

# The council incumbent

*Amanda Fritz sets new goals in run for second term*

BY JAKE THOMAS  
STAFF WRITER

In 2008, Amanda Fritz, a psychiatric nurse and neighborhood activist, became the first ever non-incumbent to win a seat on Portland City Council through Portland's Voter-Owned Elections, which provided public campaign financing to qualifying candidates. Since then, she's carefully scrutinized how the city spends its money, sometimes to the chagrin of other city commissioners, and hasn't shied away from being the lone dissenting vote on the council. With Portland's public campaign financing dismantled, Fritz now has to raise private funds to keep her seat, which is also being sought by State Rep. Mary Nolan and Teressa Raiford.

Street Roots is conducting a series of interviews with the candidates for City Council. If you missed an edition, you can catch up at [www.streetroots.wordpress.com](http://www.streetroots.wordpress.com)

**Jake Thomas:** *You've run as a publicly funded candidate in the past. Now you're running with private funds. There's a perception out there, true or not, that if you run with private funds you're beholden to private interests. As someone who's done both, what do you make of that perception? How much influence does private money have?*

**Amanda Fritz:** I remember when someone gives me \$5, and I would certainly remember if someone gave me \$5,000. I'm actually continuing to run with public campaign financing. Even though we don't have the system in Portland, we still have the \$50 tax credit, which you can take straight off your taxes each year. So that's the limit I'm taking. I'm not taking money from corporations or other groups. It's been really meaningful. It's been really important to me to be the publicly funded commissioner who has to consider every one of our taxpayers and ratepayers as constituents, and it's not that my colleagues don't do that. It's just that I don't want to have a situation where one of my big campaign donors wants special access. So all of my big campaign donors are the citizens of Portland and everyone gets access to me in this office.

**J.T.:** *So you're hoping to not even create that perception?*

**A.F.:** Right. So the flip-side to that is I need 3,000 \$50 donations to raise the \$150,000 I had with public campaign financing. So I need a lot of people to step up and send me their donation. If they don't have \$50, I would be very honored to get a thousand donations of \$5.

I've had people come to me when I'm in office with that real sense of pride that they made a difference, which they did. If I get more than 3,000 people wanting to give me \$50 I'm not setting a ceiling for my campaign fund raising. It'll be a huge challenge to get 3,000. The decision will probably be made in May with the primary. So people are starting to think, it's November of next year, I'll give money in the summer. No, I need people to give now. I need people to go to my website and give right now, which is [www.amanda2012.com](http://www.amanda2012.com).

**J.T.:** *You were in charge of the Office of Human Relations, precursor to the newly created Office of Equity and Human Rights. What sort of success came out of it, and what lessons did you learn from it that you're hoping to bring to the current office?*

**A.F.:** So the Office of Human Relations was very much community oriented and had a community focus. This new office is



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different. It's definitely a collaboration between the community and the city staff, but it's very definitely a city bureau responsible to the commissioner. I think some of the major successes are the New Portlander Program, which Polo Catalani is in charge of. The whole office of Human Relations was started by Mayor Potter, and I feel a great responsibility to continue his legacy. The staff and the work of the office didn't really do much in terms of helping city bureaus understand much in terms of equity and human rights and what bureaus need to do differently.

We saw the State of Black Oregon Report and the Communities of Color Report showing the horrible disparity that we have in our community. The mayor and I recognized that we needed to do something different from what we've done in the past. Community leaders and bureau staff all agreed that we need to start looking internally at what the city does, how our employees operate, how we spend billions of dollars of our budget every year, and we need to start being intentional as to what our bureaus do rather than expecting four people in a remote office to change the world. It has to be a partnership. So that's the difference, but it's definitely building on the Office of Human Relations and making it more integrated.

**J.T.:** *Are there any issues in particular that you're hoping to tackle with the new office?*

**A.F.:** We agreed to lead with race and ethnicity as our primary focus and also people with disabilities. The race and ethnicity work has been done in the community with the research and the data, so we have a very firm foundation of where we start from so that we will be able to set some measurable benchmarks of where we need to get on a year-by-year basis.

The Portland Commission on Disabilities, which started during my first year of office, has done tremendous work looking at what's needed for their community, but they haven't had the assistance of staff to establish the data quite as well. So for the

disabilities piece, it's very clear that the first thing we need to do is research.

On race and ethnicity, one of the first things we'll start doing is establishing an equity lens tool for the City Council. When I first started there was a financial impact statement that established what that money, who is paying for it, where was that money allocated and what are the expected costs moving forward. In the past two years we've added the Public Involvement Advisory Committee's recommendation to have a public involvement advisory statement so that every time something comes to council, the bureaus are required to say what public outreach was done and if the input made a difference. It's trying to make it easier for bureaus that haven't been engaged in inclusive public outreach. It's really not rocket science. We can establish a Portland equity lens that will ask the right questions.

One of the things I've noticed from being on the council for almost three years is I think like a woman, I think like a nurse, I think like a mother. I'm the seventh woman on the City Council in 162 years, and it's not that my colleagues on the council don't want to consider issues the way I think about them, it's just not what pops into their heads. But the more I start asking the questions, others are starting to ask these questions as well, in fact, taking the lead in some cases. We've only had two people of color on the council in 162 years, and it's not that those of us who count ourselves as white allies want to ignore the questions that would be asked by communities of color, it's just that we can't naturally think about them, but we can be trained to do so. It's not as concrete as some would like.

The State of Black Oregon showed that for African Americans, things are worse than they were 16 years ago. We're not making any progress. We need to do things differently. We need to do things intentionally. We need to involve the community so we can find out what that means.

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