



Mayor's Race

Torrey vs. Piercy choice could shape Eugene's future

BY ALAN PITTMAN

The position of Eugene mayor is often viewed as largely ceremonial with the city manager and council majority holding the real power.

Then why have developers, gravel, construction, timber and other pro-sprawl and freeway interests already poured a record-breaking \$180,000 into Jim Torrey's campaign to unseat Kitty Piercy?

It turns out that who wins the political clash for mayor could have a dramatic impact on shaping the city's future. With the City Council often split down the middle on sprawl vs. livability and the environment, the mayor will make important committee appointments and cast key tie-breaking votes on a host of vital issues. Will Eugene sprawl with a big urban growth boundary expansion or grow carefully with greener and more livable density? Will the city focus on global warming and alternative transportation or more freeways? Should we cut libraries, parks and other popular services to fund pothole repair and police? Do we want to focus on green jobs?

"This is a pitched battle for the future of Eugene, and they are pulling out all the stops," said Piercy of the development interests outspending her almost 3-1 in the mayor's race.

Backgrounds

On the surface Torrey and Piercy appear to share a lot of the same positions. Both say they support kids and education, street maintenance, public safety and jobs. Both support improvements to Beltline highway, locating a hospital in Eugene, tax breaks for Hynix and recently failed votes on downtown urban renewal tax diversion, an increased gas tax for potholes and the county income tax.

Both Torrey and Piercy have lived in Eugene for more than three decades and are parents and grandparents. But beyond that their biographies look quite different.

Torrey went to high school in Waldport, attended the UO but did not graduate and

went to work as a grocer before starting a career in outdoor and billboard advertising. He served on the Eugene City Council from 1994 to 1997 and as mayor from 1997 to 2005. In 2006 he ran as an anti-abortion Republican for state Senate but was defeated.

Piercy grew up in Virginia, Ohio and Michigan and graduated from Western Michigan University with a teaching degree. She served in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia teaching high school English and later taught elementary school in Eugene. Piercy was elected to the state House of Representatives as a Democrat from 1995 to 2000. She lost a race for Lane County commissioner in 2000 before working for five years as public affairs director for Planned Parenthood of

southwestern Oregon. In 2005, she won election as Eugene mayor.

Sprawl

Torrey has attacked Piercy for not supporting a developer-backed move to loosen local sprawl regulations. Last year the Oregon Home Builders Association, backed by Springfield officials, rammed a bill through the state Legislature to split the Eugene/Springfield urban growth boundary (UGB) in two and force Eugene to conduct an early buildable lands inventory. Developers hope the bill and inventory will force Eugene to expand the local UGB that limits sprawl.

"We will be required to expand our urban

growth boundary," Torrey said in a recent debate.

Surveys show strong support in Eugene for growing more slowly and densely and retaining the growth boundary rather than allowing sprawl. Sprawl can increase taxes, pollution, congestion and housing costs while reducing livability, studies have shown.

But Torrey said the city should change its decade-old growth management policies that support holding the UGB.

Piercy said the city is now conducting the land inventory studies Torrey and developers want. If the studies show the city can't legally meet land supply requirements with density, she said she will "very carefully and intentionally" consider a UGB expansion.

"I'm not an anti-development person. I'm just a person who wants it to be in the perspective of what a great place this is," Piercy said.

Torrey faults Piercy for alienating Springfield over the bill. He dismisses criticism from sprawl opponents saying that it was actually the other way around with Springfield alienating Eugene.

Piercy says she has a good working relationship with Springfield officials. She points to a lobbying trip to Washington, D.C. when she stood in for Springfield officials when they couldn't make the trip. "We are good partners."

Torrey faults Piercy for being an overly "divisive" mayor and said he will do a better job at bringing people together.

But when Torrey was mayor, he had a reputation as a fierce partisan. He broke a dozen tie votes to reliably take the conservative stand on sprawl and other issues, according to an *EW* review of votes from 1999 to 2004. In 1997 he backed police pepper spraying nonviolent tree sitters downtown.

In 2000 Torrey told *The Register-Guard* that a progressive majority on the council would conflict with him and other conservatives and create a "train wreck" that would make it "practically impossible for any meaningful discussion." When a local developer secretly bankrolled "Gang of 9" attack ads against progressive councilors, Torrey went on conservative talk radio to join the attacks.

Environment

Piercy is endorsed by the Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV) and the Oregon Natural Resources Council Action PAC and has a strong record of working for environmental issues as mayor. She launched a Sustainable Business Initiative to reduce the city's global warming and environmental impact and support and encourage local green businesses.

Torrey said he supports sustainability. But local OLCV organizer Meredith Shield said, "That's just obviously not true by votes he's taken and money he's taken from developers."

Torrey had an "awful" environmental voting record as mayor, Shield said. "He voted against the environment every time he had a chance," she said. "It's scary to think about what it would be like if he's mayor again."

Similar to now, Shield said Torrey also received big donations from anti-environmental interests when he