

Personal Statement for reappointment to City Planning Commission

When I received the call from the Mayor's office 8 years ago asking if I would be interested in serving on the City Plan Commission I was caught by surprise. I was just settling in to the fact that I was not going to be reappointed to the newly reformed Civilian Review Board where I had served until it was ordered to 'cease activities' while being revamped along with the Charter. I hadn't considered serving on any other board. I asked who submitted my name for consideration and was advised it was Karyn Gilvarg, then Director of City Plan. I reached out to her to ask 'why me?' and she returned my call while she was on vacation in New Orleans! She said she thought I would serve the commission well because of what she viewed in my civic/municipal involvement (participation, completion and certification in CERT training, Citizens Academy, Democracy School; attendance to community management teams meetings, BZA, CPC and BOA, participation in public hearings; community workshops and forums; coordination of block watch, community garden, neighborhood beautification activities ...), and thus would serve the City of New Haven well. She also advised that there was significant development of downtown New Haven that was coming down the pipe that would impact the neighboring Hill community, and as active committed resident, having a seat at this table would be crucial to a very underrepresented marginalized community. I thanked her for her consideration and asked for a few days to think about it. During those few days, I spoke with other seated commissions for their guidance and thoughts, All them assured me that I need not be overly concerned about my lack of technical experience ... that I brought something unique to the board just as each of them had. The technical aspects could be learned; policy & procedure could be learned; rules and ordinances could be learned. But being activity engaged and involved in my community and having a pulse for the community was an innate passion that I had demonstrated that would be a valuable asset to the Commission. I said yes.

The first few years of my term, I spent listening more and speaking less than I had ever done in my entire life. But I was excited and honored to be serving in such a capacity. And that is how I view it ... not sitting in a seat on a board, but serving in a capacity to the future development of this city ... whether it was the feasibility of having a convenience store on a corner, considering the allowance of a homeowner to add a driveway to their home, or the building of a multi-million dollar bio-complex in the middle of the Route 34 connector!!!! I mean, only 5 years prior I have bought my first home ever and here I was weighing in on a \$100 million development in downtown New Haven. And I had to remember that there was no such thing as a dumb question ... actually the only dumb question was the one not asked. And I remember putting a temporary halt to the passing of the Yale OPP (Overall Parking Plan) because (1) I didn't know what the acronym OPP that was being passed around meant, and (2) I didn't feel comfortable casting an affirmative vote to pass a plan I had never seen! And my stand convinced my fellow commissioners to also pause on a plan that most had never read ... just took for granted. I take my service on the CPC very seriously, pouring over reports well in advance, researching physical locations of site plan applications & proposed developments, studying maps, looking up unfamiliar terminology, familiarizing myself with the history of the neighborhoods of these applications & proposed developments.

CPC is where I have been prepared and groomed to serve. And I am consumed and committed to this commission ... something I would hope all who serve would be! While other boards meet quarterly or monthly, City Plan has often met twice monthly, and we have seen more than our fair share of 6 hour meetings! I believe in my 8 years I might have only missed 1 meeting.

During the last several years, there has been a plea for residents to become familiar with and to join the Boards and Commissions of the city to help build and guide a better City. The Mayor has asked that residents come forward and join the process ... to become involved, make a difference. I've done just that. I have committed many voluntarily hours not just with the CPC but for the last decade I have worked diligently to be a part of 'the process' ... not for self aggrandizement, but because I knew that to whom much is given, much is required. And I have much to give to this City and its residents, across all age, race, economic and academic backgrounds. I began this journey when I was a pregnant 15 year old who had to make a choice about keeping and raising her child or continuing to pursue my young academic dreams of going to MIT to be a cytotechnologist and finding a cure for cancer. Yes ... at that early age I thought that I could save the world. And even tho I changed directions and the path I took, I never changed my course. I realized I couldn't save the world but I could change the world ... not in bug steps, but with small incremental changes starting with me. I was 15 years old and joined a program called Teen Leadership Institute (TLI) that came to New Haven in the early 70's and was overseen by the Training and Research Institute for Residential Youth Center (TRY-RYC). This program focused on providing teens identified as 'leaders' but teachers, counselors and adult supervisors with training in personal and organizational development, human interaction and behavioral science to become peer mentors and mediators. That is where I got my start, where the seed was planted. And it took over 45 years for the harvest. I am in my season ... which includes continuing with my community and civic involvement, from establishing and supporting community gardens & greenspaces (Truman Street Community Garden & Greenspace, New Haven Farms-Career HS/Hill Site, Gather New Haven Hill District Garden Coordinator), to serving on non-profit boards (Neighborhood Housing Services of New Haven, Urban Resources Initiative), community groups (Hill North & Hill South CMTs, COMPASS Community Advisory Board, and municipal commissions (Civilian Review Board and City Planning Commission). I have the honor and privilege of doing work that influences and impact the lives of this city's residents ... particularly being a voice for those whose voices are not heard. And I am not arrogant but confident in saying New Haven is reaping the harvest!!!

I was asked to serve on CPC and I agreed. And you saw fit to reappoint me in 2018. I am asking that I be allowed to continue with the assignment that was granted for a final term. I will not be as effective in my service or leadership on any other board or commission at this time. Could I get there? Absolutely. But another board is not where I am meant to be at this time. Of that I am certain. I am certain that my fellow commissioners if asked will agree with me ... even if we don't always agree on decisions. I am certain that if asked, City Plan staff will agree with me ... even if we don't always agree on their recommendations. If asked, I am certain that many members of the BOA will agree that my service is more needed on CPC at this time. And if you look specifically at the Hill-Downtown connection with an eye on the future, I am certain that most will agree that this commission is where I will serve the best, sitting at the table as a true resident representative of the Hill. I am asking that you officially appoint me to serve a final term of 4 years to end in 2026 or until such time thereafter that when my seat is needed for the appointment of another. I am asking for that consideration as a resident who has demonstrated her commitment to serving this community of citizens, and as someone you can trust to continue to serve with honesty, integrity, transparency and commitment ... to service.

Leslie Radcliffe
20 King Place
New Haven, CT 06519