of her and Tyburski's campaign mailer pamphlets.

Tyburski did not respond.

The in-person interview with Houston and Pontier took place on Friday, Oct. 11 at the picnic pavilion in the Community Park. Neither candidate was shown the questions ahead of time, and each of them had to provide unrehearsed answers.

A transcript of the questions they were asked, and their answers follows:

### ***Bill Houston***

Houston is a technical consultant for major financial firm in New York City.

#### **What is your overall vision for the borough, and how will your platform will get you there?**

My overall vision for the borough is to advance Morris Plains; to make Morris Plains more attractive to smaller businesses, improve the downtown, and put the right businesses in the right places. There are a few things that have happened recently that are going in the right direction, but we need to do more to attract those businesses. So we need to work with business owners, we need to solicit our town, we need to work to bring other things into town to make the downtown more vibrant and more exciting to live in.

#### **What is your number one concern for Morris Plains that you will be facing during your term if elected?**

Transparency, for sure. Absolutely. Transparency of government; transparency of meetings. Just making things accessible to people overall.

**You're running as a democrat. Can you explain to the voters why you're running as democrat?**

I think the simple answer is my values more align with democratic values on a national scale. On a local scale, I don't think there's room for party politics. I don't think there's room for democrat or republican; it's all about doing what's right for Morris Plains regardless of the side you sit on.

**There are some boarded up businesses in the center of town. And of course, there is a vacant supermarket at the edge of town. Friendly's is vacant. What can you do to prevent further migration of business out of the center of town?**

What I'd like to do is to work with the current property owners to find out why those properties are vacant, and then to work with the other businesses that might want to come into town, and (I'd like to) kind of be that intermediary between the two to help negotiate that a little bit. There's limited (things) we can do because the property owner owns the property and business can decide whether they want to come in or not, but I see our job as council members as stewards of the town. We need to attract businesses and bring them into town, and that's the only way it's going to improve.

**Politicians like to say things like, 'I'm for better schools, greater transparency, lower taxes, and a thriving downtown.' But everybody is for those things. So the question is, how are you better prepared to achieve those goals than your predecessors?**

I think Tyler and I represent the next generation of Morris Plains. Tyler and I are both in our 40's; we have a finger on the pulse of what the younger generation wants with transportation and access to things downtown, and also what the older generation wants as we've done on our listening tour; we've gone and talked to a lot of people. I think that the current council hesitates and pauses at doing some things that might be outside of the norm. I think that we need to take risks; we have an attorney so we can do it under his guide. But let's take risks; let's see what we can do to make Morris Plains better. The current council has been hesitant to do some of those things, maybe for a variety of reasons, but I'm looking forward to asking the tough questions and taking those calculated risks. It's all in the betterment of Morris Plains.

## ***Tyler Pontier***

Pontier is a real estate agent and investor.

### **What is your overall vision for the borough, and how will your platform will get you there?**

I think Bill and I's overall vision is really preserving the history that Morris Plains has which is amazing, and continuing to move that forward. Morris Plains is such a great place to live. Part of our platform is that we're excited to stream the council meetings, the zoning board meetings, board of adjustments, shade tree commission, etc. We think that by streaming these meetings, that will allow residents to be more active and to feel like they're more a part of it because not everyone can go to all those meetings. We feel that if they can see those (meetings) from their home, that let's them feel more a part of things, and it gives them the ability to have a voice and to know about things that are going on in the township.

### **What is your number one concern for Morris Plains that you will be facing during your term if elected?**

My answer would be land use. That's inclusive of the businesses we have in town, our downtown district, and just the use of open space that we have in general. From speaking with residents, the downtown district; they really want that to reflect their vision and values. (It's about) attracting news businesses (and) working with the businesses that we already have there.

### **You're running as a democrat. Can you explain to the voters why you're running as democrat?**

In general, it's just always been the party that I've aligned with the most. I feel that with current society, I am really aligned with their social and economic values; family values. While Bill and I are running on the democratic ticket, we would like to try to be independent thinkers that vote and listen to everyone's voice in Morris Plains regardless of political party. I am running as a democrat, and I do feel aligned with them, but if elected I'm going to be an independent thinker who listens to everyone's voice and who votes for what's best for every resident in Morris Plains.

**There are some boarded up businesses in the center of town. And of course, there is a vacant supermarket at the edge of town. Friendly's is vacant. What can you do to prevent further migration of business out of the center of town?**

It's a process with things like that because what attracts businesses to town is having the right ordinances and zoning in place that (are applicable) to that business. The more of a thriving downtown that we have, other businesses (will) want to be near other businesses that are doing well. As we continue to bring new businesses to town, that's going to attract other businesses to some of these vacant places. The reason places like the Acme are vacant is because there are restrictions in zoning, so only certain types of businesses can apply. So it (requires) working with the landlords to try to attract smart businesses that will benefit Morris Plains. If business is thriving, then other businesses will want to town, and that benefits all the residents.

**Politicians like to say things like, 'I'm for better schools, greater transparency, lower taxes, and a thriving downtown.' But everybody is for those things. So the question is, how are you better prepared to achieve those goals than your predecessors?**

Having been a private citizen who has listened and learned, and as a business owner and real estate professional, I have a very good understanding of what people are looking for when they move to a town with low taxes, good schools, to a thriving downtown. My experience as a real estate professional and business owner gives me insight and experience that others may not have. I think I can use that experience to reflect the vision and values that Bill and I have listened to when speaking with the residents of Morris Plains.