

# State of Eugene

Piercy touts downtown projects, celebrates city

**E**ugene Mayor Kitty Piercy cheered the city's accomplishments, including \$100 million in downtown redevelopment projects in a recession, and gave a preview of coming work, including a possible city tax for schools, in her State of the City Address Jan. 4.

"We're here tonight to celebrate living and working together in this community," Piercy told a crowd of several hundred gathered in the Hult Center lobby for the annual event.

"We know the most important thing about our lives, our jobs and this city we call home is how we care for each other," Piercy said. "It is about how we do this in the best and worst of times."

Piercy called the recession the "number one issue" for the city last year. "Incomes suffered and unemployment stayed high. Our city finances remained tight, and regular services were more difficult to provide" Piercy said.

"We responded by focusing on smart governance, using the triple bottom line of social equity, economic development and protecting our natural resources as a lens, to maximize our dollars and our service while cutting over \$17 million

"Our Independent Police Auditor and Civilian Review Board are functioning well," Piercy said. "Several high-profile cases were handled and resolved with great sensitivity and transparency. The oversight process we so painstakingly put into place is running more smoothly, building confidence in the integrity of our civilian review system and our Police Department."

Last year the Civilian Review Board found that a police officer used excessive force in Taser-ing a Chinese student, contrary to a ruling by the police chief absolving the officer. The city council, city manager and mayor largely ignored the review board's advice in the high-profile case.

"We maximized our resources and our firefighting capacity through the collaborative merging of services with Springfield and single fire chief oversight," Piercy said.

"With careful use of your tax dollars, our public works department repaired and rebuilt more roads than ever before in the history of this city," she said.

"Eugene sponsored a state rail summit to initiate work on the Cascadia Rail Corridor from Eugene to Vancouver, British Columbia," Piercy said. "Along with Portland

"We've led an enormous community planning effort encompassing land use, transportation, social equity, economic development and environmental stewardship," she said. "This is Envision Eugene and you're all invited to be part of it."

"This city commitment to people, planet and profits has grown and strengthened over the last few years with careful and smart work by many people," the mayor said. "It has not always been easy, nor do I suspect it will be in the future. The life of a city is complex."

"ICLEI, a national coalition of local governments for sustainability, recognized our leadership in sustainability initiatives and innovation," Piercy said. "We were named among the top bike cities in the country by *Bicycling* magazine. We were named one of the 100 best cities for business by *Forbes*; a best place to retire; a great place for people with pets; home of a great university that is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities; a best small city for families; a smarter city; and a best place to live. 'Eugene is a breath of fresh air, unlike other places which duplicate each other across this land,' and 'considered paradise' are just a couple of the quotes about our city I've found."

Piercy said Eugene has also been cited as "one of the nation's most progressive communities and that is only possible because of all the work, cooperation, and vision coming from our citizens, council, staff and leadership, working in a new era of collaboration to make Eugene a great city and place in the 21st century."

"In 2011 we will continue to move our economic plan," Piercy said. "People must have jobs — jobs that pay well and keep our community unique, healthy, clean and strong. We have a lot to build on."

"We'll take some specific additional steps to further address homelessness and the needs of our young people," the mayor said. "In particular, we'll take a look at how we might locally support our public schools during this time of state funding crisis."

"We'll see all our downtown projects come to fruition and work on adding more," she said. "We'll work on creating a safer community."

"We'll focus city efforts on an arts and culture district," Piercy said. "Although we've lost some ground in the visual arts due to the recession, we remain committed to supporting the wealth of talent we are so fortunate to have in this community."

"We'll decide the future of our City Hall and plan accordingly," she said. "We'll implement our ambitious climate and energy plan to ensure that we are as prepared as we can be for an uncertain future, and we'll maintain our huge commitments as a Human Rights City. We'll finish Envision Eugene and integrate it into all our other planning processes."

"We'll evaluate the proposed third segment of EmX in order to continue to build our world-class transit system. We'll support strengthening our state's passenger and freight rail system, ensuring that Eugene benefits economically," she said. "We'll move up to platinum status in bike friendliness through implementation of our bike and pedestrian plan."

"And we will care for each other and take pride in our city where so much is done and so much is possible," Piercy said.

The mayor also used the event to announce a parade from the UO to downtown Jan. 22 to celebrate the accomplishments of the Duck football team and others in the community, and the connection of the city with the university. **EW**

*'We'll take a look at how we might locally support our public schools during this time of state funding crisis.' – Mayor Kitty Piercy*

from our general fund budget over the last two years," the mayor said.

"We recognized that while we strain to deal with the lasting effects of the recession, we must also plan for a better and more prosperous future," Piercy said. "Eugene is a great place, full of talented people and resources — capable of strong leadership in our state and in our nation."

Given the recession, the city accomplished an "amazing amount," Piercy said. "We have five downtown revitalization projects on the move. Whoopee! You told us that having a successful downtown is a major community priority and after many ups and downs, we are finally seeing our work come to fruition."

Piercy listed planned and ongoing projects downtown. "There's the Beam's renovation of Centre Court, Bennett's office building filling the Aster pit, Lane Community College's innovative Green Learning Centre and five-story student housing complex in the Sears pit, Masters' apartments [in a former city-owned building] on Pearl and former Mayor Brian Obie's Inn at 5th."

"When you add in Lord Leebrick opening on Broadway, the Jazz Station expansion, opening of OPUS 7, great restaurants and waterholes, there's a lot going on," she said. "That's about \$100 million in new investment in the heart of our city."

"We've incrementally improved our public safety response and capacity," Piercy said. "You told us public safety is key to the livability of our community and a responsive police force is important."

"We've added police officers and training, a renovated and efficient police facility," Piercy said, citing a project that would move the police headquarters and hundreds of employees across the river.

business leader John Russell, I've agreed to co-chair a state committee to develop a preferred rail alignment for both passenger and freight between our city and Portland. Millions of dollars have been infused into the corridor, which holds the economic promise of great travel through two states and two countries."

"Eugene moved along our public transit system vision for the future," the mayor said. "We know that EmX enables us to achieve a number of council and community goals in terms of accessible transportation, transit-oriented development, green house gas reduction and reduced reliance on fossil fuels. We're part of the process to determine the preferred way to extend EmX out into west Eugene, and we're working our way through community concerns to find the right solutions."

"Eugene continued to be a national leader in bike system improvements with one of the highest percentages of bike usage in the country," Piercy said. "With our continued focus on transportation planning that considers bicycle infrastructure improvements; it's only going to get better."

"We moved forward our sustainability goals through the completion of our Climate and Energy Action Plan, and used the triple bottom line lens to make city decisions," she said.

Piercy said "Sustainability is imbedded in economic development initiatives aimed at reducing the costs of business and positioning us for a carbon-constrained economy."

"We helped provide for our most vulnerable population through the Human Services Commission, Courthouse Gardens, Project Homeless Connect, the Egan Warming Shelters and partnering to build our stock of affordable housing options," Piercy said.

The mayor said city government has collaborated with "government partners throughout the area and state—and we have done it successfully while holding true to our values."

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