

## Maplewood Democratic Committee - Candidate Questionnaire

FINAL 2022

**Name:** Kurt H. Kiley

**Address:** 506 Summit Ave

### Section A - Meet the Candidate:

**Question 1:** Please tell voters In Maplewood a little bit about you.

My name is Kurt Kiley, I live with the love of my life Carol and our dog Lacey on Summit Ave. I love the diversity of our town, the intimacy and small-town charm. I've lived in NJ my entire life, traveled the country and globe, and planted my roots here in Maplewood.

I was born in the great melting pot of the City of Elizabeth and lived there until I was a young adult. I went through the public school system. Growing up in a low-income family in Elizabeth had its own unique challenges which taught me respect, tenacity, resourcefulness, and grit.

I have an Associate, Bachelor's and Master's degree, all earned while I worked mostly full time to finance them.

At the age of 22, I became an independent management consultant and have been running by own business for the last 33 years.

No surprise, my favorite musician is Bruce Springsteen.

I have two vintage cars that are a passion of mine. I enjoy spending time with my wife Carol, traveling, carpentry, seeing live music or the occasional Broadway show, gardening, eating great food & wine, and having an occasional American Whiskey.

**Question 2:** How long have you lived in Maplewood/ Essex County?

Carol and I moved to Maplewood on May 24, 2011. Prior to that we lived in Morristown/Montclair. I was born and bred in Elizabeth.

**Question 3:** What does a weekend of fun look like for you in Maplewood?

COVID has redefined a lot of what "fun" looks like. Typically, we shop in the Village or on Springfield Ave. We have made a point, since we have moved in, to shop local, and to get to know the owners of the shops. It's one of many things that makes Maplewood special. We

regularly walk our terrier mix, Lacey from our house, up to the reservation and back. If it's nice, the three of us stop in the Village for lunch at any of the places that have outside dining and allow dogs. Lacey has her regular of grilled chicken and water.

Prior to COVID turning us into homebodies, we would frequent the many festivals and art fairs. We go out to dinner in town, or spend time with, our SOMA friends. Now we spend most of our free time on weekends restoring our home and gardening.

**Question 4:** Please express in no more than 100 words why you are the best person to serve on the Township Committee?

I think what makes me the best candidate for the position is that I recognize that its not about "me", its about "us". We are a town of around 25K people, we have a diverse collection of volunteers that serve on various civic groups, boards and committees. We have members of the Township Committee, and we have the people we pay to take care of our town. These are a vast number of competing and complimentary interests. To be successful, I need to marshal these interests and find the opportunities that bring us all together for a greater Maplewood.

Woo-Hoo! I did that in under 100 words. (Not including this sentence)

**Question 5:** What motivates you from your life experience to run for Township Committee?

Our family knew Mayor "Chris" Bollwage of Elizabeth from the time he was a young man running the North Elizabeth Youth Baseball League. As Chris rose through the ranks to become Mayor of one of the largest cities in NJ, he always showed our family interest and respect, and for no other reason than we were from the neighborhood. We didn't have money to spare on campaigns, we weren't involved at all in town politics (or much of anything), and had zero influence. And despite that, if we saw Mayor Bollwage in town, he always made a point to shake my Dad's hand and call him Mr. Kiley, ask how things were going. Chris made us feel important. I believe if he recognized me today, he would do the same.

Chris is my inspiration for how and why I want to serve.

**Question 6:** What 3 skills from your lived, professional and/or educational experiences do you bring to the table that will be most beneficial to the township committee? Please elaborate.

1. Functionally, my degree and profession are in Management. I understand finance, accounting, planning, scheduling, IT, sales, and operations, as well as lean concepts and how they are applied.

2. I see or try to see, everything as a system and its interdependencies. Whether its management, history, gardening, urban planning or exercise, everything is a system of interdependent objects and events. I work hard to see those connections. Understanding where things are, why they are, and where they came from will help you anticipate and affect different outcomes. This is crucial in my field, and it made be successful.

3. I work with people of many different backgrounds and skill sets, with varying needs and concerns. To be successful, I need to be able to understand everyone's concerns, digest them, and then communicate back to the other stake holders these ideas in terms they understand. I break departments out of their silos so they can successfully communicate and collaborate.

**Question 7:** Please briefly summarize your volunteer/civic experience from the last 10 years.

The highlights:

I formed Maplewood Senior Share along with Irene Dunsavage in 2013, it promoted senior interests in Maplewood, and had regular meetings with special guest speakers.

I was a member of the Maplewood Recreation advisory committee, and then was the Chair of the newly formed Senior Advisory Committee from April 2017, until December 2020.

I have served the Maplewood Democratic Party as a District leader for District 16 since 2015.

**Question 8:** The Township Committee meetings and Board/Committee meetings take place during the evenings. As the pandemic ends, these meetings are likely to return to in-person meetings. Are there any on-going evening commitments in your life that would make it challenging to serve?

There are none now. Prior to COVID I did travel a lot for my career, COVID has redefined my relationship with my clients and almost all work now is remote. There is the possibility I will need to travel, and that will need to be addressed as needed.

## **Section B - Vision/Goals**

**Question 9:** Why are you running for Maplewood Township Committee?

I love our town and am excited to represent the people of Maplewood. I think my skills and background represent a unique niche. I will be a force multiplier that can help the committee further our goals.

**Question 10:** What do you see as the most important priorities/ challenges for the township right now?

These all overlap in some way:

1. Climate Change. What do the flood plains look like in 30 – 50 years? How does that impact our sewer system, development, Master Plan? How does the rise in temperature impact our tree canopy? As we transition to all electric, what does that mean for our electric grid and how do we upgrade? How do we address the increase in storm frequency and severity? Now is the time to start these discussions and get ahead of them while we can.
2. And of course, taxes. As the cost-of-living increases, Maplewood can no longer be a town for everyone, all ages and all incomes.
3. Managing future development, while maintaining what makes Maplewood, Maplewood. Former planning board chair Tom Carlson called what Maplewood has, “Lightning in a Bottle”. Its easy to lose, difficult to capture.
4. Continuing the work to make Maplewood, One Maplewood.

**Question 11:** If elected, at the end of your 3 years, what is the top priority you want to say you have accomplished?

I have helped develop a sense of community that has crossed neighborhood divides.

**Question 12:** How often have you watched/participated in Township Committee meetings? Tell us of an agenda issue with which you agreed or disagreed.

I have watched/attended/participated in many Township Committee meetings.

This is in the realm of the Library Trustees, but I would have pushed for small branch libraries in our lower income neighborhoods.

I reached out to two Library Trustees I respected about this and there was no interest, the response was this was going to be a library for “All” of Maplewood, but reality is, its only

for “All” of Maplewood if you have access to it, and children from distant neighborhoods, like Lightning Brook, will have a challenge getting there.

If we are serious about narrowing the educational achievement gap, then we should be cognizant of all opportunities presented to us when they arise. Building a small library branch in the lower income neighborhoods was one of those opportunities.

I am passionate about this because having a little branch library in our neighborhood changed my life. I walked there with my grandmother until I could walk on my own. Walking on my own, checking books out on my own, gave me a sense of agency, even at a young age. There were no educational resources at home, the library was it. I knew at a young age my library card was a ticket to a better life, but it would be worthless if I had to go to the main branch which was downtown, it might as well have been on the moon.

As an added benefit, these little branches have their own community. The librarians knew my grandmother personally, and when she was in the hospital with cancer, the librarians continued to bring her books.

**Question 13:** Please share what (if anything) the Township can do to be more equitable and inclusive.

When I served on the Senior Advisory Committee, we worked to ensure that community events, ie Maplewood Stock, Fourth Of July Celebration, Harvest fest, were cognizant of the special physical needs of seniors. To that end, we incorporated cooling tents, water stations, transportation, parking, and special senior specific tents that were easy to access on level ground. We also published a paper on how to make block parties senior friendly.

This was one of the ways we worked to ensure Maplewood is an inclusive town for seniors.

But with that, we were aware of the challenges of reaching and representing every senior from our diverse community. It is a huge challenge, there are varying cultures, communities, and languages. There have been ongoing improvements in this area, but I think the immediate challenge is communication, and outreach to everyone regarding the services in town, the events we have, and the boards and committees that one can serve on.

It may be worth considering having formal advisory committees for Communication and Volunteerism to help us in these areas.

## **Section C - Commitment to Democratic Party Values**

**Question 14:** In what year did you become a registered Democrat? Have you ever affiliated with any other political party? If so, when and why?

Short version: I have been a registered Democrat since 2015. When I was 18, I registered to vote as a Republican. At some point I realized that I could no longer be affiliated with the Republican party, I switched my affiliation to Independent.

Longer version: There wasn't much thought in that decision when I was 18. It was 1985, the height of the cold war. Everyone in our Democratic town of Elizabeth was a Ronnie Regan supporter because he was going to beat the Russians. Our Democratic mayor supported Regan, and Regan had a huge rally on the steps of City Hall with our Democratic Mayor Dunn. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72qMZ0hi7cQ>

When I went to register, I asked my Dad what party my parents were registered to, he said they were Democrats but he voted Republican. He was a Democrat so he could vote for Mayor, which never made sense to me until recently. He was afraid that if Democrats got elected, they would cut defense, and it would hurt the company he worked for, and that would not be good for us.

And at 18, keeping my Dad employed, and beating the Russians were the only considerations at the time.

**Question 15:** Please review the platform of the Democratic party (<https://democrats.org/where-we-stand/party-platform/>).

- (a) What is one aspect of the party platform that resonates the most with you or is particularly important to you and why?

Education, closing the achievement gap. As a country we have let the quality of our education system fall way behind other countries, developed or developing. This has a direct impact on everything we find important, from poverty reduction to national security. Also, education should be looked at as a lifelong endeavor, that includes worker retraining and advancement.

- (b) Do you have any personal or professional considerations or issue positions that are in conflict with the Democratic Party Platform or that would limit your ability to advance the Democratic Party Platform? If yes, please explain.

I support the spirit and goals of the Democratic Party platform and am committed to incorporating these ideals in my service to Maplewood on the Township Committee.

With that said, I am going to be asking questions when we get into the weeds of the execution of those goals as stated in the platform, in particular, if I see something that infringes on our rights in the constitution as I understand them.

For Example:

Easy one for me. At the end of the party platform: “We oppose any effort to unfairly single out and delegitimize Israel, including at the United Nations or through the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement, while protecting the Constitutional right of our citizens to free speech.”

Unfortunately, you can't have it both ways, boycotts are legitimate forms of free speech, and I think we can all agree on that. Look at the power of the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955. It's disappointing the Democratic party even entertains this.

More complicated are gun restrictions, how do we reduce gun violence without violating the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and more importantly 14<sup>th</sup> amendments.

“Democrats will enact universal background checks, end online sales of guns and ammunition, close dangerous loopholes that currently allow stalkers, abusive partners, and some individuals convicted of assault or battery to buy and possess firearms, and adequately fund the federal background check system.”

There is a whole lot to unpack in there, but I want to focus on the area highlighted in yellow. We can agree that people of color have been disproportionately arrested and convicted of crimes. We agree that laws that restricting voting rights of convicted individuals disproportionately impacts people of color. I have concerns that laws that remove the right to own firearms from people convicted of crimes could disproportionately disarm communities of color, a direct affront to the spirit of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment.

I also don't believe in retroactively increasing one's sentence, which this is, as this to me looks like double jeopardy.

So, what does my commitment to the Constitution mean?

It means I believed in drug decriminalization, and marriage equality, way back before these were popular ideas.

It means a question, that seems innocuous on its face, like whether the Township should host an annual Easter Egg hunt or not, is a conundrum that completely ties me up in knots. This is an actual township issue that was raised while I was on the Recreation Advisory Committee, and I was committed to ensuring this was something our non-Christian residents were heard on.

Balancing our shared goals, with our civil rights is important to me.

## **Section D – Conclusion**

**Question 16:** What one thing about you that every member of the MDC should know before they are deciding on a vote to endorse you?

It's important for me to always listen and understand every side of every issue, do my best to set aside any pre-conceived notions and to come to a decision that is fair and balance.