

Rev. Dr. Leslie Frances Smith Belden, Ph.D.
504 E. Lafayette Street
Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701
lesliebeld@aol.com; 479.466.1061

Mayor Lioneld Jordan
Sonia Gutierrez, Ward 1, Position 1
D'Andre Jones, Ward 1, Position 2
Mark Kinion, Ward 2, Position 1
Sloan Scroggin, Ward 3, Position 1
Sarah Bunch, Ward 3, Position 2
Teresa Turk, Ward 4, Position 1
Holly Hertzberg, Ward 4, Position 2

October 30, 2021

Dear Mayor Jordan and Members of the City Council,

I have been asked by friends in the community to prayerfully consider putting my name in consideration to fill the vacancy in Ward 2, Position 2, created by the resignation of Councilman Matthew Petty. I had been thinking of running for the City Council sometime in the future, but believe that now may be the better time for me to offer my service to the City of Fayetteville. I have been serving on the City's Planning Commission for over five years, and my second term of service will expire at the end of March, so perhaps it is time to transition to another form of giving back to the City of Fayetteville.

Serving is what I do. As a pastor and volunteer for many organizations I have been blessed to be able to use my time benefiting my community. I served on the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustments in Jacksonville, Arkansas, prior to moving to Fayetteville, and represented Jacksonville on the Greater Little Rock Metroplan Board. In Fayetteville I have served on the Board of Fayetteville Downtown Partners, which transitioned from the Downtown Dickson Enhancement Project, working toward the improvements made to Dickson Street which the City of Fayetteville continues to benefit from today. I have also served on the City of Fayetteville's Historic District Commission, the Town and Gown Committee, and as previously stated I now sit on the City's Planning Commission.

I think that I am in a unique position to serve due not only to my commitment to service, and my experience with the City, but also to my academic background. My undergraduate degree is in architecture and I have a Ph.D. in Public Policy Planning, both achieved here at the University of Arkansas. Also, although I am not a native of Northwest Arkansas, I am a life-long Arkansan other than a few years away pursuing educational degrees. I not only know the culture of the state but I am very familiar with the other parts of the state, as my position within the Presbyterian Church has allowed me to serve state-wide. I spent five years as a student in Fayetteville in the mid-to-late 1970s, and my family and I moved to Fayetteville permanently in 1995.

My theological training puts the needs of people foremost in my heart and mind, with a specific emphasis on justice and the need for all to be heard. My voice on the Planning Commission has been particularly loud when standing up for citizens' rights as property owners when they have been challenged by our regulations that make it more difficult for those unfamiliar with the legal language of the city's codes. I have also been the Planning Commission's "voice in the wilderness" crying out that all of the children in the city need to have a park within walking distance of their home – particularly in those neighborhoods where most living there are two-income families. My doctoral dissertation for my Ph.D. focused on whose voices are "at the table", and the difficulties within governing bodies for all voices to be heard equally.

I believe that these issues of justice are central to what makes Fayetteville, Arkansas, not only the best place to live in Arkansas, but the best place to live anywhere. One of my projects when working on my Ph.D. was a hard look at the history of the development of downtown, and the role that the University of Arkansas, the business owners, and the City of Fayetteville played through various periods of its history. Another project focused on how the gender of participants and the diversity of governing bodies impacts the decisions that they make. While City Council meetings may be long, the commitment to hearing the voices of any and all who wish to speak is one of the reasons that Fayetteville is such a great place to live.

And yet we have our problems. Housing costs are too high for many of our citizens, and the need for more attainable housing for all remains vital. The City Council's role alongside that of the Planning Commission is more important than ever in this climate following the economic slowdown of COVID-19. Land is cheaper on the edge of our city, and building subdivisions out in a field is much easier than the process of in-fill and the public out-cry against density when it means density in one's own neighborhood. We, those of us in decision-making bodies, have allowed sprawl to occur with its resulting traffic congestion and the danger to motorists and pedestrians alike in too many areas of our city. Fayetteville will continue to grow as we attract more people, and how we choose to grow will impact generations to come.

We have excellent Police and Fire Departments, which require adequate and appropriate funding. The relationship between the City of Fayetteville and the University of Arkansas will remain crucial to the growth and the vitality of the City. My service on the Planning Commission has made me more aware of some of the areas of our City which suffer from flooding, and the need for the City to assist with improvements where new development will not be occurring to cover those costs. As the City of Fayetteville continues to grow the challenges will increase. But the resources to meet those challenges will expand as well.

I am attaching my resume to this letter of interest. However you choose to fill the unexpired term of Councilman Matthew Petty I will remain committed to serving our City as my gifts and talents are needed.

Sincerely,

