

Exit interview: Amanda Fritz

After 12 years on Portland City Council, Amanda Fritz leaves office Jan. 1. Fritz is a former psychiatric nurse and member of Oregon Nurses Association, and her late husband was the president of his AFSCME union local at the Oregon State Hospital. Labor Press reporter Don McIntosh spoke with her by phone Dec. 14.

What are you most proud of in your 12 years at City Hall? With respect to union issues, working with UFCW and others on paid sick time. *[Fritz led passage of a pioneering city sick leave ordinance in 2013.]* That changed state law, and hopefully will change national law as well. **You're the first to have been elected under a system of public campaign finance. A new system known as Open and Accountable Elections is now in place, and you were the lead in bringing that about. A system that matches donors six to one, it had its first use this year. Do you think it changed the way this year's elections went?** We just did a preliminary report on it last week at City Council. It was spectacularly successful in improving the diversity of candidates who were able to run, improving the representation on the council, and empowering the people of

Portland to have a meaningful impact on the election via their small donations. So 55% of the people who donated in this cycle had never donated to a city campaign before. I know that unions were concerned that there'd be a loss of influence without PAC *[political action committee]* money. As it turned out, unions do things other than raising money and donating. They do organizing. They provide endorsements. They help candidates get their message out. So unions still had a huge impact, only it was with their time and talent, rather than with their money (except when members donated).

How would you describe your relationship with City employee unions over the years? Really good. I've had a primary labor liaison, Tim Crail, for the entire 12 years. Union leaders know that my door is always open. I'm always very clear that during bargaining times I've got to stay in my lane and they stay in theirs. They still are welcome to come talk to me and I will listen to whatever they want to tell me. I worked really closely with Laborers Local 483, particularly as we were looking at bringing on more *[Parks and Rec]* workers who had previously been temporary. We did that very collaboratively and it was very successful.

Those permatemps were lifted up, and became union members with



benefits. At the time there was an estimate that it would add \$4 million or more in annual expenses to Parks. Within a few years, City Council was looking at cuts at community centers. I would certainly not say that it was because we did justice for the seasonal workers. There's been a structural problem in how parks are funded for many years. You can't raise the fees in community centers to cover the costs and still keep things affordable for people who want to use them. You can't balance the budget based just on user fees. That's why we passed the levy. And that's why we're going to continue to look at true sustainability for Parks, which probably is going to involve a new revenue source that doesn't depend on property taxes or the general fund.

Sometimes there may be an expectation that a city commissioner, if they're a union ally, will intervene in bargaining, to establish a more harmonious relationship or restrain the instincts of HR and the attorneys office. Is that an unfair expectation? Did you ever end up intervening when you felt that what city negotiators were asking for was not fair? I worked really hard to make the lines clear and to stay in my lane. As far as intervening behind the scenes with HR, that would be inappropriate for a city commissioner to do. It's important that the bargaining happen at the bargaining table so that everybody present knows that they are the ones who are authorized to make the decisions.

Over the years, you were a dissenter on a lot of votes. Looking back, what's the worst thing City Council did, something that you opposed but lost out on? The most recent was the residential infill project. We all agree on the goals, but the way it was done—without regard for climate change, without regard for livability, really throwing out a lot of the planning that we've done for the last 20 years—that was really distressing to me.

You were also in the minority voting against the ordinance that allowed Uber to operate legally in Portland. Do you feel that ultimately worked out okay, or did the things you were concerned about come to pass? They

absolutely came to pass, and the union taxi drivers that we worked so hard to get their taxi company acknowledged has been decimated by Uber and Lyft. Being independent contractors, the drivers get the short end of the stick, and Uber and Lyft make all the money. And there are still the safety issues we were talking about, which have been well documented all over the country. Although they have been able to help people during the recession make ends meet by doing that as a part time job, it's a profession and people should be respected for their knowledge of the community.

What are your plans now? Well like everybody else's, my plans have gone out the window. I had been planning to do lots of traveling. My son and his wife are in Chicago, and my daughter's in Long Beach. My mother's still in England and doing well. So I had been planning to gallivant, and that's obviously not happening, not until after a vaccine. I do have a four-month-old grandchild who lives two miles from me. My son and daughter-in-law are being truly kind and fully isolating like I am, so I can go over and hang with her. And unfortunately lots of house cleaning and yard work, which doesn't sound very enticing. And I shall continue paying my dues as a retired ONA member. I will continue to be an advocate, but I'll get to choose what issues to work on rather than being assigned something that I then do the best I can. My mentor was commissioner Gretchen Kafoury, so I will take her as my role model. *[After she left Portland City Council]* she wasn't constantly in everybody's faces, but she made a difference when it really counted. I'm a little concerned that the mayor will now be the longest serving person on the council, with only four years. There are so many things that you learn. It's important to remember what happened in the past, what worked and what didn't. I certainly appreciated reading all my own emails for the entire 12 years. I learned so much from community members who tell me what I don't know, and then I look into it. So I am hoping to be that person who is a source of useful information to the future council.

That's one of the things I admired about you over the years — that you took the trouble to read those and to respond. Thank you. Well it stems from being a nurse. If you tell somebody you're going to be back in five minutes with their medication, you better come back in five minutes with their medication. And then you'd better check afterwards and find out, "Did it help?" In some ways, the way I conducted myself on the council very much mirrored my 22 years at OHSU and my previous work in New York.

Any final message you'd like to convey to our union member readership? We are all in this together, and that's something unions teach you. You may not always agree, but you can agree to disagree, and you can work together even if you disagree.

Happy Holidays

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