



# Berwyn Strong



**A Coalition of Proven Leaders and Bold New Innovators**

## NEIGHBORS UNITE TO SECURE BERWYN'S FUTURE

A local grassroots movement started around the idea that community leaders should be chosen in open non-partisan elections and free to focus on issues that impact Berwyn. The old concept of electing local leaders through the partisan primary system forces voters to declare a national political party and handcuffs candidates into holding the party line when regional members of the same political party may not be support-

ing Berwyn's best interests. The idea of putting local concerns first drove the non-partisan ballot initiative in March 2024 to an over 75% approval rating by Berwyn voters. Due to this initiative, anyone can vote for a candidate for local municipal offices in February 2025 without declaring a political party and those elected must get a majority of the entire popular vote as independent candidates.

Now, a coalition of current and

future leaders from various local political projects have formed a collective think tank committed to shared governance and setting individual agenda's aside to put Berwyn's interests first. The representatives of this group are not a political party, but instead a movement that calls themselves Berwyn Strong. This group includes former members of different political organizations and other non-partisan community leaders

who realize that constructive debate is necessary, and no single group has all the answers. Berwyn Strong is a concept created by all those who have embraced the idea and have pledged to forego any personal or national political agendas to keep the community as the top priority. They all believe that the path forward is setting up checks and balances to ensure that the focus of local government is always on the best interest of Berwyn.

## LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE BERWYN EVEN STRONGER

**By: Mayor Robert J. Lovero**

I am excited to announce my candidacy for re-election as your Mayor in partnership with experienced elected officials and a group of independent future leaders that will move Berwyn forward by bringing forth innovative ideas and challenging the status quo. The change to independent municipal elections is a unique opportunity for the community to coalesce behind motivated individuals who will bring solutions forward instead of empty divisive rhetoric. Berwyn is a community of economic and ethnic diversity where competing interests are a natural and expected part of local government. Debate is crucial, but our goal is to challenge each other to be better



**Mayor Robert J. Lovero**

leaders. What Berwyn needs for its future is for leaders to put aside spe-

cial interests, personal agendas, and rigid partisan idealism to collectively do what is best for the community. That is precisely the mission of the Berwyn Strong movement and why I partnered with these motivated new leaders.

I urge the community to reflect on why they chose Berwyn as their home and to respect our past as a reminder of what untested and ineffective leadership can do to destroy the neighborhood. The Berwyn we have today came from many years of hard work and I am humbly asking for your support to finish some long-term projects already in motion and then turn the leadership over to the next generation.

We absolutely need to evolve and embrace change to ensure that we

can protect our past achievements and guarantee continued progress. We succeed through transitional leadership from teamwork and planning, not through abrupt change for the sake of change. I am committed to passing along my governance experience to the future leaders of Berwyn Strong who can build off my proven successes and learn from past mistakes to usher the best possible Berwyn into the future.

Together, we have a detailed plan to continue enhancing local public safety, fight oppressive Cook County property tax increases, launch a brand-new grant funded community senior center, and collaborate as a team on innovative concepts that will bridge the transition into the next generation of leadership for Berwyn.

## OUR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

### SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

The key to public safety is a wholistic approach that involves community investment and interactive cooperation with first responders. The focus on continuous training, implementing new technologies, using data driven solutions, and positive relationships with employee unions are just the beginning. The current elected officials on our team helped create a crisis co-responder program where mental health professionals

respond with police or in place of them for mental health emergencies. Mayor Lovero resisted the call to defund the police and kept our community safe even during periods of surging violent crime and civil unrest. At a time when the call to public service is at a multi-generational low, Mayor Lovero's team approved a trailblazing recruitment program that has kept our police and fire departments fully staffed while neighboring communi-

ties are suffering crippling personnel shortages. This is why Berwyn needs elected officials with tested experience, proven solutions, and a core of members that have a record of putting Berwyn's safety first.

### SUPPORTING SENIORS, FAMILIES

The long-time goal of building a senior services center is finally in progress after some covid related setbacks. Competitive bidding has been done and design concepts will soon be released as we move towards the construction phase of the grant funded plan. The new center will offer senior citizens a place of their own that will better meet the needs that have been outlined through community outreach and feedback from participants in the current senior services programs. With seniors in their new space, the currently shared space will be open for more youth programs and other community support.

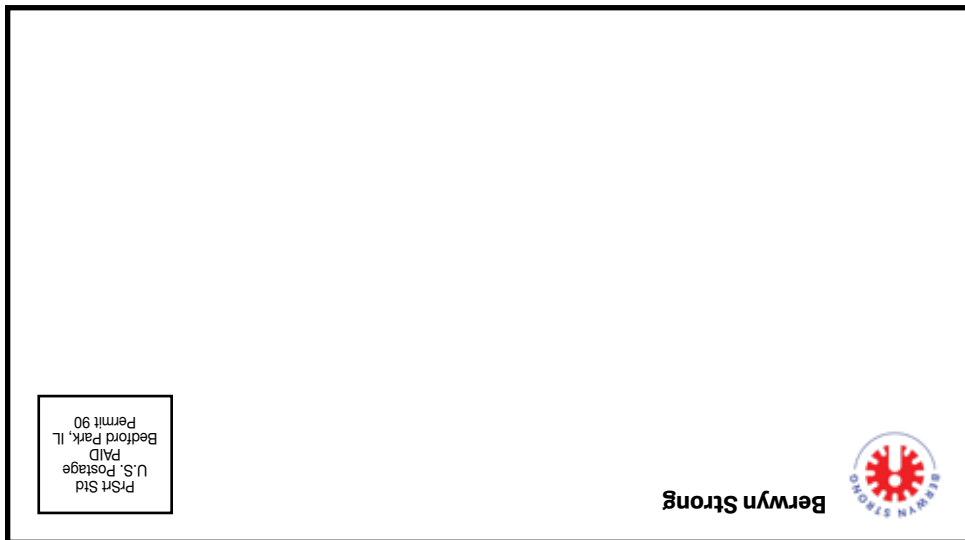
backgrounds who are committed to building a coalition where a system of checks and balances ensures that every voice is heard, and decisions are made with the best interest of the community as the driving factor. Constructive debate on local issues is encouraged in the spirit of true representative democracy so that common solutions can be reached with a teamwork approach.

### SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP

With a base of elected officials who have proven experience and an influx of fresh innovative ideas from energized new professionals, Berwyn's next generation of leaders has a stable foundation to help local government evolve to meet future challenges. There are six (6) dynamic non-incumbents supported by five (5) seasoned veteran officials that comprise a team that is uniquely constructed to offer Berwyn a seamless bridge by mapping past success into future prosperity. We strongly support the belief that transitional leadership is the path to success.

### SHARED GOVERNANCE

We are leaders from diverse personal, professional, and ethnic



Berwyn Strong



# MEET THE REST OF THE BERWYN STRONG TEAM

## JESSICA "AQUINO" RODRIGUEZ CANDIDATE FOR CITY CLERK

Jessica "Aquino" Rodriguez is a dedicated first-time candidate running for City Clerk bringing innovative ideas along with a wealth of experience and a passion for public service. For the past three years, Jessica has served as the Operations Manager for the Berwyn Township Clerk's Office where she has honed her skills in managing public records, providing excellent customer service, and ensuring transparency. She now seeks to utilize her expertise and serve the City of Berwyn, aiming to bring the same energy to the City Clerk's office.

Jessica's is committed to modernizing city record keeping ensuring easy and efficient access to the resources that the community needs. Her proactive approach includes

listening to community concerns and working diligently and assisting residents with the appropriate city services for their needs. Jessica understands that effective communication and responsiveness are key to building trust and serving the community effectively.

Transparency is the cornerstone of Jessica's campaign. As the keeper of records, Jessica will be a watchdog for the people and ensure that good government is the rule rather than the exception. She knows that making city operations more accessible and understandable to the public will keep residents informed and engaged. Jessica believes that transparent government fosters trust and accountability, and she is determined to implement technol-

ogy that enhances openness in all city functions.

Jessica's dedication to her family and community drives her commitment to public service. She understands the importance of a supportive and well-informed constituency and she is passionate about making a positive impact through her role as City Clerk.

Jessica "Aquino" Rodriguez has the experience, dedication, and proactive mindset needed to bring effective transparency and increased public access to city services in Berwyn. As your Clerk, Jessica will ensure that residents voices will be heard, their needs will be addressed, and their city will be open and accessible.



Jessica "Aquino" Rodriguez

## LIZBETH "LIBBY" LINARES-HERRERA CANDIDATE FOR CITY TREASURER

Lizbeth "Libby" Linares-Herrera is a proud first-generation Latina and 30-year Berwyn resident who originated from the Little Village area of Chicago. She holds a B.A. in Finance and Entrepreneurial Business Management from DePaul University and Illinois insurance licenses in casualty, health, and life. Libby also became a Hartford Commercial Lines Coverage Specialist and founded her own successful local insurance and financial services agency that serves over 1600 households in our area. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for

the Berwyn Development Corporation, Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF), and DePaul Alumni Association.

Her passion is protecting families and their financial assets, which motivated her to run for Treasurer. Now, she can use her skills to further serve the community in a new role. Libby is committed to economic development, public engagement to increase financial literacy, and ensuring responsible spending. Her unique background in reviewing reports, understanding the im-

portance of comprehensive plans, conducting due diligence, being transparent, and communicating with the public make her an ideal candidate for Treasurer.

As a wife and mother of three children, Libby is also a devoted advocate for safe neighborhoods. She wants to ensure that Berwyn continues to invest in public safety to protect families, our most precious commodity.

Libby's hobbies include physical fitness and volunteering in various roles at her church.



Lizbeth "Libby" Linares-Herrera

## JAMES S. "SCOTT" LENNON 1ST WARD ALDERMAN

At the age of 19, Lennon had to leave Purdue University to care for his ailing parents—both lost when they were far too young. That same year, he joined Kemper Financial Services, working his way up to Assistant Vice President, where he received the Consistency of Excellence Award. His career has since included facilities management for Pitney Bowes, where he received the All-Star Award, and operations manager at a prestigious law firm. He is now seeking his third term as Alderman of the 2nd Ward.

Alderman Lennon has previously served three terms as Vice President of Berwyn Development Corporation's board of directors. In his first term, he helped create the incredibly effective "Why Berwyn?" marketing campaign, which featured billboards, online promotions, and outreach events across Chicago and resulted in an influx of new residents to the City of Berwyn, homeowners, and businesses. Alderman Lennon

has a complex understanding of the importance of a strong economic engine and his extensive personal networks enable him to drive impactful change.

Alderman Lennon's commitment to public safety is unwavering. He has worked tirelessly to ensure that our neighborhoods are safe and secure by supporting measures that enhance the capabilities and responsiveness of our public safety departments. His vision for the future includes efficient and friendly government services that leverage the latest technology, making interactions with the city seamless and user-friendly for all residents.

Alderman Lennon is a proud member and vocal advocate for the LGBTQ+ community. He is a founding member of the Pride walk and citywide recognition of Pride Month. He believes in equality and inclusion, striving to create a city where everyone feels welcomed and valued. His advocacy extends beyond mere

words. Scott actively participates in various community organizations and events, demonstrating his dedication to making a positive impact. He and Jousef, his partner of 24 years, have always lived in the 1st Ward.

Alderman Lennon's public service record is built on a foundation of experience, community involvement, and a forward-thinking approach. He understands the intricate dynamics of our city and is committed to ensuring its continued growth and success. Scott Alderman Lennon is a leader who embodies the values of our community and is ready to lead us into a brighter future. Alderman Lennon knows there are no easy solutions to complex problems but continues to find practical ways to embrace progress for the ward and the city of Berwyn. Alderman Lennon looks forward to mentoring newer public officials to keep Berwyn moving forward.



James S. "Scott" Lennon

## JAMES A. WOYWOD 2ND WARD ALDERMAN

A Berwyn resident for over 28 years, James Woywod and his wife, Deddra, have been 2nd Ward homeowners for the last 25 years, where they raised their three children.

Throughout his time in Berwyn, Woywod has given back to the children and families of the community through volunteering and service as a previous Berwyn Park District Commissioner. He has been an active member of the J. Sterling Morton High School Booster Club for 11 years, and served six terms as its Vice President. James coached softball for the Berwyn Park District for five years and basketball at the Berwyn Recreation Department for seven. He and his family were active in the Emerson Elementary School PTA for 13 years.

As an incumbent one-term council member, Woywod has a proven re-

cord of addressing the needs of our community with a focus on clean up and beautification efforts, particularly in the Stanley area business corridor. His initiatives have revitalized this vital part of town, making it more attractive and welcoming for residents and businesses alike.

Public safety and community wellness remain at the forefront of Woywod's priorities. He understands the importance of a safe and healthy environment for all citizens and has consistently supported measures to strengthen our public safety departments and promote community mental wellness programs. With a background as a career social worker, Jim has dedicated his life to advocating for mental health. His professional experience gives him a unique perspective on the challenges

many residents face and the solutions needed to support mental well-being in our community.

Woywod envisions a city that values green spaces and youth development, especially on the south end of town. He advocates for the creation and use of more public green spaces, providing families with areas to relax, exercise, and enjoy nature. Additionally, Woywod is enthusiastic about youth development programs that offer opportunities for growth, education, and recreation for our young citizens.

Woywod is a family man, married with two children, who understands the importance of a supportive and nurturing environment. His dedication to his family and community drives his vision for a better future for all residents.



James A. Woywod

## RICHARD E. LEJA 3RD WARD ALDERMAN

Richard Leja is a 43+ year resident of the 3rd ward and has been a tireless representative of the ward during his first term on the city council. As a retired union painter, Alderman Leja has made serving the community his purpose in life and puts in the hard work every day to support his vision. As alderman, he is committed to being your voice and representative, no matter who you are, where you are from, or what you believe. He is always working hard to make Berwyn a welcoming, safe, and desirable place to live.

Public safety and continued public engagement are at the heart of alderman leja's vision. He is currently the chairman of the Fire and Police committee on city council where he remains very involved in making constituents voices a priority and in maintaining safe neighborhoods. Alderman Leja has strong ties and support from the police and fire departments, who recognize his commitment to keeping Berwyn safe.

Alderman Leja is particularly committed to fostering strong relationships with our senior residents, ensuring they feel valued and heard. He is a strong proponent of the proposed senior community center that will greatly enhance our senior services program.

He is an active sponsor of our youth sports programs, attending most games, interacting with parents and families, supplying refreshments at the games and hosting celebrations to honor the players to close out each season.

Alderman Leja is a strong advocate for the use of public green spaces, with a particular emphasis on Proksa Park. He envisions these areas as hubs for green initiatives, promoting environmental sustainability and community well-being. His plans include expanding the use of these spaces for recreational activities, community events, and educational programs benefiting residents of

all ages. This led him to put through a moratorium on building on land less than 30' wide, helping to mitigate flooding in Berwyn.

Richard attends nearly every district 100 school board meeting, visits the schools and attends student functions and activities. This led him to discover we were dangerously low on crossing guards protecting our students. With the Blessing of the mayor and help from the Berwyn Marketing Department, Richard created an initiative to raise awareness of our crossing guards and their diminished numbers while promoting their recruitment. His initiative began early in 2024 and has raised our crossing guard count by over 50% in less than a year.

As your Alderman Richard will continue to be a leader who combines experience, passion, and a genuine dedication to the growth, prosperity and safety of our community.



Richard E. Leja

## ROBERT W. FEJT 4TH WARD ALDERMAN

Robert W. "Bob" Fejt, the senior Alderman, is seeking re-election, bringing his extensive experience and steadfast commitment to the Berwyn community. Known for his dedication to maintaining a clean and safe environment, Bob has been organizing monthly ward clean-up drives for over a decade. He firmly believes that a clean community is a respected community, and a respected community is a safe community. This philosophy drives his efforts to enhance the quality of life for all residents.

Public safety and continued public engagement are central to Bob's platform. He understands the importance of fostering strong relationships between the community and local government, ensuring that

residents' voices are heard, and their needs are met. Bob's direct approach and consistent presence in the community make him a trusted and approachable leader.

Bob is also a strong advocate for the use of public green spaces. He envisions areas like Proksa Park as hubs for green initiatives, promoting environmental sustainability and providing residents with beautiful, functional spaces for recreation and community events. His commitment to preserving and enhancing these green spaces reflects his dedication to improving the community's overall well-being.

During his tenure on the city council, Bob made a point of giving back to the community by financially

supporting programs in other government entities such as the school districts and park districts. He encourages inter-governmental cooperation as a comprehensive approach towards a better Berwyn.

With a distinguished career spanning 30 years at the Berwyn Fire Department, Bob brings a wealth of experience in public safety to his role as Alderman. His background in emergency services has given him a deep understanding of the importance of a secure and responsive community infrastructure. In addition to his public service, Bob is a small business owner, running a successful landscaping business that underscores his commitment to beautifying and maintaining the community.



Robert W. "Bob" Fejt

## DEANNA E. CARBAJAR CANDIDATE FOR 5TH WARD ALDERPERSON

Deanna Carbarjar is a longtime Berwyn resident and proud homeowner who became interested in running for office when she and her neighbors felt unheard from her current Alderman regarding issues impacting the safety of her neighborhood. This led her to seek her own solutions by personally engaging city department heads and other elected officials to get results.

She believes that a commitment to public safety and continuing public engagement are the two important issues that set her apart from her Alderman. She recognizes the importance of creating safe neighborhoods for all residents, particularly the children in the ward. One of her key initiatives is to attract more crossing guards to apply for vacant positions and expand safe passage routes to ensure the safety of children as they travel to and from school. She and her neighbors became involved when an increase of

traffic collisions in a school zone drew their attention, and they sought solutions.

Deanna is committed to working with local and Cook County leaders to improve traffic conditions on Ridgeland Avenue in the vicinity of Havlicek School. Additionally, she plans to collaborate with the public works department to place more public garbage receptacles throughout the ward, as part of a comprehensive plan to fight rats. Deanna is also committed to raising awareness and garnering support for playgrounds and usable recreation spaces, recognizing their importance in fostering community well-being.

Parking regulations and their impact on residents are another priority for Deanna. She intends to bring citizen concerns to the city engineers and work on adjusting regulations where feasible to improve parking accessibility

and convenience.

Deanna is an experienced professional in the hospitality industry who knows that the public demands excellent customer service from both elected officials and career public service professionals that work for the city. She intends to advocate for the implementation of consumer feedback evaluation programs to ensure that citizens who use city services are obtaining the best possible experience from employees.

After getting involved as a volunteer community representative, Deanna joined Sara Barnett Bruckmann and Ruthy Ortega to advance a ballot initiative that would make Berwyn municipal elections non-partisan. Together, they formed the Berwyn First Initiative and successfully drove the binding referendum to an overwhelming passage.



Deanna E. Carbarjar

## THEODORE J. "TEDDY" POLASHEK CANDIDATE FOR 6TH WARD ALDERMAN

Theodore J. "Teddy" Polashek is a lifelong resident of Berwyn, a graduate of its schools, and the first-generation son of immigrants. As a former two-term Alderman, past Mayoral contender, and founder of the Berwyn United Party, Teddy is a constant presence in the community. He is best known for forming his own volunteer "snow patrol" that started out assisting the elderly and mobility-challenged at their homes and later expanded to shoveling every sidewalk in the ward whenever it snowed. He also started a corner beautification program where he used his own funding to landscape the sections of land often neglected at the corners of blocks.

As a career firefighter who worked his way to the rank of Lieutenant, Teddy developed a passion for maintaining public safety. His

professional experience gives him unique insights into the importance of a robust and responsive safety infrastructure that is often neglected in other area communities.

Continued economic development remains one of Teddy's priorities. He is a staunch advocate for the businesses along Cermak Road and the 16th Street corridor and plans to collaborate with stakeholders to bring innovative ideas to life and ensure continued growth and walkable options for residents

Teddy enthusiastically supports a senior and family community center and looks forward to seeing it become a reality. Once built, he plans to concentrate on programming to make sure our seniors are able to enjoy the center.

He is also deeply committed to the youth

of the community and has been a member and coach at Sokol Tabor for his entire life. The concept of Sokol is that its members are family and participation support body, mind, and sense of community. This is where Teddy developed his responsibility to others and drive to constantly volunteer to help those in need.

As President of the Czech American Cultural Center Teddy deeply believes in initiatives that support our diverse cultures and bring communities together through appreciation for art, dance, musical performances, and youth education programs.

When Teddy is not volunteering, he enjoys spending time with his wife and son, little Teddy.



Theodore J. "Teddy" Polashek

## SARA BARNETT BRUCKMANN CANDIDATE FOR 7TH WARD ALDERPERSON

Sara Barnett Bruckmann is a senior government service professional with a bachelor's degree in political science and master's degree in public policy from the prestigious Northwestern University school of professional studies. She has over 20 years of experience in administrative roles overseeing large-scale projects to support government, business, and civic endeavors. Sara served in various roles under Governor Pat Quinn in his executive administration including the Illinois Department of Commerce, Chief of the Illinois State Lottery, and as Assistant Deputy Director for the Illinois Office of Tourism for the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic opportunity.

Sara also led outreach campaigns for significant public/private economic initiatives

and headed an international trade mission highlighting dedication to economic growth and community development. She previously served at Visit Oak Park, where she promoted western Cook County to travelers and gave her firsthand experience in boosting local economic activity. She is currently the Senior Vice President of Operations and Administration of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce.

Having previously worked in Barack Obama's Illinois Senate campaign, Sara also understands the importance of bringing grassroots advocacy to the masses. She again proved herself to be a driving force as a strong advocate for Berwyn's transformation into a non-partisan community. She founded the Berwyn First Initiative where

she partnered with Deanna Carbarjar and Ruthy Ortega to drive the referendum to passage with nearly 75% approval.

Through decades of experience, Sara managed relationships with key stakeholders, navigated legislative initiatives, and received numerous accolades and awards for her work across the spectrum. She wants to leverage her experience and professional network with the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce to drive Berwyn's economic engine, bringing in valuable sales tax dollars to ease property taxes. She also understands that public safety is a critical element for a thriving business community and plans to work closely with city officials to ensure a secure and prosperous environment for all.



Sara Barnett Bruckmann

## RUTH "RUTHY" ORTEGA CANDIDATE FOR 8TH WARD ALDERPERSON

Ruthy Ortega is a long-time Berwyn resident who raised her children in the community as a single parent. She is a 20-year public servant who has served in various administrative and legislative roles in local government. She is currently a records administrator for the Cicero Police Department and previously served in the Building Department and on the Zoning Board of Appeals. Ruthy is also a long-time member of the Latinos of Berwyn and Cicero civic organization with a proven track record of volun-

teering to help members of the community.

She is motivated to run for office due to lack of engagement by the current 8th Ward Alderman. Ruthy is also a strong supporter of safe neighborhoods and disagrees with her Alderman's lackluster support of public safety initiatives. Furthermore, she wants to bring an active voice to the city council along with proposed solutions. She feels the current Alderman resists neighborhood input and often votes against initiatives brought forth by others without ever offering

alternative solutions.

Ruthy believes in constructive debate and dismissing the status quo while embracing new ideas. She partnered with Deanna Carbarjar and Sara Barnett Bruckmann to create the Berwyn First Initiative which advocated for a non-partisan municipal election system in Berwyn. Their efforts helped the binding referendum to an overwhelming passage and is an example of the innovative concepts that are needed to secure Berwyn's future.



Ruth "Ruthy" Ortega