

Torrey starts second term, confronts issues first hand

■ He wants to improve police/student relations, revitalize downtown and see new fire/police stations

By Christena Hansen
for the Emerald

This year's election cycle seems to have hardly fazed Eugene Mayor Jim Torrey.

Re-elected to serve a second four-year term by 69 percent of voters, Torrey is busy whittling away at his municipal wish list for expanded youth programs, a revitalized downtown and a slimmed-down City Hall renovation project.

And regarding the University area, where recent protests have put relations between police and students in the spotlight, Torrey said he is putting his confidence in the efforts of the newly formed Eugene Police Commission to improve the situation. Established last December, the commission is made up of 12 members, including one University student, and was created to allow a forum for the police department's broad policies to be evaluated, Torrey said.

"I spent more time making sure it was a broad-based committee than any other set of recommendations that I have made to the City Council," Torrey said. "We have people from all spectrums of our community. They're looking at the policies that the police department use in responding to protests, the loud parties and things of that nature. They're running it through that filter, and it's very helpful."

Torrey said he has little patience for out-of-the-ordinary protests and parties on campus or elsewhere in Eugene that end up costing tax payers large amounts of money. As a result, he said he supports — in concept — the police department's proposal to charge renters a fee for multiple police visits within a 90-day period.

"I would be inclined to find some level of penalty for multiple abusers," he said. "If we're having to send police officers weekend after weekend after weekend to the same location, then there needs to be a response."

The police department's proposal, introduced to the commission last month, has come under fire from some University students who worry that the 90-day window is too long, allowing a renter to be fined for activities of a former renter. Other students

have complained to Torrey that the threat of fines would keep students from calling police in the case of an emergency, he said.

But Torrey said he thinks the proposal could be modified to penalize only those responsible for overuse of police resources and feels confident that students in need of emergency services would not avoid calling police, fire or medical services.

Torrey said his frustration comes, in part, from working to secure money for new projects — including his desire to offer after-school activities to children and youth — only to watch funds drain away in police-related expenses.

The protest over Pennsylvania death row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal on April 3 "was a \$29,000 expenditure," he said. "We just turned down numerous people at our budget committee process for programs in the range of \$29,000 to \$30,000 because we didn't have the money."

During his first term as mayor, Torrey made little progress toward providing city funds for "Lighted Schools," a program that he envisions paying community members, including senior citizens, college students and high school students, to mentor and teach younger children after school hours and on weekends.

It's an effort that he promises to throw his heart and soul into during his second term. Already, he said he is mulling over the idea of proposing to the City Council a five-year serial levy or a 5 percent surcharge on admission to theaters, movies or other shows to pay for the program.

"We have a really great recreation sports program in Eugene: Kidsports," he said. "It's as good as any in the country. But what we don't have right now is accessibility to safe places and positive activities after school. My goal would be to have [the program] from the time school gets out until 7 p.m. at night."

Torrey's interest in children's reading programs — a trademark of his first term in office — is also likely to continue. As the vice chairman of Oregon's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, Torrey's goal last term to read a book to every elementary class in Eugene had a deep connection to his philosophy that childhood reading problems are strongly associated with juvenile crime.

During his first term, Torrey persuaded state lawmakers to put \$250,000 toward the Bethel Reading Readiness Program, developed by University education professors Deb Simmons, Ed Kameenui and Roland Good to help students be proficient readers by the time they reach third grade.

To Torrey's satisfaction, the

program's two-year report presented Tuesday night showed that the number of non-readers in Bethel's first-grade classes dropped from 15 percent to 6 percent, Simmons said.

Also at the top of Torrey's agenda for his second term is his desire to "bring vitality to the downtown area," a part of Eugene that he sees as somewhat strangled by one-way streets and the section of the downtown mall that is blocked off to vehicles.

Although on May 16 voters turned down the ballot measure aimed at building new police and fire stations, Torrey hasn't given up the idea of presenting a more modest proposal to voters

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Jim Torrey
mayor

that he said would trim at least \$8 million off the original police plan alone. He favors the construction of an additional 90,000 square-foot building on the parking lot south of City Hall and a strengthening of the current building.

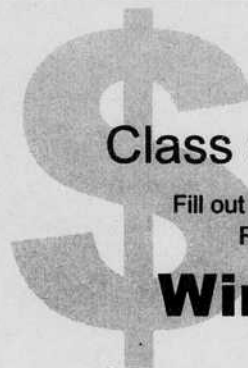
"Anytime we lose an election, I don't want to just throw the same thing back in front of the people — I don't believe in doing that," he said. "But we have to find a safe place for our police officers to work. I'm not positive that I'm going to get everything I want, but I'm going to fight real hard for it."

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