

Piercy Takes Over

New mayor's inaugural contrasts with Torrey.

Eugene's new Mayor Kitty Piercy held a state of the city event Jan. 3 that contrasted sharply with her predecessor, Republican Jim Torrey.

Whereas Torrey's annual state of the city addresses were held around banquet tables in the Hilton conference center and attended largely by business pooh-bahs and city staff, Piercy's inaugural address overflowed with the full diversity of Eugene.

More than 500 people packed the Hult Center lobby with overflow filling stairs and balconies to the third floor. Music was provided by a pair of talented African-American high school violinists, a Hispanic man and woman singing "Mexico Americano," and the Soromundi Lesbian Chorus of Eugene singing "You are the New Day."

Piercy took the podium to wild and thunderous applause. Whereas Torrey was criticized for his lack of civic vision, and for characterizing the city as anti-business, Piercy laid out an optimistic plan for reform and progressive change that celebrated the city's strengths.

"I have heard Eugene labeled as a difficult place to do business because of our concern for our environment," Piercy said. "I would like to change that message. We have excellent schools and a beautiful environment and these are key attractions for business investors."

"Eugene can and should have a strong economy *and* protect this beautiful natural environment," she said. "By encouraging businesses that

are sustainable, we can meet the goals of environmental regeneration, social equity and profitability."

Piercy called for creating a sustainability advisory board for the city, recognizing sustainable local businesses, and promoting local purchasing. She said she would work to promote the city and its environmental rules and other strengths. "We live in a great place and we need to say so!"

Piercy's other proposals included:

- An independent city auditor "that is consistent with our city manager type of government, but that also addresses concerns for transparency in how an auditor is selected, how goals for audits are determined, and how the results of audits are shared and used."
- Creating a River Road/Santa Clara advisory committee.
- Mayor one-on-one meetings in the neighborhoods.
- "Focus on the holes in our social service systems that exacerbate student achievement gaps and the role the city can play in addressing them."
- Connecting business incentives the city hands out to wage and benefit standards.
- Addressing racial profiling by police and improve the climate for diversity and tolerance. "We must take action where action has been lacking and measure our success in moving forward."
- Establishing a "police external review board that will help us meet our city's goal of ensuring

that everyone is treated fairly and appropriately by our police officers."

• Using the arts to promote downtown with year-round events and connect the city to the university.

Piercy alluded to the tough challenges that lie ahead. "There is work unfinished in this community, from resolving traffic issues in west and north Eugene to locating a hospital and opening our new Federal Courthouse, and the downtown continues to need special consideration."

Although not mentioned by name, the West Eugene Parkway is one of the thorniest issues Piercy will have to grapple with. During her campaign, Piercy openly criticized the highway, which will destroy a large swath of beautiful wetlands and promote sprawl. Her opponent Nancy Nathanson supported it.

Efforts to reform the police department and bureaucracy with a review board and auditor with real independence and teeth could also face strong opposition from police and city staff. Five months ago, a red-faced Eugene City Manager Dennis Taylor lashed out at city councilors for even suggesting

the need for an independent auditor in the wake of police scandals. Such independent oversight would diminish his credibility and power and "undermines the whole profession that I'm a part of," he said.

The issue of subsidizing riverfront development for Triad hospital could also become contentious. The proposal for selling the EWEB headquarters to Triad has met with growing criticism from citizens concerned about the high taxpayer and ratepayer cost and huge ugly development along the river.

Piercy, a political moderate and Democrat, is the first mayor elected in Eugene who is not under the control of the city's conservatives and developers, and as such will likely face continued opposition from the city's powerful Chamber of Commerce and *The Register-Guard*, which opposed her campaign.

A strong public mandate could help Piercy overcome obstacles. In November, Piercy won 53,732 votes, 84 percent in the mayor's race. Councilor Bonny Bettman looked out at the diverse sea of supporters at Piercy's inaugural, saying, "Wow, this is quite a crowd."

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