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Meet the Westwood Council Candidates

Four candidates are running for two open seats in the borough

By [Michelle Sartor](#) | [Email the author](#) | November 1, 2011

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Two Republican incumbents and two Democratic challengers are running for two council seats in Westwood next week. Patch asked each to answer four questions to give voters an idea of why they're running and what they hope to accomplish.

Polls will be open Nov. 8 for residents to cast their votes.

Philip Cerruti (Democratic challenger)

- *Why did you decide to run for council?*

I'm running for council to help improve the lives of the residents of the Borough of Westwood.

- *What do you think is the biggest issue facing Westwood? Why?*

Westwood has not one, but several major issues. First is the re-opening of the former Pascack Valley Hospital. I support Mayor John Birkner's tireless, non-stop efforts to accomplish this. The second is the severe flooding events that the borough now too regularly experiences. Again, I approve of Mayor Birkner's commissioning of a complete engineering study to determine the causes of the problem and to identify possible solutions. The third major issue is traffic. Westwood is a central train transportation hub, and as a result, the local road system is severely strained with commuter traffic during peak hours. Several intersections need to be re-engineered in order to help relieve the congestion.

- *If elected, what do you plan to accomplish in the borough?*

What I hope to accomplish is twofold. First and foremost I want to help craft and implement solutions to the problems that I listed above. Second, I want to enhance the quality of life for borough residents with a couple of other projects. I would like to duplicate programs in Morris and Union

Counties to put solar panels and small wind turbines on public buildings. I would further explore the possibility of private borough residents also being eligible to participate in this initiative. I believe that it would save Westwood substantially on long term energy costs and be in keeping with Mayor Birkner's vision of a cleaner, greener Westwood. I would also like to see the creation of a volunteer Arts Council. This council would be responsible for coordinating and promoting different performing arts events that take place throughout the borough. Many events are not now well coordinated or advertised. Cranford commissioned a study in 2008 that found that vibrant arts communities attracted more visitors and revenue to their towns. I believe Westwood has the best downtown in the Pascack Valley and that we need to support our local businesses and restaurants. Bringing in revenue through the arts is a good way to accomplish this.

- *Why should voters choose you?*

The re-opening of the former Pascack Valley Hospital will bring much need jobs and revenue to Westwood. However, it will also raise further issues of sustainable growth of our commercial districts and the preservation of Westwood's small town charm and character. Alleviating flooding will involve multiple land use issues, including any Blue Acres funding to buy out flood distressed property owners. Re-engineering intersections will mean coordinating land use priorities with NJ Transit and the state DOT. For nearly two decades, I have been dealing with complex real estate issues in my title insurance business. In addition, as a member of Westwood's Planning Board, I have been intimately involved in the process of balancing sustainability with growth. This is why I believe I have the necessary qualifications for borough council and why the residents should vote for me on Nov. 8.

David Fischer (Democratic challenger)

- *Why did you decide to run for council?*

I decided to run for council because after living in Westwood for the past 18 years, and raising two sons in town, I realized this is a place that I want to remain for the rest of my life, and felt with my background in banking and finance, I could volunteer my time and knowledge to help make sound fiscal decisions within town government.

- *What do you think is the biggest issue facing Westwood? Why?*

I feel the one of the biggest issues facing Westwood is the flooding. There may be nothing that can be done for major natural disasters, but the persistent flooding that affects many residents in town, creates anguish for all Westwood residents. I would like to be involved on the flooding study and future action plan that is currently be performed by our town engineer.

- *If elected, what do you plan to accomplish in the borough?*

If elected, I would contribute my professional financial expertise, to help make sound fiscal decisions within my home town's government during these difficult financial times. Keeping the budget in line, and finding ways to reduce expenses is something that is very important to me. I am completely behind our current mayor's efforts in re-opening our hospital. Not only does our area need this medical care facility, but it would be an important source of much needed jobs to all of the Pascack Valley.

- *Why should voters choose you?*

Although I am running with the Democratic Party, my interests lie in helping all citizens of Westwood. Helping to preserve the safety, quality of life, and standard of living for all residents is important to me.

John J. Sciara (Republican incumbent)

- *Why did you decide to run for council?*

I decided to run for my first term in 2002 because I wanted to give back to the community that had given me and my family so much.

- *What do you think is the biggest issue facing Westwood? Why?*

The biggest issue facing all municipalities is keeping the tax rate at a level that residents can bear. Shared service agreements, the reopening of Pascack Valley Hospital will help stabilize tax rates.

- *If elected, what do you plan to accomplish in the borough?*

If elected for my fourth term, I hope to continue the work this council has begun. We have fought tirelessly for the reopening of the hospital, have helped keep the integrity of our downtown while promoting growth, have listened to the residents as far as traffic (studies are being conducted with the county currently at major intersections), flooding and park improvements.

- *Why should voters choose you?*

Voters should choose whomever they wish to elect. However, I have proved that I have Westwood as my sole interest. I have no further political aspirations than to serve the residents of the town I raised my children and hope to watch my grandchildren grow up in.

Cynthia Waneck (Republican incumbent)

- *Why did you decide to run for council?*

I first ran for office six years ago because I love my town and wanted to give back to the community. My motivation remains the same. As a kid who grew up in Westwood, I believe it is important to give back to the community which has been so caring and giving to me over the years. As a council member, I have made positive contributions and am part of an excellent team. We have accomplished much, but there is still a great deal more that needs to be done.

- *What do you think is the biggest issue facing Westwood? Why?*

Taxes. Taxes. Taxes. Taxes affect all of us - each and every resident - those who are on fixed incomes who want to retain their homes, those whose homes flood, those who want the town to provide quality services, those who want to continue to be able to afford to live in Westwood. And, taxes influence all of the monetary decisions that we make on the council. Our local property tax bills are a compilation of municipal, county and local school taxes. Council can hold the line on the municipal portion of that bill, but don't control the other two thirds.

- *If elected, what do you plan to accomplish in the borough?*

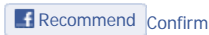
I promise to continue to control costs, cut spending, and lower our debt. I will continue to seek additional shared service programs; to work on a solution to our traffic issues without sacrificing Veteran's Park or its neighborhood; and to continue our efforts for waterway management by working in a bipartisan manner with local and state officials. Westwood is working and I'll keep working for it and its residents.

- *Why should voters choose you?*

I have proven to the residents that over the last six years that I work hard, think independently and keep my promises. I have promised:

1. to be fiscally conservative, and we have managed our debt, increased our bond rating and kept municipal tax increases to under 2 percent the last three years (even before the new state mandated cap existed).
2. that we would have a new website; that the DPW would have the manpower and equipment they need; and that we would complete Westvale Park along with a dog run, and we have.
3. to preserve the hometown character of Westwood and, we created our Historic Commission, adopted anti-McMansion ordinances, limited fast food restaurants and broadened business uses in our commercial areas. I voted in opposition to parking garages and in favor of keeping bus traffic off of Jefferson Avenue.
4. to explore green initiatives and, we created our Environmental and the Green Team and earned a Bronze Status from Sustainable NJ.
5. to bring a community hospital back to Westwood and, with the help of our residents, it looks now as if that promise too will soon be fulfilled.

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