

As the League of Women Voters of Schenectady County was unable to schedule a candidate forum acceptable to both candidates for Niskayuna Supervisor, we posed six questions to the candidates. The candidates used their own discretion regarding the length of their replies.

Question 1

Over the next five years, what do you feel is the biggest challenge facing Niskayuna? How will you address that challenge?

Answer: Erin Cassady-Dorion

Our biggest challenge is maintaining fiscal stability and critical services while managing fast-rising municipal costs and infrastructure needs. In the General Fund alone, employee benefits and healthcare are projected to rise over \$700,000 next year—with active employee health insurance increasing about 22% and retiree coverage up 48%. Compounding this, building fee revenues are slowing and our high median income limits grant eligibility.

We are taking direct action by reforming town operations rather than relying on reserve funds for a temporary fix. We eliminated all short-term debt this year in order to maintain a clean financial slate, filed a conservative 2027 Tentative Budget with zero fund balance drawdowns, and initiated a public works restructuring to combine Highway and Water & Sewer crews. By sharing labor, equipment, and project management, we are reducing operational silos, lowering long-term maintenance costs, and keeping spending across those departments controlled.

Answer: Elizabeth Santana

Niskayuna Deserves Affordable Government

The biggest challenge facing Niskayuna over the next five years is balancing quality Town services with responsible spending and affordable taxes.

Residents deserve safe drinking water, well-maintained infrastructure, public safety, and responsive Town government. These services must be provided within our community's financial means.

A proposed 18.5% property tax increase is simply unaffordable for many homeowners, working families, seniors, and residents on fixed incomes. Taxpayers deserve clear answers about what is driving this increase and what alternatives have been considered.

Tax increases should not be the default solution to a budget problem. Before asking residents to pay more, the Town must review its spending, contracts, administrative costs, and opportunities for savings.

My Five-Year Priorities

- **Control spending:** Identify unnecessary expenses and opportunities for savings.
- **Protect taxpayers:** Work to prevent excessive property tax increases and higher fees.
- **Plan ahead:** Develop a sustainable five-year financial plan for budgeting and infrastructure needs.
- **Increase transparency:** Explain Town finances, spending decisions, and proposed tax increases.
- **Strengthen oversight:** Review contracts, expenditures, and financial practices.
- **Expand the commercial tax base:** Encourage responsible business development to support Town revenues.
- **Maintain services affordably:** Explore cost-effective alternatives before raising taxes or eliminating valued services.

My Commitment to Niskayuna

Responsible government means living within our means, prioritizing essential services, and respecting the taxpayers who fund them.

Residents should not automatically be expected to pay more when expenses rise. The Town must first examine its budget, improve efficiency, and identify practical alternatives.

Niskayuna deserves quality services, responsible spending, and affordable government. Our residents should be able to live, work, raise families, and retire here without being priced out by an ever-increasing tax burden.

Affordability must be a priority—not an afterthought

Question 2

What is your perspective/position on land planning and business development?

Answer: Elizabeth Santana

Economic development is essential to Niskayuna's long-term financial stability, but growth must be responsible, carefully planned, and consistent with the character of our community.

With limited developable land remaining, Niskayuna must approach future development strategically. We should prioritize opportunities that strengthen the local economy, broaden the commercial tax base, create jobs, and provide needed services while avoiding unnecessary strain on infrastructure and preserving established neighborhoods.

- Revitalize Existing Commercial Properties

Filling vacant commercial spaces should be a priority, particularly at the Market 32 Plaza in the Town Center. We should focus on attracting restaurants, retail establishments, professional services, and other amenities that residents want and use.

The Town should work proactively with property owners and prospective tenants to encourage investment, reduce vacancies, and strengthen existing commercial centers.

- Prioritize Redevelopment Before New Development

Whenever practical, redevelopment should come before development of previously undeveloped land.

This approach can help limit unnecessary infrastructure costs, preserve remaining undeveloped land, and protect the character of Niskayuna's established neighborhoods.

- Oppose Development That Does Not Fit Niskayuna

Not every development proposal is appropriate for our Town. I do not support data centers or large-scale solar farms in Niskayuna. Given our limited available land and infrastructure constraints, I believe these uses are inconsistent with the balanced economic growth we should pursue.

Development decisions must account for long-term impacts on taxpayers, infrastructure, environmental resources, surrounding neighborhoods, and quality of life—not simply the promise of short-term revenue.

- Make Niskayuna More Business-Friendly

Town government should be a partner in responsible economic development, not an unnecessary obstacle.

I support clear requirements, predictable review processes, and timely communication with business owners, property owners, and prospective investors.

The Town should help applicants understand expectations early, coordinate reviews, and avoid unnecessary delays while maintaining appropriate planning, environmental, and neighborhood protections.

Being business-friendly does not mean approving every proposal or lowering our standards. It means providing a fair, transparent, and efficient process that encourages investment consistent with Niskayuna's long-term interests.

Answer: Erin Cassady-Dorion

Protecting Niskayuna's neighborhood character is essential, but because commercial development has historically been limited, residential property owners carry most of the tax burden. To ease this load without encouraging suburban sprawl, we must foster smart, targeted commercial growth along established business corridors like the Nott Street East and Mohawk Commons areas while strictly evaluating fiscal impact.

We are guiding development using our updated Comprehensive Plan and Natural Resource Inventory to protect critical green spaces and wildlife corridors. At the same time, through our Safe on Seven initiative, we are pushing for key traffic and safety improvements. Commercial growth must pay its own way, undergo rigorous environmental and traffic reviews, and support our community's tax base.

Question 3

As Town Supervisor, what new initiatives, short and long term, would you like to implement?

Answer: Erin Cassady-Dorion

Short term: Consolidate public works operations across Highway, Water, and Sewer departments to maximize efficiency, sell surplus equipment, and optimize cross-department staffing. Expand community programming through better utilization of volunteers and public-private partnerships. Modernize municipal software to eliminate manual processes and improve services, review open positions to right-size personnel costs, and complete corrosion-control and main replacement projects.

Long term: Implement a multi-year capital plan for roads, water mains, and facilities; advance Route 7 safety upgrades; establish sustainable long-term solutions for senior services and the Town Pool; and finalize negotiations on regional water agreements while keeping borrowing low.

Build a 'true cost of services' inventory so residents and the Board can see what each town service actually costs, including staff time and benefits. That way, budget decisions are made with full information.

Answer: Elizabeth Santana

As Town Supervisor, **my first priority would be to bring our community together and restore trust between residents and Town government.**

Niskayuna deserves leadership that rises above political divisions, listens to all residents, and focuses on finding practical solutions to the challenges facing our Town.

The Supervisor must be approachable, accessible, responsive, and willing to listen—even when residents disagree with decisions being made at Town Hall. Every resident deserves to be treated with respect, and their concerns should be taken seriously.

Unfortunately, many residents have expressed frustration that their concerns about property taxes, rising water and sewer bills, water quality, Town spending, and transparency have not received the attention they deserve.

Town Hall should never be a place where residents feel ignored or dismissed. It should be a place where their voices are heard, their questions are answered, and their concerns lead to meaningful action whenever possible.

My Immediate Priorities

- **Restore Trust and Unite Our Community**

Work to reduce political division by encouraging respectful dialogue, cooperation, and open communication among residents, Town employees, elected officials, and community organizations. Good ideas should be welcomed regardless of political affiliation.

- **Make Town Hall More Accessible and Responsive**

Establish clear expectations for responding to residents' questions and concerns. Encourage greater public participation, improve communication, and ensure residents have meaningful opportunities to be heard.

- **Strengthen Transparency and Accountability**

Provide residents with clear, understandable information about Town finances, proposed spending, property tax and fee increases, and major policy decisions. Residents deserve to know how their tax dollars are being spent, why increases are being proposed, and what alternatives have been considered.

Residents should not have to submit Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests just to obtain basic information and answers about Town matters that should be readily accessible to the public. Town government should proactively share important records, explain its decisions, and respond to residents' reasonable questions in a timely manner.

Transparency is not optional—it is a fundamental responsibility of the Town government.

My Long-Term Priorities

· Develop a Sustainable Five-Year Financial Plan

One of the most important responsibilities of the Supervisor is ensuring that Niskayuna can afford the services it provides.

I would prioritize developing a comprehensive five-year financial plan that anticipates future expenses, identifies essential infrastructure needs, evaluates revenue sources, and establishes realistic spending priorities. **This plan would also include actively identifying and pursuing available federal, state, and county grants and other funding opportunities to help offset eligible Town expenses, support infrastructure improvements, and reduce the financial burden on local taxpayers.** By planning ahead, exploring outside funding sources, and managing resources responsibly, we can better protect taxpayers while maintaining essential services and addressing Niskayuna's long-term needs.

Responsible Budgeting and Accessible Meetings

Every significant expenditure should be assessed for necessity, affordability, and value to taxpayers. Before raising property taxes or fees, the Town must explore reasonable alternatives and demonstrate a commitment to controlling costs.

Make budget meetings accessible to residents. Schedule meetings during evening hours whenever possible so working residents can participate. Continue livestreaming meetings and posting recordings online to ensure taxpayers can follow discussions, ask questions, and understand budget decisions.

Residents deserve responsible spending, meaningful participation, and a budget that prioritizes affordability—not automatic tax increases.

· Move Away from an Unsustainable Tax-and-Spend Approach

Simply increasing taxes and fees to cover rising expenses cannot be our default solution.

We must take a more disciplined approach that focuses on controlling costs, eliminating unnecessary spending, pursuing available grants, encouraging appropriate economic development, and expanding the commercial tax base.

Our goal should be to maintain essential services while minimizing additional financial burdens on homeowners, working families, seniors, and residents living on fixed incomes.

My Commitment to Niskayuna

Leadership begins with listening, but it must be followed by action.

My immediate goal would be to restore communication, cooperation, and confidence in the Town government.

My long-term goal would be to establish a financially sustainable Town government that delivers quality services, maintains essential infrastructure, and respects the financial limitations of the taxpayers who support it.

We cannot solve every problem overnight. However, we can establish clear priorities, make responsible decisions, and develop a realistic plan for Niskayuna's future.

The people of Niskayuna deserve a Town Supervisor who listens, responds, brings people together, and treats every taxpayer dollar with the respect it deserves.

That is the standard of leadership I would work to establish at Town Hall.

Question 4

News reports and residents have raised questions about water quality in Niskayuna. Is water quality an issue for the town, and how should it be addressed?

Answer: Elizabeth Santana

It is increasingly difficult to ignore the concerns surrounding water quality in Niskayuna. Too many residents and business owners have come forward with photographs, firsthand experiences, and documented complaints about problems with the water in their homes and businesses.

These concerns deserve serious attention, a thorough investigation, and a transparent response from Town government—not dismissal, defensiveness, or attempts to minimize what residents are experiencing.

I believe the responsibility of the Town Supervisor is to listen, investigate, and take appropriate action.

When residents report discolored water, corrosion, or other potential water quality problems, the response should not be limited to statements defending the Town's water system. The Supervisor should be willing to personally visit affected homes and businesses, speak directly with those experiencing these problems, and work with qualified professionals to determine the underlying causes.

Leadership means showing up when residents need answers, not simply responding when questions become politically uncomfortable.

· **My Priorities for Addressing Water Quality Concerns**

Listen to Residents and be proactive in addressing these complaints

Meet with affected homeowners and business owners, document their concerns, and ensure that appropriate water quality professionals investigate reported problems. Residents should receive

meaningful follow-up rather than being left wondering whether their complaints have been taken seriously.

- **Work With Independent Experts to Identify the Causes**

Engage qualified water quality engineers, environmental specialists, and appropriate regulatory agencies to evaluate reported problems, review existing studies, and determine whether issues originate within the Town's distribution system, individual plumbing systems, or other sources.

- **Develop a Clear and Publicly Accessible Action Plan**

Based on the findings, establish a realistic corrective action plan identifying necessary improvements, estimated costs, funding opportunities, implementation timelines, and the individuals responsible for overseeing the work.

- **Provide Regular Updates on EPA and Regulatory Matters**

Residents deserve accurate, timely information about the status of EPA-related reviews, investigations, correspondence, and any required corrective measures.

The Town should publicly explain what is known, what remains under investigation, and what steps are being taken, while respecting any applicable legal or regulatory limitations.

- **Demonstrate Empathy and Accountability**

Perhaps most importantly, Town leadership must recognize the frustration, anxiety, inconvenience, and financial costs experienced by residents who have reported water problems.

For affected families and businesses, this is not simply a political debate or a technical disagreement. It is a concern that directly affects their homes, businesses, finances, and confidence in the safety and reliability of an essential public service.

My Commitment to Residents

The first responsibility of Town government is to protect the health, safety, and well-being of its residents.

The proper response is to acknowledge the complaints, investigate them thoroughly, communicate the findings, and take corrective action wherever necessary.

Niskayuna residents should not have to repeatedly demand answers about something as fundamental as the water coming into their homes.

We need less defensiveness, more transparency, and a genuine commitment to finding solutions.

As Town Supervisor, my approach would be straightforward: **Listen to residents. Investigate the problems. Bring in the experts. Develop a responsible plan. Keep the public informed. And take action.**

That is the accountability and responsiveness our residents deserve.

Answer: Erin Cassady-Dorion

Water quality and system reliability are top priorities. Rather than relying on short-term fixes, we are executing a structured multi-year plan while evaluating long-term water supply options and regional agreements. Key achievements and active projects include:

- Completing a corrosion-control study in coordination with the NYS Department of Health.
- Replacing critical water mains, including the River Road main replacement project.
- Conducting engineering assessments and budgeting redevelopments for town wells, standpipes, and water storage towers.
- Executing a comprehensive water and sewer rate and infrastructure study with active resident advisory committee input.

Our strategy focuses on steady, scheduled investment—targeting a replacement rate of roughly 1% of water mains annually—and providing transparent updates to residents.

Question 5

The [Town Pool](#) is in need of updates. What is your position on the Town Pool and other recreational opportunities?

Answer: Erin Cassady-Dorion

The Town Pool, built in 1960, has reached the end of its functional lifespan, requiring increasingly costly repairs each season. In addition, its location is inconvenient for many residents. As outlined in our current evaluation, the town is considering keeping the pool closed while determining a comprehensive long-term plan.

We are evaluating options including full renovation, constructing a new modern facility at a different town park, or permanently closing the existing structure. A new facility could feature added amenities, concessions, or multi-use program space to help offset operational expenses. Because major capital projects require borrowing, any decision will involve robust public participation and a dedicated capital planning process separate from annual operating budgets.

Whatever we decide, we'll present the full cost of each option, including operating, staffing, and capital costs, so residents can weigh real numbers.

Answer: Elizabeth Santana

The Niskayuna Town Pool is an important community resource that provides recreational opportunities, brings families together, and contributes to the quality of life in our Town.

Residents who pay substantial property taxes deserve well-maintained public facilities that are safe, accessible, and ready to serve the community. The Town pool should not be allowed to fall into disrepair because of inadequate maintenance, poor planning, or a failure to address problems in a timely manner.

Just as the closure of the Town transfer station came as a sudden and unexpected surprise to residents, we must ensure that other important community resources are not allowed to deteriorate or become unavailable without adequate planning, public communication, and accountability.

Residents deserve to know what is happening with the facilities they help fund through their tax dollars.

This pattern must change. Town resources must be managed proactively, not reactively. Regular maintenance, long-term capital planning, careful budgeting, and responsible oversight are essential to protecting the facilities and services residents depend on.

As Town Supervisor, I would prioritize evaluating the condition of Town facilities, identifying necessary repairs, exploring available federal, state, and county grants, and developing realistic plans to maintain and improve community resources without placing unnecessary financial burdens on taxpayers.

Niskayuna deserves responsible management, transparent decision-making, and a commitment to preserving the public facilities and services that contribute to our community's quality of life.

Preserve what matters. Spend wisely. Keep Niskayuna affordable.

Question 6

There has been some discussion in the [news](#) about live streaming of meetings in Niskayuna. How will you address live streaming of meetings if elected?

Answer: Elizabeth Santana

Town Hall belongs to the people of Niskayuna. Their voices deserve to be heard, their concerns deserve thoughtful answers, and their tax dollars deserve to be managed responsibly.

It is equally concerning when residents feel that their comments are met with scoffing, laughter, or dismissive behavior from the very officials elected to represent them. **Leadership requires listening, not labeling. Accountability requires answers, not accusations.** Public trust cannot be restored without respect and meaningful engagement.

Too often, residents who ask legitimate questions about taxes, water quality, spending, and Town services feel dismissed or unfairly characterized as “rude” or accused of “harassment.”

Asking questions is not harassment. Holding elected officials accountable is not intimidation. It is a fundamental part of responsible local government.

Niskayuna deserves better than what we currently have. Niskayuna deserves leadership built on respect, transparency, and accountability.

Answer: Erin Cassady-Dorion

Full transparency remains a core commitment. All formal decision-making meetings—including Town Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board, and Conservation Advisory Council meetings—are broadcast live and archived for public view.

Internal legislative committee meetings function as administrative working sessions between board members and department heads to review technical operational details. To protect candid staff discussions and focus work efficiency, live streaming was made optional for these working sessions, but complete recordings and formal written minutes continue to be posted publicly for full community access.

Niskayuna remains far more open than neighboring municipalities, most of which do not hold open working sessions at all. We will continue to balance open government with a respectful and safe working environment for our employees, ensuring public access to town information remains clear, complete, and accessible.