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# NEWSLETTER

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## **The Election Edition**

### **Tuesday, May 20, 2025**

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## Get out and Vote on May 20, 2025!

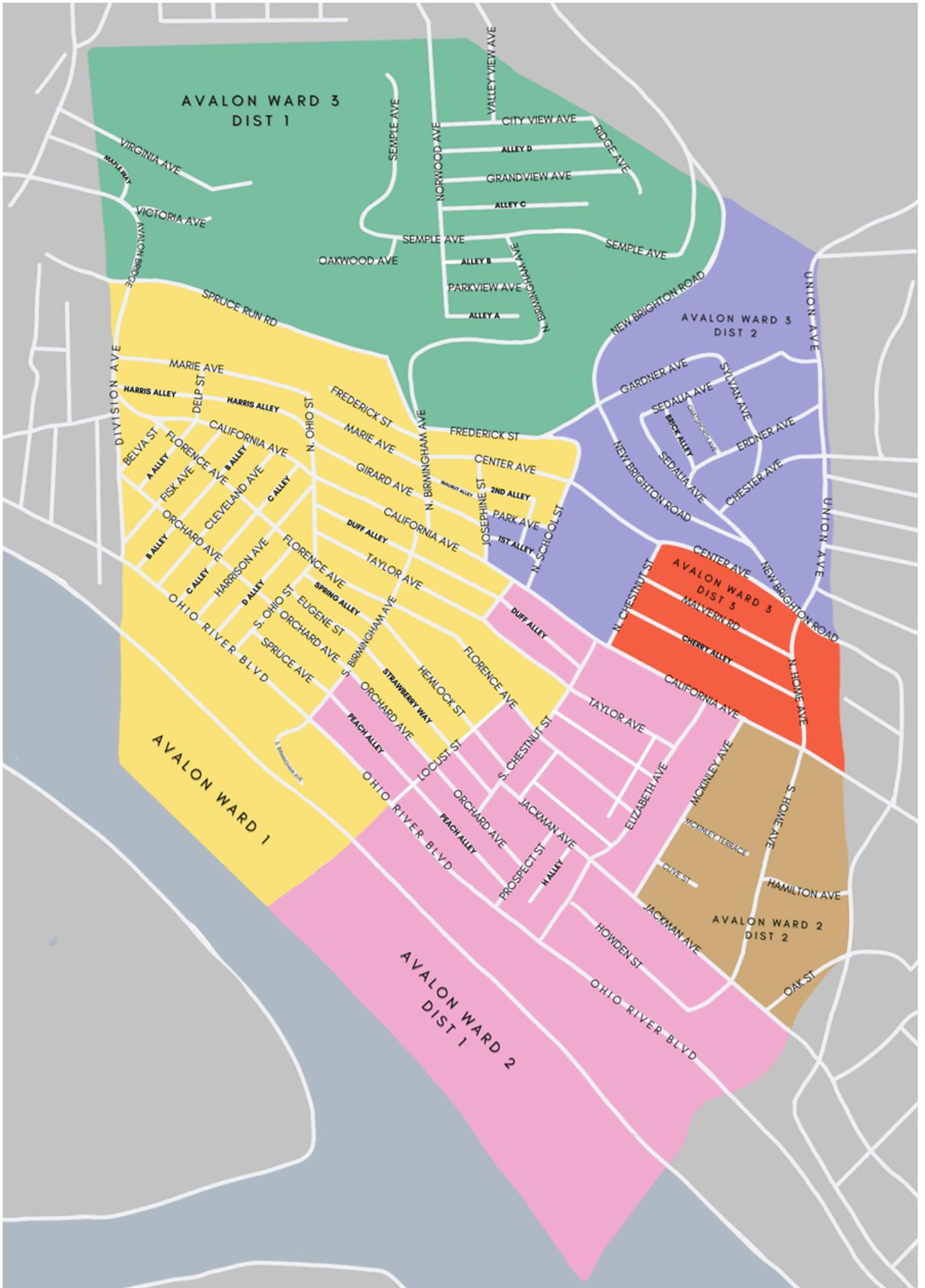
This issue of The Apple will offer messages from candidates running for Avalon Council as well as the Northgate School Board. How do these elected officials work in and influence your community?

The **Mayor** oversees the Police Department. The most important piece is keeping up with the needs and concerns of the department. The Mayor reports to the Borough Council.

**Council members** have the final vote in creating and approving ordinances that affect various areas of the borough.

A **School Board** member is responsible for the district's budget, curriculum, and overall operations.

# Avalon Boroughs Ward and District Street Map





# Where Do I Vote?

## Avalon Polling Locations

*Ward/District colors are in conjunction with  
the Street Map on Page 5*

**Ward 1:** Avalon Municipal Bldg.  
640 California Ave

**Ward 2, District 1:** Avalon Public Library -  
Conf Room  
317 S. Home Ave

**Ward 2, District 2:** Greenstone United  
Methodist Church  
939 California Ave

**Ward 3, District 1:** Avalon Elementary School  
721 California Ave

**Ward 3, District 2-3:** Greenstone United  
Methodist Church  
939 California Ave

# **Allegheny County Resources**

**from the Allegheny County Website**

**<https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Government/Elections>**

**Elections Division  
County Office Building  
542 Forbes Avenue, Room 312  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
Phone: 412-350-4500**

## **Information Available**

**Mail-in and Absentee Voting / Ballot Return Sites**

**Military and Overseas Voting**

**Track Your Ballot**

**Find Your Polling Place**

**Voter Registration**

**Election Results**

**Sample Ballots**

**In-Person Voting on Election Day**

**Polling places are open from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm. Anyone in line as of 8:00 pm on Election Day will be allowed to vote.**

**First time and newly registered voters will be asked to show an approved form of ID upon arrival to the polling place.**



**"Talk is cheap, voting is free; take it to the polls."**

**-Nanette L. Avery**

## **Avalon Candidates**

### **AVALON MAYOR AND COUNCIL CANDIDATES**

**(In alphabetical order within their categories)**

#### **Mayor**

Brigitte Jackson, Republican, 4 Year Term

Heather Weleski, Democrat, 4 Year Term

#### **Council**

##### ***Ward 1***

Maxwell Swartwout, Democrat, 4 Year Term

##### ***Ward 2***

Tia Morris, Democrat, 4 Year Term

Lee Nelson, Republican, 4 Year Term

##### ***Ward 3***

Luke Meyer, Democrat, 4 Year Term

Michael Packard, Republican, 4 Year Term



# Northgate School Board Candidates

## NORTHGATE SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

(In alphabetical order)

### ***Democratic Ballot***

Melissa Bilski, 4 year Term  
Chelsea MacDonald, 4 Year Term  
Cheryl Patalano, 4 Year Term  
Laura Pollanen, 4 Year Term

Amber Lehman, 2 Year Term

### ***Republican Ballot***

There are no Republican Candidates





All candidates running for Avalon Council and the Northgate School Board we're contacted with the opportunity to introduce themselves.

Below are messages from various candidates.

The more you know about a candidate and how they influence your community, we hope you will feel more confident in your choices while casting your ballot.



## A Message From...

# Avalon Mayor, Incumbent, Brigitte Jackson - R



I am Brigitte Jackson, current Mayor of Avalon. I served 6 years on the Northgate School Board and then 4 years as the Mayor of Avalon. I am not only invested in our community civically, but personally. I will celebrate 22 years of marriage in June with my husband Derek. We've owned our home in Avalon for 18 years. Our daughter is in her first year of college and our son attends Northgate and Beattie Tech.

My first term as Mayor was productive and rewarding. I initiated discussions in 2024 with the Borough of Ben Avon to explore the possibility of Avalon Borough providing police services to their community. Through collaborative efforts between myself and the Borough Council, we successfully secured a contract. This agreement allowed Avalon to strengthen its police department by hiring additional full-time officers, while helping us avoid raising taxes to cover increased costs related to salaries, equipment, and operational needs.

I've chosen to seek re-election because I am committed to building on the progress that was made during my first term. I developed a strong working relationship with our police department and gained insight into its daily operations and challenges. This understanding positioned me to advocate effectively for both the department and our community. One of my goals is to increase community engagement by involving our officers in more local events, fostering trust and transparency.

## **Brigitte Jackson Continued**

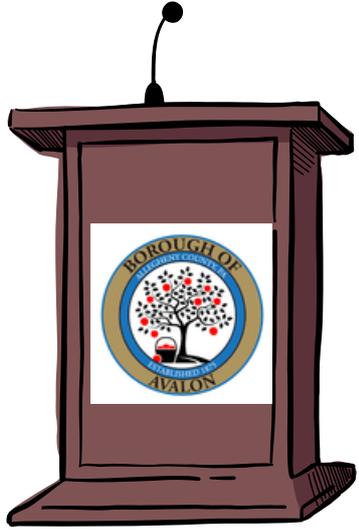
Additionally, I completed training to become a certified law enforcement chaplain. This allows me to support our police officers and firefighters as they manage the emotional demands of their roles.

Like many communities across the country, Avalon is impacted by the ongoing law enforcement hiring crisis, which often results in smaller departments losing officers to larger municipalities. To address this issue proactively, I am exploring the development of a Regional Police Force with neighboring boroughs and townships. Regionalization is not a question of if, but when. By leading this initiative, Avalon can be at the forefront and take advantage of available state and federal funding for regional departments, strengthening our police services without burdening our taxpayers.

The greatest challenge facing Avalon is the rising cost of essential services. Unlike some communities, Avalon does not have land available for development or expansion, which limits our growth potential and tax intake. We must be strategic in cutting costs where possible and aggressively pursuing grants for major projects to avoid tax increases. I recognize how detrimental a tax increase would be for families and senior citizens on fixed incomes. I'm committed to maintaining fiscal responsibility while continuing to meet the needs of our residents.

Derek and I both grew up in the North Boroughs and chose to raise our family here and make Avalon our permanent home. We care deeply about this community. Over the years, I've served on the Northgate School Board, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Tri-Borough Planning Commission—always ensuring that Avalon residents had a voice at the table. When Avalon thrives, we all benefit. If taxes increase or services decline, my family is affected just like yours.

I ask for your vote on May 20, 2025, to continue to serve as your Mayor and Avalon's voice at the table. Thank you.



## A Message From...

# Candidate for Mayor, Heather Weleski - D



I'm Heather Weleski and I am running for Mayor of Avalon. I have lived in Avalon for a decade where I am the Library Director at the Avalon Public Library. During my time in our community, I have served on the following committees: Friends of the Avalon Public Library, Grow Avalon, North Boroughs Community Day Committee, Avalon and Bellevue Democratic Committee, the Halloween Parade/Trunk or Treat Committee, the Street Sweeping Focus Group and currently, the Avalon Borough Sesquicentennial Committee.

Throughout my career as a librarian, I have served on committees, chapters, and divisions for the Pennsylvania Library Association. The leadership I displayed during my membership in the Pennsylvania Library Association led me to receiving a Certificate of Merit in 2024 for my service to libraries in the Commonwealth. I was also elected to serve as the 2023 Librarians' Advisory Council for the Allegheny Library Association. One of the most my various leadership roles in the Pennsylvania Library Association and the Allegheny County Library Association, I have built relationships with local, state, and national leaders.

The first I moved to Avalon, I instantly fell in love with the borough. It had the small-town charm with a suburban vibe that I was looking for. I love that you can walk down the street and be greeted by neighbors. Though I had to move for a short period of time, when I returned to the borough in 2019 as the Library Director, I knew that I had found my forever home.

## Heather Weleski Continued

My leadership, community involvement, and commitment to positive change will help Avalon thrive. I believe in a future where everyone has a voice, and I am dedicated to turning that vision into a reality.

My vision/campaign strategy, if elected, would be the following:

- To partner with the Avalon Police Department to maintain and enhance public safety.
- To work with the Streets & Safety Committee to address community infrastructure needs.
- To collaborate with community groups to organize events that foster connection.
- To host open office hours to ensure residents can share their concerns and ideas directly.

One of Avalon's biggest strengths are the community leaders and elected officials who are willing to step up. Our Borough Council, Borough staff, Department of Public Works, Police Department, Volunteer Fire Department, and community volunteers, shape Avalon to be a small but mighty community.

We can only continue to be as strong as our leadership.

I think, as a moderately turnover heavy area with apartments, communication is something the borough can improve upon. While we have invested in platforms like Savvy Citizen and the online newsletter, if our community members don't know they exist then how can they stay informed? Maybe the possibility of a yearly newsletter or even just canvassing by borough council members to make sure the community knows where to find information.

While the Primary election is party specific, I want everyone to know that I want to be a mayor for all residents. I believe that the only way we can keep our strength is to continue to have meaningful conversations about what our community needs. Also, please vote in the odd-year elections! In order to have more impact on our local, state, and national policies, we need to stay engaged in the democratic process every year.

You can find my campaign Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/people/Heather-Weleski-for-Mayor-of-Avalon-PA/61573012405349/>

# A Message From...

## Avalon Council, Ward 2 Incumbent, Lee Nelson - R



My name is Lee Nelson. I was born and raised in Avalon, and moved back about twenty years ago. I enjoy our small town atmosphere, and the ability to walk around town and talk with my neighbors.

I have served the residents of Avalon Borough, Ward 2, as their council member for the majority of the last twelve years. Our local real estate taxes have remained stable over that period of time and we've obtained grant money to improve our local parks and re-open the Avalon swimming pool in 2025. I look forward to building upon the success of what was achieved.

I am currently the Chairman of the Safety Committee, and have also served on the Borough Development Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Streets/Engineering and Infrastructure Committee. I have been the chairman of the Community Day/ 4th of July Fireworks Committee since 2016.

Avalon is a small land locked community whose greatest ongoing obstacle is not raising taxes. We don't have the land to expand and add more businesses like McKnight Road or the land to add multiple sub-divisions to spread out the tax burdens among our residents. Council must continue to challenge themselves and as leaders of the community, figure out ways to maintain fiscal integrity and provide a safe and inviting atmosphere.

If you are happy with stable taxes, strong leadership, and infrastructure improvements that improve our quality of life in Avalon, I would appreciate your support in the upcoming election! Thank you.



## And Now A Message From...

### Avalon Council, Ward 3 Candidate, Luke Meyer - D



My name is Luke Meyer and I am a lifelong resident of Avalon. I graduated from Northgate in 2019, I was a lifeguard at Avalon Pool for 6 years and I volunteer annually at Touch-A-Truck. The experience of running for office for the first time has been exhilarating.

I'm running for Council because I believe real change starts with us. If we see something that needs fixing, we can't just sit back and complain—we have to step up, take action, and be part of the solution. That's what I'm here to do for Avalon.

My platform is focused on increasing opportunities for community involvement and attracting new businesses to our borough. Our residents deserve to have a voice in the decisions that shape Avalon, and I'm committed to making sure that voice is heard. We live in a great area with incredible potential—and it's time we put that potential to work for everyone's benefit.

Avalon's biggest strength is our close-knit community. You'll find a familiar face everywhere; from neighbors walking their dogs, to families running errands or friends out for a jog, It's this sense of connection that makes Avalon more than just a place to live-it's a place where lasting friendships are built and community thrives.

## **Luke Meyer Continued**

The biggest challenge our Borough is facing is the lack of accessible businesses. We have loads of businesses on Ohio River Boulevard, but everyone knows how hard it is to cross. I wish to try to bring businesses to California Avenue and elsewhere, where our residents will only have a short and safe trip to access them.

It is always important to vote in your local elections because all politics start local. Your vote is your voice, and making your voice heard is one of the great things about our county's democracy. Thank you , and thank you for the consideration of your vote on May 20, 2025.



## A Message From...

# Avalon Council, Ward 3 Candidate, Mike Packard - R

My name is Mike Packard, and I've been a proud resident of Avalon's Ward 3 for nearly 31 years. Along with my wife, Jennifer we've raised our two children, Jessica and Christian, here in the community, both of whom attended Northgate Jr./Sr. High School. I am an active volunteer with Boy Scout Troop 226, where I mentor Life Scouts working toward their Eagle Rank. I am currently serving my fourth year on Avalon Borough Council and have held the position of Finance Committee Chair since 2023.

It takes time—often one to two years—to truly understand the inner workings of local government, especially when it comes to budgeting, grant funding, mandates, and staffing. I've been fortunate to work alongside a dedicated Council and Borough staff who've helped me grow in this role. I'm seeking re-election because we've made meaningful progress and I want to continue building on that momentum. Over the past few years, we've completed improvements to California Avenue Park, the Avalon Park playground and basketball court, and undertaken significant repairs to the community pool.

My platform focuses on fostering growth in the Borough of Avalon while maintaining fiscal responsibility. For more than a decade, this and previous Councils have worked hard to avoid increasing taxes, and I remain committed to that goal. A recent success in our efforts to grow Avalon was a partnership with Ben Avon Borough, through which Avalon Police now provide patrol services in their community, enhancing public safety.

## Mike Packard Continued

Avalon is truly a hidden gem. Despite our size, we offer an impressive array of amenities including our own police and fire departments, a community pool, library, and a community garden. We also host family-friendly events featuring visits from the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus riding through the community on a fire truck! Through partnerships with neighboring communities, we're able to offer services/activities like Community Day, glass recycling, and semi-annual Dumpster Day events. We are also seeing visitors from all over the area come to our business district to patron companies such as Mia Madre, One White Lane, Lash Dolls, and Violet Street Florist.

One of Avalon's greatest challenges is managing rising operational costs without increasing taxes. That said, we've made sure that residents can see the direct impact of their tax dollars—whether it's new roads, a revitalized pool, updated parks, or new police vehicles. Continuing to look for grant funding to offset costs is a top priority.

I remain committed to finding ways to increase revenue and reduce expenses so that we can continue to avoid raising taxes. As Councilmembers, we're not just decision-makers—we're also your neighbors. We experience the effects of every policy and financial decision alongside you. Personally, I believe we all pay enough in taxes, and I will continue to work hard to put Avalon residents first.



# A Message From...

## Northgate School Board Incumbent, Chelsea MacDonald - D



I'm the parent of a student at Bellevue Elementary School and someone who cares deeply about the role schools play in shaping communities. I was appointed to the board in 2024 and am running because the experience has been meaningful.

I've always made community service a priority. Though this is my first experience in public office, serving on the school board fits with who I am and what I have to give.

I've developed respect for the process and people who keep the district running - especially those working quietly behind the scenes to make thoughtful, student-centered decisions. I decided to run because I want to continue supporting that work. It's been rewarding to contribute in a role that helps ensure that effort is seen, supported, and sustained.

I don't consider myself a politician. I'm an introvert who loves being at home with my family. Campaigning is a stretch for me, but it's worth stepping outside of my comfort zone for the greater good. I see value in the work the board does, and I'm here to serve.

## Chelsea MacDonald Continued

My goal is to support the ideas and expertise of others - the educators, administrators, and community members who are in the trenches every day. I take the responsibility seriously and try to lead with humility, curiosity, and consistency.

Northgate is a small district, and that comes with advantages. There's a sense of familiarity, accountability, and community here that's hard to find in larger systems. I think this makes our school district uniquely equipped to adapt and improve as the needs of its students change.

The district has made improvements in recent years and that momentum is something I feel grateful to help grow. One of the biggest challenges we face is navigating the broader systemic limitations of public education funding. While our district does an admirable job managing its budget with care and precision, we are still working within a larger structure that often asks schools to do more with less. The effects of this can impact everything from staffing to facility updates to students and families.

I struggled in school - with comprehension, processing, and keeping up in a system that wasn't built for how my brain works. As a kid with undiagnosed ADHD, I often felt like I was failing, and that feeling stuck with me well into adulthood. My experience shapes how I think about education and why I care about creating schools that meet students where they are.

I care about building schools where all kids feel seen and supported - whether they're immigrants, queer or gender-expansive, neurodivergent, misunderstood, or still figuring out where they belong. These students and families are my people and I'm here to do my part in making Northgate a great place for all children to learn.



## A Message From...

# Northgate School Board Incumbent, Cheryl Patalano - D

I am Cheryl Patalano and I'm seeking re-election for my second term as Northgate School Board Director. During my current term, December 2021-December 2025, I have demonstrated my commitment to educational excellence and responsible governance, most recently serving as Board President since December 2024. My involvement with the Northgate School District extends beyond my board service, including past roles as a Bellevue Elementary PTO member, elementary library volunteer, and Secretary of the Northgate Marching Band Booster organization. These varied experiences have provided me with an understanding of our district's needs from multiple perspectives.

My decision to serve on the School Board began forming before the pandemic. After years of contributing to various school organizations, I felt called to engage at a more strategic level. I was inspired by Northgate's positive trajectory and wanted to build on that momentum. My vision has always included creating an inclusive educational environment where every student feels welcomed, supported in their academic journey, and empowered to discover their unique identity. I believe that by combining academic excellence with opportunities for personal growth and exploration, we can prepare our students not just for academic success, but for fulfilling lives as confident, well-rounded individuals

My commitment to the Northgate School Board stems from a genuine desire to serve our community, not political ambition. I have no aspirations to leverage this position as a stepping stone to higher office. My only motivation is to help our district continue to flourish and improve for the benefit of our students and community.

## Cheryl Patalano Continued

I would like to encourage civic engagement. If you've ever considered serving on the school board, I welcome the opportunity to share my experiences and insights. Public education thrives when dedicated community members step up to contribute their unique perspectives and talents.

One of Northgate's greatest strengths is the accessibility of our administration. In contrast to my own educational experience in a large district where I graduated with nearly 500 classmates and administrative access was limited, our community benefits from direct communication channels. Parents can simply email or call our superintendent with questions or concerns.

Unheard of in my home district back in the 90s!

Additionally, Northgate distinguishes itself through its commitment to student involvement. Our district actively encourages students to explore multiple interests simultaneously, with coaches, club advisors, and activity leaders collaboratively ensuring students can participate in diverse opportunities. I love seeing our football players and cheerleaders participate in the marching band half time show! We encourage our students to explore their full range of talents!

Funding equity is the biggest challenge for our district. Pennsylvania's public schools operate under restrictive financial constraints while charter schools often benefit from substantial financial resources without equivalent accountability. Charter school tuition reform is critically needed to create a more balanced educational funding landscape.

Additionally, Allegheny County's outdated property assessment system creates unnecessary friction between school districts and homeowners. The current practice of reassessing properties only at the point of sale results in significant tax disparities between new homeowners and long-term residents.

These systemic funding challenges ultimately impact our ability to provide the comprehensive educational experience our students deserve. Despite these obstacles, Northgate remains committed to maximizing every resource to support student achievement and opportunity.

Please vote! I would appreciate your vote for me, but most importantly, exercise your right to cast your ballot!



## A Message From...

### **Northgate School Board Incumbent, Laura Pollanen - D**

My name is Laura Pollanen; my official residency date is Jan 1, 2016, but I have been in Bellevue and Avalon since 2011. I have served as a Democratic committee member and have been on the Northgate School Board since 2022. I was the volunteer coordinator for Wizardvue, and have been serving on the Bellevue Pride Committee since 2021. It is the positive experience gained from these multiple posts that has propelled me to continue to serve the communities school district.

I was raised by two educators. A free and fair education system is NECESSARY for our communities to thrive. I consider it my duty to my community to ensure that all children have access to science-based, fact-based, history-checked schooling.

I am an outspoken proponent of free lunch and breakfast. Having worked for after school programs as well as at a food bank, it's clear to me that the district needs to ensure that kids are being fed so that they can succeed.

Northgate's Chill Project is a positive and unique attribute of the district. I have admiration for the Chill teachers. They are offering our students a resource that they may not find elsewhere.

Funding is the biggest challenge our district faces. The district must continue to be fiscally responsible and maintain our budget.

I'm serving on school board because I am confident that I can ensure our kids get the best education that is available to them. I am a public servant, and with your vote, I will continue to serve our district. Thank you.