Fetterman himself grew up in York, across the state, a mid-sized, fairly prosperous place where he played offensive tackle for his high-school football team. His father, Karl, started and still runs a prosperous place where he played offensive tackle for his high-school football team. His father, Karl, started and still runs a commercial insurance company. “Our family is comfortable, but we’re certainly not Rockefeller rich,” he says. “Gisele and I live very frugally.” The mayoral post pays $150 a month.

Fetterman is a politician, but more for the bully pulpit and authority to act than any personal vanity. But his daily work is entrepreneurial and essentially extra-governmental. Braddock Redux is a small, nimble entity able to make decisions and act quickly without being mired in a political process. He doesn’t have to write grants, for example, every time he wants to do something in town. “I have the financial freedom to say, ‘Hey, it’s 98 degrees out here and everyone’s sweating and unhappy. Let’s buy tickets on Fandango and take the kids to the movies this afternoon. Let’s just do it!” Is the money going to run out? “So far, so good,” he says. “Levi’s has been good to us and my own family resources have been good. And I am not spending extravagant sums.”

He does have some critics. Not all the artists and newcomers have found him as supportive as they would like; some are overwhelmed as well by the work involved in being a change agent. Some large projects, like the renovation of the eight-story Ohringer Building, have had setbacks: the artist tenants were evicted in 2007, after which Braddock Redux bought the structure for $15,000. But last year Fetterman got a $100,000 Heinz Foundation grant to put up a green roof that kids in the BYP are helping create.

Politically, in Pennsylvania, the county is the most powerful and primary local governing body, but each borough within it has a local elected council. The mayor’s role, technically, is to monitor the police department—a job Fetterman generally leaves to the police chief, with whom he is on good terms. Some Braddock council members have criticized Fetterman for bringing negative attention to the town, and not knowing enough about the logistical aspects of town administration, while the borough manager, in an article in Rolling Stone, essentially said the mayor was “full of s...t” and accused him of wanting to create “Fettermanville.”

Fetterman says he feels empathy for the older people on the local borough council who “lived through the implosion of their town” and has tried to work with them, but they generally have “nothing constructive” to offer on how to improve conditions in Braddock...I don’t want to get distracted with petty issues, old personal grudges, and quibbling,” he adds. “We know how that movie ends because that’s what’s happened in the past and that’s how Braddock got where it is.” He depends on what he considers a better working relationship with other local nonprofits working hard in Braddock before he arrived, with the county economic development team, and with the Democratic county executive, Dan Onorato (currently running for governor). In 2009, Fetterman was reelected by a margin of nearly three to one.

“We’re not ready to bring in Adobe Systems or Google,” he says, “but there are things we can all agree on that are fundamental and doable now.”

In his mind, it does not take much to improve people’s lives in little ways on a daily basis, while working on the more intractable problems, like bringing in employers. “We’re not ready to bring in Adobe Systems or Google, we are not at that level,” he says, “but there are things we can all agree on that are fundamental and doable now: opening playgrounds that are staffed for children; running a summer-jobs program that gives kids meaningful jobs.” He notes that KaBoom (a national nonprofit that creates play spaces where there are none) is installing a new play-