

Barbara Hall – Mayor of All the People

Yes, we are indeed going through some challenging times as a city, and a civic corporation right now, but one thing that we all know – whether we are from the downtown area, or from North York, from Scarborough, East York, or Etobicoke – one thing that we all aspire for, is a mayor that we can be proud of ...

Barbara Hall was such a mayor. A Mayor of Toronto that we were and still are proud of !

A smart, intelligent, and forward looking mayor, who governed with grace, style, dignity and caring. A mayor with a track record of involvement with the community and inclusion for all parts of the city.

And as we know all too well, actions speak louder than words, because they are a reflection of priorities, beliefs, and values. Most Torontonians would not know that in late 1994, one of the very first things Barbara Hall did after just having been elected mayor and even prior to being sworn in, was to organize a major rally on behalf of a foreign political leader being held under house arrest. It was for a woman who had won 81% of the seats in her nation's Parliament and poised to become its Prime Minister, yet who was being held captive. That leader was Burmese political leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Barbara's efforts were a full 16 years prior to her release from captivity in 2010.

Some background Barbara Hall. The person, the neighbour, friend, community leader, and mayor.

She was raised in Ottawa, Victoria, and Halifax, and London England, the daughter of a Canadian naval officer father who was also dedicated supporter of the arts, and her mother, a committed social worker. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Sociology from the University of Victoria, and later attended law school as mature student.

Barbara served as a front line worker with the Elizabeth Fry Society and the Central "YWCA", and as a street worker with Central Neighbourhood House working with poor, low income, and marginalized youth. She was a co-founder of the Point Blank Alternative school, as well as volunteering with the iconic Company of Young Canadians, working in Three Mile Plains, a poor rural black community in Nova Scotia.

Barbara worked as a youth probation officer in Cleveland where she first got involved in politics as a member of the Presidential campaign of then U.S. Democratic Senator, George McGovern. She returned to Canada and studied law at Osgoode Hall Law School of York University, and in 1980, was admitted to the Law Society of Upper Canada. She opened a law practice in Cabbagetown, specializing in family law, housing and tenant issues, and human rights. She served as a member of the City of Toronto's Planning Board and was a mover behind the revitalization of *Seven News*, then Toronto's oldest community newspaper. She taught at the Bar Admission Course, and also in the workplace with Community Legal Education Ontario, and with Labour Community Services.

In 1985 Barbara ran for the Ontario Legislature, on a platform of quality daycare, better transit, the independent civilian review of policing, safer workplaces, tenant protection, re-training programs for workers whose jobs had disappeared, and for housing that was both decent and affordable. And in what is truly a sign of respect in politics, when she later ran for the mayoralty, Ian Scott the MPP who had been her opponent in that race, was a strong supporter.

From 1985 - 1994, Barbara served as councillor for the former Ward 7, which took in Cabbagetown, St Jamestown, Regent Park, and Corktown. On Council she would go on to serve as Budget Chief, keeping tax increases at or below the rate of inflation, and she also chaired the City's Land Use Committee. She oversaw a streamlining of development approvals, and was instrumental in the approval process for the new Metro Convention Centre.

She also led initiatives on homelessness, working with housing advocates for supportive and affordable housing, and housing for AIDS patients. It was also the time when the very first public health budgets for AIDS were being put forward. As an active member of the Board of Health Barbara championed those efforts, and helped to confront fear and misunderstanding in the community head on.

A committed and long-time friend of downtown neighbourhoods, and the Church-Wellesley community, Barbara was also a public, visible, and committed champion of human rights at a time when rights were being seriously trampled. She forged a close relationship with the then emerging gay and lesbian community and worked with a group of criminal defence lawyers to found the Right to Privacy Committee following the bath house raids on 1981 – the largest police round up of Canadian citizens since the War Measures Act, and second largest since the Second World War. She emerged as strong defender of basic human rights at a time when people could be fired from their job or refused employment or accommodation simply for being gay.

As chair of the Safe City Committee, Barbara put the issue of violence against women on the political agenda of municipal governments across Canada, and on the national political agenda for the first time. She also led environmental efforts to bring back the Don River, served as a director of the Toronto Arts Council, as a director of Cityhome – the municipal non-profit housing corporation, and as a member of the board of Harbourfront, the Design Exchange, and former Wellesley Hospital.

In November 1994 in a hard fought three way race, she was elected Mayor of Toronto, becoming the city's 61st Chief Magistrate. As Mayor of Toronto she pulled together a divided council and showed inclusion, appointing someone from the opposite side of the political spectrum to be her Budget Chief. She streamlined city bureaucracy, making the city government more efficient, and held the line on taxes for five ... yes five ... years. She worked to reduce city CO2 emissions, and to sell Toronto's knowledge, expertise, and products around the world.

Barbara fought the worst excesses of the Harris era municipal downloading and cuts, while keeping a steady hand on the City budget. She also became the first big-city mayor in Canada to actually march in a Gay Pride parade.

She led a major urban renaissance, with construction of the Air Canada Centre, the development of the multi-billion dollar railways lands (approved unanimously by City Council). And with former Chief Planner Paul Bedford she championed a major downtown revitalization called "The Kings." It transformed bleak areas of once grubby warehouses, boarded up buildings, vacant parking lots and industrial sites, into what are today thriving, revitalized, dynamic, and liveable mixed-used neighbourhoods, from the King-Parliament, to the King-Spadina neighbourhoods.

A recent study prepared by the Altus Group estimates that 38,000 jobs, and over \$7 billion in economic activity has been generated by the Kings' initiative. Along an east-west King Street corridor. from the Don River to west of Bathurst Street, the results are borne out in fact: the number of occupied dwelling units has gone from 9,600 units in 1996 to 35,780 in 2011, and is still growing! The population of the area has almost tripled – from 19,340 in 1996 to 57,865 today.

From 1998 to 2002 Barbara headed the federal government's National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention, and served as a member of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police Crime Prevention Committee. She also served as a member of the Ontario Health Ministry's Health Results Team, and lectured nationally and internationally on urban and social issues.

In November 2005, and with a strong record of bringing diverse groups together to build safe and strong communities, Barbara was appointed Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, a position she now holds. Earlier this year, Barbara announced her retirement from the post this coming October.

For all her life, and indeed throughout her career in elected office and within government, Barbara Hall has demonstrated a deep commitment to individuals, to communities, and to issues of equality, fairness, and social justice.

Think of that, for a moment, and contrast it to our present situation.

As Mayor of Toronto, Barbara Hall governed with grace, sensitivity, inclusion, and an appeal to the very best in people.

She brought diverse parties to the table, treated people with respect, and listened to their hopes and aspirations.

She was a thoughtful, honest, and accessible mayor, who acted with intelligence, commitment, dedication, and positive energy ... who thought before she spoke, and who believed in strong institutions.

Yes, a mayor for all the people, and mayor to be proud of.