

# **NEWS RELEASE**

## ***For Immediate Release***

### **For More Info Contact:**

Leslie Belden  
Email: [lesliebeld@aol.com](mailto:lesliebeld@aol.com)  
Phone: 479.466.1061

**Please see attached for supportive image**

## **Leslie Belden Announces Candidacy for Fayetteville City Council Ward 2 Vacancy *Special Election Set for February 8, 2022***

**FAYETTEVILLE, ARK. (November 12, 2021)** — Leslie Belden, current Fayetteville Planning Commissioner and active community volunteer, is pleased to announce her candidacy for the recently vacated Ward 2, Position 2 seat on the Fayetteville City Council. Belden's second term on the Planning Commission will expire in March of 2022 and she was already considering expanding her service to the City at that point, but with the resignation of Alderman Matthew Petty she has had members of the community approach her and ask her to run now. Belden plans to file the required papers to formally run in the coming week – and is pleased to also announce Lowell Grisham of Fayetteville will serve as her campaign committee Chair, and Stuart Walker as Treasurer.

"My life is dedicated to service," Leslie recently explained, "and to the ways my gifts and talents may be used to benefit my community I feel so committed to serve." While Belden acknowledges that her background in architecture and community planning lent themselves to her gravitation toward service on the Planning Commission, she says that her interests go beyond the built community in Fayetteville.

Belden explains, "As a pastor I am aware of the needs of the citizens of Fayetteville as people who experience our city in vastly different ways and hold a variety of perspectives, as well as a diversity of opinions. I believe that our city must balance our desire to attract entrepreneurs, businesses and industries who add positively to our economy, with our commitment to the environment and providing attainable housing for all who live in Fayetteville. That means that our city government must work hand-in-hand with the University of Arkansas, the Chamber of Commerce, the Fayetteville Public Schools, the Northwest Arkansas Council, and the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Association, among other stakeholders, so that together we can ensure that Fayetteville will continue to be one of the best small cities in the nation in which to live for generations to come."

And, Belden has the experience and expertise to encourage the City Council to engage in such cooperative conversations. Leslie has served on the City of Fayetteville's Historic District Commission as well as its Town and Gown Committee, and was on the Board of Fayetteville Downtown Partners, formerly the Downtown Dickson Enhancement District, which worked alongside the City of Fayetteville in achieving improvements to Dickson Street. Leslie earned her Ph.D. in Public Policy Planning, illustrating her commitment to the process of governance as well as her knowledge of the importance of working across agencies and organizations to achieve mutual goals.

But serving the people of her community and dedicating her life to, in her words, "making the world a better place," is her life's work. Leslie is a pastor in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and has spent more years as a volunteer in service as a pastor than in a paid position. She has served on the Board of Butterfield Trail Village, on the Board and as President of the University of Arkansas' Women's Giving Circle, on the Board of the Washington County Historical Society, on the Board of the Arkansas Humanities Council, on the Board of the University of Arkansas' Alumni Association, on the Board of the Washington County League of Women Voters, and on the University of Arkansas and Fay Jones School of Architecture's past two development campaigns as well as the Fay Jones School of Architecture's Dean's Circle. Leslie's service to the University

of Arkansas, as well as that of her husband Ted, led to them being awarded the 2021 Anthony J. Lucas Award for service to the University of Arkansas.

Leslie Belden earned her Bachelor of Architecture and Ph.D. in Public Policy from the University of Arkansas, and her Master of Divinity and Doctorate of Ministry from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Leslie and her family moved to Fayetteville in 1995, and she and her husband, Ted, have spent the last 20 years investing their time and resources into the revitalization of underutilized places and spaces in Fayetteville to rejuvenate parts of our city as well as its economy. The Beldens were partners in the renovation of Carnall Hall on the University of Arkansas campus, and the UARK Ballroom on Dickson Street, the transformation of the old St. Joseph Catholic Church campus into condominiums and apartments, the renovation of the Fulbright Public Library into an office complex, and many other projects in downtown Fayetteville, as well as working with the owners of an apartment and mobile home park off North Leverett to improve affordable housing options.

Leslie sees the City Council's commitment to the Cultural Arts Corridor as the next big step toward Fayetteville's future. "Fayetteville has historically served as Northwest Arkansas' hub for music, entertainment, and the visual arts. Now our sister communities are adding their contributions to the mix, and it was time for the City of Fayetteville to do our part alongside the business community, the University, and the Walton Arts Center, TheatreSquared, and other non-profit organizations for the arts. Never before in our history has the City of Fayetteville invested in the infrastructure of our city to the degree that we are currently doing, and I believe that it's an investment that will more than pay off."

Belden also believes that allowing restaurants to have sidewalk seating during COVID-19 was a good move, and a change that the City should continue. Supporting small businesses with policies that encourage creativity and energy is something that Belden asserts must continue for Fayetteville to retain its reputation as an entertainment destination. "The City Council's response to COVID-19 is to be commended, and should position us well as we move toward a 'new normal'."

Other issues that Belden champions include neighborhood parks within walking distance of every resident, balancing the need for attainable housing with the City's commitment to smart growth and discouraging urban sprawl and traffic congestion, and transforming the congested commercial strip-centered corridors of College Avenue, MLK, and Wedington into safer, more pedestrian and auto-friendly avenues.

She also believes that the City Council can do more to support our law enforcement and fire personnel, and the good work accomplished in our city to address discrimination. "The City of Fayetteville has historically been a positive example of anti-racism in our state, and as the division in our nation has become so evident I have been proud that I live in a community in which those who differ can address those differences in honest and open discourse," Leslie stated. "But we must not fool ourselves into believing that there is not more improvement needed."

Belden believes that flooding and water run-off are problems in the city that the City of Fayetteville can do more to address. "Developers address problems associated with flooding and water run-off when an area of our community is developed or redeveloped, but there are areas in Fayetteville that will not be redeveloped on a scale for problems to be addressed. That's where, and when, the City itself must fill in the gaps," Belden said.

"I welcome the opportunity to expand my service to the City of Fayetteville, the City Council and the people of Ward 2," Belden reiterated. "It's time to go 'all in' for my adopted hometown. I've lived in communities across our state and believe that everyone wishes they could live in Fayetteville. I've now lived here for the majority of my life, and I feel it's my responsibility to do what I can for those of us blessed to call it our home."

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