

Keith Kaplan, Teaneck Council candidate, wants better communication with residents

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Editor's note: This is the second in a series of seven interviews with each of the candidates running for four seats on the Township Council seats in Teaneck's May 8 election.



(Photo: Mitsuru Yasukawa/Northjersey.com)

Keith Kaplan, the vice chairman of the township Planning Board, is running for a Township Council seat [in next month's election.](#) ([/story/news/bergen/teaneck/2018/04/12/teaneck-election-seven-candidates-vie-four-council-seats/394119002/](#))

Kaplan, a law clerk for a New York City law firm, is running on a slate with [Jim Dunleavy](#) called "Teaneck Citizens Working for You." ([/story/news/bergen/teaneck/2018/04/18/jim-dunleavy-teaneck-council-candidate-wants-more-stores-open-township/490817002/](#))

The 40-year-old moved to Teaneck 11 years ago and has served on the planning board for six years.

He recently spoke with The Record about his candidacy and what he would want to accomplish if he were elected.

What do you think is the biggest issue facing Teaneck?

I think we have a lot of issues facing us right now, but the one thing that seems to be getting in the way of everything, at least from the council side, is the ability to work collaboratively and get along in order to reach solutions. One of the real things me and Jim [Dunleavy] have been looking to do is create listening sessions in order to get input from the public. When you have six or seven people that can work together and you can have a few split off and hear about a topic, you can come back and really talk to each other and prepare solutions. We need to get back to basics. I think the ability to communicate with residents is key.

What would your goals be if elected?

One of the things we need to focus on is long term budgeting. We need to make sure we don't put off pothole repairs, for instance. We need to make sure our fire trucks, police cars — things that are long term and required core functions of the government — are planned for and maintained. Once you get that maintained, we need to focus on meaningful communication between the township and the public. I can throw up a list of every road were repairing,

but if I can show a map of every road we did this year, the prior year and the plans for next year all of a sudden that list becomes meaningful to someone. Once we share information in a more meaningful way, you can get more productive input and you don't have to spend as much time reinventing the basic form of the conversation.

What made you want to get involved in government?

Before I joined the planning board, I came to the council with a problem, and someone said "if you have an issue, why don't you do something about it?" I said OK, and I've used the position to get rid of things like uniformity requirements for businesses who wanted to put up signs. Some businesses have had to pay an appeal fee and come before our board because they had the word "Teaneck" on their sign. The building department said that was advertising. I thought, this is madness. We need to look at some of the rules in town, a lot of which was created in the 1950s. We need to figure out what the role of government is and move forward in a way that makes sense for 2018.

Why did you decide to run for a council seat?

I was frustrated at not being able to get enough done at my current position. I had people come up to me and say "Thank you for getting rid of the requirements for surveys when you need to repair and replace something simple on your property." I don't want to just get rid of rules, but after I did the research I found there was no good reason for this. We got rid of it, and a grandmother came up to me and said she had been sweltering in the summer because she couldn't afford the extra \$1,000 for the survey to replace the slab her AC unit was on. I had other things I wanted to get through and it's not easy when you're not able to put forward any ordinances. I basically had to petition the council as would any other resident. I want to get these ideas out there.

You became very involved in the issues surrounding the eruv in Mahwah and Upper Saddle River over the summer. How has that influenced your views of public service?

I have always been extremely aware of civil rights issues. My grandparents came from Germany, survived the war, and they came here to a place that let them live, literally. It really infused an idea of civil rights, so when I saw what was happening in these towns I wanted to say something about it. In this case I had the legal background, the knowledge of New Jersey law and knew the way civil rights and municipal codes worked, so everything really aligned for me to step up. We should never take civil rights for granted. The notion that everyone will be accepted is probably never going to pan out among everyone. But the idea that government officials would countenance the hatred and imbed it in the laws they pass is unacceptable, and when it happens it needs to be called out and condemned in order to make sure we don't backslide into a situation we've seen many times before in this country.

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