

# Rebecca Parr for City Council

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My name is Rebecca Parr and I have been a resident of South Knoxville for over 30 years. I purchased my home in the Vestal community in 2006 and never considered purchase outside of South Knoxville. I have known for a long time that this is where I belong. I live with my great nephew Wyatt, who will be entering kindergarten in the fall. My niece and her baby live in my basement apartment, because I believe family is the most important treasure we have and loving support is the greatest gift we have to give.

My career has been in opera and theatre production. I worked 19 years as a stage manager with Knoxville Opera, and have worked the last 11 years as the production manager for UT School of Music Opera Theatre. Before I made the decision to be the primary custodial parent of my nephew and best friend Wyatt, I was a member of our local stagehand union, IATSE 197.

I serve on the board of Community Action Committee as a representative for the Head Start Policy Council (Chairperson), and am in the 2017 CAC Community Leadership class. I also serve on the board of Marble City Opera, and in the past have served on the board of Dismas House, Community Shares as a representative of Save Our Cumberland Mountains, and the Flenniken Landing Liaison Committee.

As a Garma , a great aunt Rebecca ma, I find many ways and reasons to explore and be involved in our community, including educational field trips to Fort Dickerson, outdoor adventures at Ijams Nature Center, parent meetings at Anderson Head Start, playgroups with various families at a variety of our neighborhood parks, visits to our County Sheriff's at Island Home Airport to sit in the helicopters and collect our badges and always, always the sense that this is our world and these paths all lead to our home. All the hellos in the grocery store with the other familiar faces spending their WIC to feed their babies and rushing to prepare the meal after long days of working, or study, just making the ends meet, to bring it all back to family and ways to enrich the next generation – and I am reminded we are not alone. We share the same struggles, dreams, values, and home.

I see the nameless voiceless faces sometimes in their tatters huddled on the sidewalk or when it is too cold, sitting invisibly, inside the market, and I offer a blanket, a plate of food a couple dollars and I know that this isn't the solution. So I ask the names, and sit to listen, and still I try to seek them out and then when I can no longer find them, I wonder where they have gone. Does anyone know what became of Tory? If you ever shopped the Kroger or walked the track at Sam Duff Park you had to have seen her. I persisted long enough to learn that she really did have a voice for anyone who made the time to listen. She rolled her cigarettes with her tobacco stained hands, and slept under the shelter of the old Big Lots storefront. What could I have done to help her more?

I laugh and talk with the generational families who are raising their grandchildren and living the heartache of the losses dealt from the opioid epidemic that has plagued so many in our neighborhoods, and I ask them what they are feeling and I hear hopelessness when I ask do you vote and what do you think of the riverside development, and I hear "can we get a water park", and "no I don't vote because what is the point?" I see how it hurts when my friend Sue has to tell her granddaughter, that they can't afford the Boys and Girls Club anymore, so there will be no swim team this summer. We families find each other and build our strength in community and commonality, and I know that it is important that they understand the value of their voice in this community, and how can I impart to them that importance?

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When I was a young woman of 19 I held a summer position as Youth Director for the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Association. At that time the neighborhood was mostly multi unit rentals, where individuals and families could afford to live. That summer I helped to feed many children through the CAC summer lunch program, brought in nutritionists from UT to educate, helped start a community garden and helped to generate many smiles with field trips to Silver Dollar City, and nature excursions at Ijams Nature Center. Over years of time that neighborhood has been reclaimed in its historical beauty, but I often wonder what became of the families I met and the young people that helped plow the garden and tend to the weeds? What became of the ancient faces that were layered in those antique efficiencies? The values of those homes are now more than tripled, and the grandeur is splendid but what has become of those people, those families, and those faces?

As we invest in our neighborhoods for improvement and increased revenues are we able to consider what becomes of the generational and often marginal families, and how can we include them in our cities progress without forcing them out or to be another homeless statistic? How do we remember to listen to the voices that get left out of the new language that has a way of taking over the landscape and the conversation? How do we go into the places where there becomes no place of belonging if we lose affordable housing, and find our populations become segregated in pockets, that all too often become smaller, silenced and again invisible? How can we help families to keep their homes or afford to maintain the increased higher costs from utilities and taxes, without increase in wages to match? How do you convince people to not feel helpless when they are not even invited to the conversation? The language is unfamiliar to them, in phrases like 'urban wilderness' when what we really are saying is the woods that these families grew up playing in and the 'greenways' that are really just the trails they walked on or where they made make believe worlds with their neighborhood friends. How do we remember to be inclusive in this landscape when we have left folks behind already with the language?

When I consider what has compelled me to run for City Council and to use my strong voice of leadership that primarily up to now has been a power in the arts community of our city, I have to take it back to family and my experience with Wyatt. Having him in my world has opened my life to a larger world of South Knoxville families, and to learn that no matter our diversity of color, ethnicity, preferences both personal and political, we are all striving for a quality of life and a comfort of security for the next generations. I want to represent all of our community constituents, but feel strongly that I can reach out to be a better listener for those who do not already have a voice in our decisions and map-work for the future. I want to know that I am representing everyone and not just those who already are sitting at the table.

I hope you will strongly consider some of the things I say whether or not you support me as a candidate for our district and city. I believe we can have growth and development AND still remain a place that families of all walks can continue to survive and even thrive. I thank you also for your attention.