

Eileen Brady

The grocery executive talks big bridges, urban renewal and creating jobs in her bid to become Portland's next mayor

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Street Roots is conducting a series of interviews with the candidates for mayor and City Council. If you missed an edition, you can catch up at www.streetroots.wordpress.com

Eileen Brady is perhaps best known for founding New Seasons Market with her husband Brian Rohter, a chain of stores that has drawn national attention for stocking its shelves with products from local and sustainable sources. But Brady is hoping to leave an even bigger mark on Portland by getting elected mayor. Aiming to bring her "results-driven approach" to city hall, Brady wants to make Portland a place that is both sustainable and nurturing toward businesses.

While Brady serves or has served on the board of multiple nonprofit and government entities and her name was thrown around as potential candidate for U.S. Senate in 2008, she came from more humble origins. Shortly after graduating from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash., she moved to Portland as a young mother and started working at Nature's Fresh Northwest, a precursor to New Seasons, for \$5 an hour, eventually rising to human resources director.

"Portland's a good city," says Brady. "It could be a great city. In order to be a great city we've got to be able to build that economic piece of the puzzle and provide the civic leadership to get there. That's what I'm most excited about: How do you move Portland from a good city to a great city?"

Jake Thomas: *You've raised hundreds of thousands of dollars so far for your campaign. Do you worry that there's a perception out there that there's too much private money in politics?*

Eileen Brady: Yeah. There's too much influence. I'll tell you one thing, you spend a lot of time raising money. My husband was the chair of the Voter Owned Elections campaign, and we came really close to winning. I was very disappointed that we didn't get over the hump. We think that if we had two more weeks, voters would have kept public financing of elections. I am a huge supporter of campaign finance reform. But right now, we're playing with the rules we have. If I could wave my magic wand and make this different, I would. I think one of the huge shifts in our politics, locally and nationally, when it comes, will be true campaign finance reform.

J.T.: *You support moving ahead on the Columbia River Crossing. How confident are you that the project won't have an adverse effect on the environmental health of the neighborhoods of North and Northeast Portland?*

E.B.: Good question. So let's be really clear what my position is: I support moving forward on the bridge and moving forward



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on the process toward that end. What I think is going to happen, is there's going to be a decision we're going to get soon, and probably the project is going to get slimmed down. There's no way that project is going to move forward in it's current existing bulk and size.

This is one of the largest public works projects that we're going to have that we could bring into reality. Even though it's been a mess getting to this point, and it's been a bit of government run amok on the planning process, I'm supportive of moving this thing forward.

So, in terms of how it affects the neighborhoods and the environmental pieces of this puzzle, I think I'm the only candidate who has come out and said that we need congestion pricing or tolling. The choke point is right where you're thinking of where these neighborhoods are. The issue is really a one-way issue; it really is people coming south. We need to be the model and step up on congestion pricing — period. So I think there are huge opportunities there.

J.T.: *In the Portland Business Alliance questionnaire, you said, "Portland is currently trying to use (urban renewal) in a convoluted way as a job development tool." What's an example of the city doing that, and what is the proper role of urban renewal?*

E.B.: Great question. Let me back up, I'm in this race because I am concerned about the economy in Portland. It is a tough place to find a job or make a living, and it doesn't have to be that way. The premise of my thinking and my race is that we have a myth here that says that you can't have a progressive city and a vibrant economy. There's a whole generation that's just struggling to create stability in their lives. So that's the underpinning of why I get into the race.

Urban renewal is ultimately a tool to eliminate blight, an "old-school, 20th century" idea. But at its core, urban renewal is a real estate development tool, and it does a relatively good job at that, and whether we've been using it for blighted areas is beside the point in this particular question.

We have to be honest about those dollars, and that tool is about real estate and housing development. We can use some of those dollars for job development, but if we want to be really honest with ourselves, we have to say that either general fund dollars or some other funding mechanism needs to fund true economic development and job development. Right now, it's much easier to discuss the tax increment, or the services that are going to get created in that area or how you're going to change the face of the neighborhood.

There are jobs created in URAs, but could you maximize job creation if you had a set of funds you could use differently? Can we set up shared manufacturing centers, with, say, advanced metals manufacturers, or sewing manufacturers, or food processing centers, so that we can literally restart the manufacturing centers in the Portland area and commit to that piece of the puzzle? That takes a certain kind of financing.

What I'm calling for is an economic catalyst team that would work with larger employers to help them accelerate their business programs. A lot of our larger employers have plans to grow and add professional, good-paying jobs with benefits, and the city should be a partner and help accelerate those plans. There are jobs in the pipeline.

For instance, OHSU has 13,000 jobs, the largest employer in the city of Portland, and in the middle of the recession they added

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