

Phyllis McQuaid St. Louis Park mayor, state senator

From City Hall to Legislature, she strove to include everyone

By JOSIE ALBERTSON-GROVE • josie.grove@startribune.com



As St. Louis Park's first female mayor and a two-term state senator, Phyllis McQuaid developed a reputation for a political style focused on building community.

One of McQuaid's successors as St. Louis Park mayor, Jeff Jacobs, said McQuaid was part of setting the tone in the city that has become known for its often-progressive way, with

an approach to governing that strives to include everyone.

"Give me an entire Legislature full of Phyllis McQuaids and we could solve any problem on Earth," Jacobs said. "It's just a shame we don't have more politicians like her."

McQuaid died June 7. She was 95.

Daughters Meredith McQuaid and Joanie Hinderaker said their mother didn't think of herself as a politician at all. Her political career began only after raising her eight children as a stay-at-home mother and active member of parent-teacher associations.

"She often said raising eight children was the best training for politics," Meredith McQuaid said. "Because you have to help people get along."

Phyllis McQuaid decided to run for school board in 1974 to oppose school closings. Meredith McQuaid said her mother valued the neighborhood school as a community gathering place, even though most of her own children attended Catholic school. She won her first race and launched a 15-year career in politics.

McQuaid decided to run for mayor in 1979 after she learned another local politician would be running unopposed. Though she did not differ much on policy with her opponent, Meredith McQuaid said, her hyper-personable style won the day.

Phyllis McQuaid told St. Louis Park Magazine in 2013 that most people thought the city was ready for a woman to be mayor.

"Others thought it was a joke, that a woman had no chance of winning," she said. "But I did win and I felt lucky to have that school board experience and the support of a great city staff."

She won re-election in 1981 before running for state Senate in 1982. McQuaid served two terms in the Senate, losing her third election to Ted Mondale in 1990.

McQuaid spent her career pushing for things she thought would improve quality of life, Meredith McQuaid said, including well-funded schools, recycling pickup and public transit — all based on a drive to build community.

She did not run for office again but stayed involved, informally advising other mayors in St. Louis Park and advocating for projects like the light rail system. She rode the Blue Line the day it opened in 2004 and attended the Southwest light rail groundbreaking in 2018.

"I am 90 years old so probably won't ever ride it but just watching it being built is going to be great!" she said.

She was an active part of every community where she found herself, Meredith McQuaid said, including on the board of the condo where she moved after leaving her St. Louis Park house, forever starting clubs and chatting with neighbors.

"Every time you turned around she was on another committee," Hinderaker said. "I don't know when this woman slept."

A genuine love for people informed McQuaid's approach to politics as much as life, Jacobs said.

"Government tends to view people as an annoyance or a speed bump to go over to get what they want," Jacobs said, but McQuaid wanted to engage. Her approach left a mark on St. Louis Park, he said, in her politics and her founding of the annual city festival now called Parktacular.

"She could not help herself," Meredith McQuaid said, "but create opportunities for people to be together."

Services will be held July 14 at St. Gabriel the Archangel in Hopkins.

Josie Albertson-Grove • 612-673-4391

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Daughter Meredith McQuaid



Phyllis McQuaid in 1979.

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