

# Teressa Raiford

## 'Make the process more efficient'

BY JAKE THOMAS  
STAFF WRITER

In 1996, 26-year-old Teressa Raiford left Portland with two children in tow for Dallas, Texas after her cousin died in a shooting. "I didn't want my children to think that that was normal," she recalls. Raiford went on to pursue a career in business and in 2006 started her own company, Intrinsic Group, which helps businesses operate more efficiently.

In August 2010, Raiford moved back to Portland, the city she was born and raised in, and has delved into the city's civic life, revealing what she characterizes as a deep disconnect between City Hall and the citizenry. She hopes that by getting elected to City Council, she can apply her business acumen to city government and improve communications with the public. If elected, she would be only the third black person to hold a seat on City Council.

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:** *What made you want to run for City Council?*

**Teressa Raiford:** Having a business consulting company, my job is to build solutions. So when I came home and saw that our community was changing and our attitudes were changing, even toward each other, I thought what is the problem? It looks beautiful here, and there seems to be a lot of opportunity, so why isn't everybody happy and taking advantage of what's here? And what I realized is that there is a lack of communication. I was like, OK, the haves are not promoting the information to the have-nots.

**J.T.:** *Both candidates for this position are known quantities. People know who Amanda Fritz is, they know who Mary Nolan is. Why should voters pick you?*

**"Being from this community, I see the issues and know the people and know what the problems are and understand that they don't know how to vocalize them. They don't trust the system and it defeats them even more."**

**T.R.:** Because I'm a businesswoman, and we need a better business service in this community. Evidently people are not happy, and that has to do with customer service. You have to be more efficient. I know Amanda is caring. She used to be a nurse. She has a compassionate heart, but she's doing business in my neighborhood. Mary Nolan, she knows geography and politics, and that's beautiful and everything else, but we need business in the neighborhood, and we need people who know the people in the neighborhood to do business and to show them how to get access opportunities. That's what I'm going to do; that's what I've been doing.



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TERESSA RAIFORD

**J.T.:** *What are you going to do to make the city more business-friendly and jumpstart businesses?*

**T.R.:** Entertain global opportunities. I have a global business right now. So I want to attract some of those opportunities to come here and to do business with some of the underdeveloped opportunities here. We have a lot of minority money here that nobody's taking advantage of. We have a lot of seed money that's here that's just sitting and nobody knows how to plan enough to use that. I program people on how to do that — training. I keep calling it programing because you have to develop that mindset, but basically you have to teach those skills. You have to understand the process and rules of engagement. That's what I want to teach the city. Let's use our education system; let's use some of these apprenticeships that the Portland Development Commission has.

**J.T.:** *What do you think about the new Office of Equity and Human Rights?*

**T.R.:** (Making a thumbs down gesture) I believe that justice is equitable. I didn't see anything in there where we're going to start assessing fees and violations to people that discriminate openly and blatantly. You can't legislate morality, so why would you create an Equity Office that has no sustainable justice? There's nothing in there. It's kind of empty. We already have a Human Right Commission. People complain and then we give them two years to figure out how to deal with it? You just apply a violation.

**J.T.:** *So you want something more concrete?*

**T.R.:** No. Nothing that's not already been done with Human Rights Commission. (For example) You go in and are discriminated against and that company's flourishing. Well, they never have to hire you if they don't want to. How do we process things as they come so we can document it and do something about it? We don't need training. We all know how to be humans.

**J.T.:** *As an African American born and raised in Portland, I was wondering how*

*having that experience might shape some policies you'd bring to City Hall.*

**T.R.:** I'm black. I've never been African. I'm a black American. When I was 11 years old, the Portland police did something unreasonable to my family. We had the "possum incident," as they like to call it.

**J.T.:** *The well-known one? (In 1981, Portland police officers threw dead opossums on the doorstep of a black-owned business, which, in part, helped lead to the creation of the city's first police review board.)*

**T.R.:** Yes, that was my grandmother's restaurant, and my dad had to call the commissioner. When you're a kid and happy-go-lucky and something like that happens before you're a teenager, your mindset changes. It doesn't defeat you. It kind of makes you powerful because you get to see the world for what it is, and you become a resolver, and say, how can we make this better? Because that hurts with that type of pain. So in my life now, I've always been a philanthropist. I'm giving. I'm like a teacher. It turned me into a different type of person.

Being from this community, I see the issues and know the people and know what the problems are and understand that they don't know how to vocalize them. They don't trust the system and it defeats them even more. I can communicate that sometimes the city's not being racist, it's just that the laws don't make any sense. I'll just go in and make the process more efficient.

You have a defeated community, and not just blacks now. You see Occupy Portland. Everybody's upset and they don't understand that we're the 99 percent. What they need to do is occupy City Hall. If you're a businesswoman, get a position in there so that you can be on the inside and you can help them make decisions that make sense.

**J.T.:** *How has Northeast Portland changed since you grew up there?*

**T.R.:** That's an honest question?

**J.T.:** *Yeah.*

See RAIFORD, page 9