

THE BURNSIDE TRIANGLE

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If the smaller establishments did close or move, he says his business still would be affected. "Sure, the synergy in the neighborhood is really important."

Other Stark Street bars did not return calls from *Just Out*.

Wilson says the bars along Stark Street probably can hold on as rents increase in the area. But he wonders if they will.

"I personally think it would be too bad," Wilson says about the possibility of Stark Street losing its gay bars. "Most of us probably feel that way."

But Club Portland is another story. Wilson says someone likely will try to force the building's ownership to turn over.

If the bathhouse is perceived as a detriment to market a project, Wilson says, something will happen sooner or later. He guesses a deal already might be in the works because the Brewery Blocks are within a stone's throw of the front door.

Club Portland's management and landlord could not be reached for comment.

PROGRESS OR POLITICS?

Although numerous planning documents mention the Burnside Triangle throughout, none mention the fact the area is frequented by the gay community—particularly men. Not only that, officials claim not one disparaging comment has been made during community meetings and workshops.

Multiple gatherings with people from every walk of life, and nobody mentions a bathhouse, two bars with nude dancers, public sex acts or young male prostitutes? Clark says it simply hasn't come up.

"It may come up between (committee) members, but not in the larger forums," he says. "Yes, it does surprise me."

Clark thinks the lack of controversy might be because people don't know what is on the street. Wilson thinks the neighborhood is more subtle than one might think because of its mixed crowd.

"It's not just gay men," he says. You might start hearing a little more about the issue though, he says.

When he first heard about the city's desire to make a development plan for the Burnside Triangle, Wilson thought the aim was to drive many of the gay businesses along Stark Street

out, but he now says that is not his impression. Others aren't so sure.

Dave Haysom has seen Portland's bar scene ebb and flow through the years, sometimes growing and sometimes diminishing. Change can be good, he says.

But Haysom thinks Stark Street's days are numbered. He says he's felt it for a long time.

"My fear is that it's just going to completely go away and no one is going to care," the longtime Portland resident says. "I've had the impression for several years that they wanted us out of this area."

Haysom has heard many people express their disenchantment with the Burnside Triangle. "They

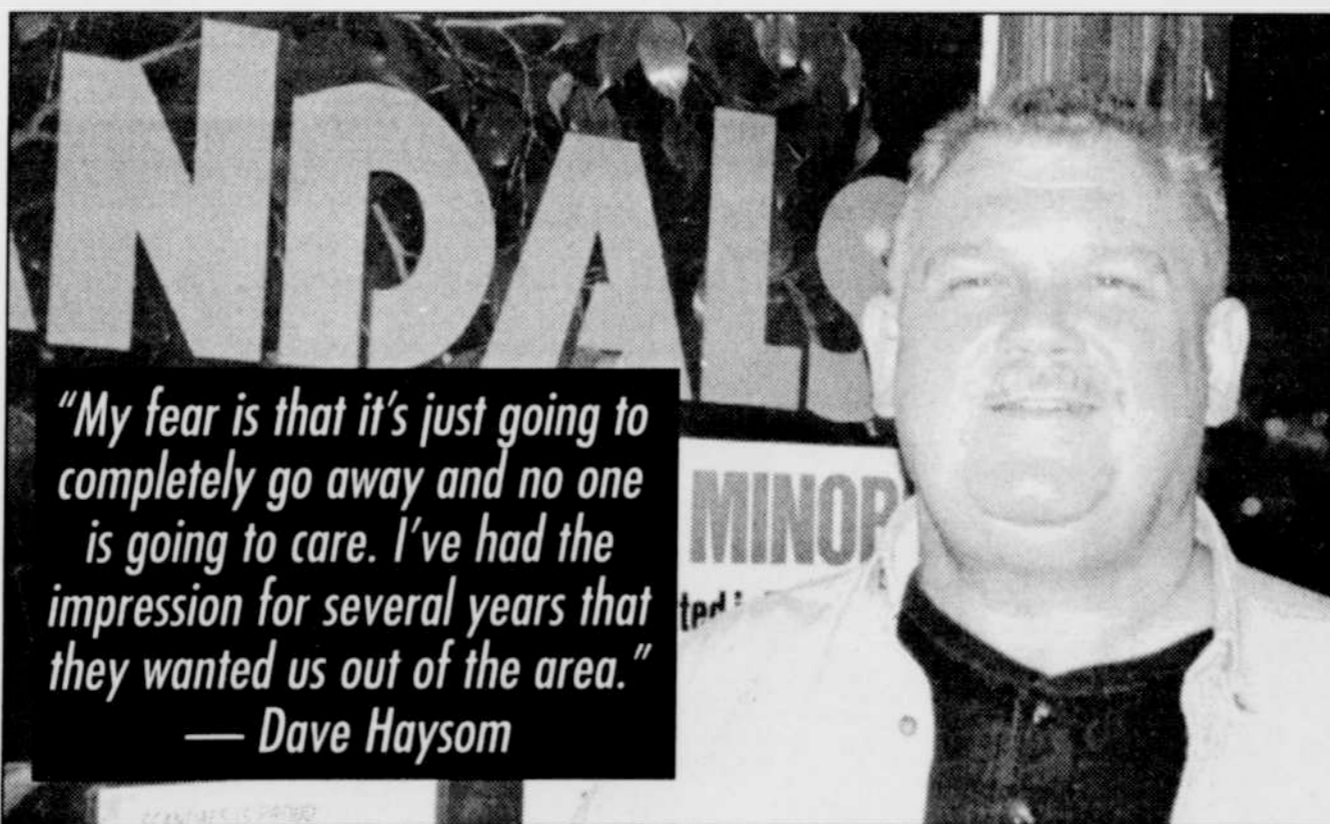
be risky, Wilson says, because there is strength in numbers.

THE PATRONS

If the bars do relocate, forced out because of skyrocketing rents, Tom and Oscar might not follow. The transplanted couple from California say they usually go to straight bars.

But when they do venture out looking for gay night life, they always come to Stark Street. They say they like to park and visit a number of establishments, which is the appeal of the area.

If drink and food prices went up to accom-



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are bored," he says, seated at the Red Cap Garage.

He wouldn't be surprised if the goal is to quietly force gay bars out of Southwest Portland. "I'm very jaded when it comes to government."

Haysom says that it doesn't matter who the mayor is and that such an action wouldn't necessarily be a vendetta. He thinks some people are afraid the neighborhood and its bars will keep people from coming and spending money.

But Haysom doesn't expect Stark Street's bars to disappear. They'll just be in a different location, he says.

Although some patrons expect another neighborhood to emerge as "the new Stark Street," others predict the bars more likely will be dispersed throughout Portland. This would

moderate increasing rents, the couple of eight years still would travel from their Clackamas County home to the Burnside Triangle. But they say they likely wouldn't go to bars scattered all over town.

Terry, sipping a beer at Scandals, says finding new spaces in Portland for the bars might be difficult.

"Some parts of the community don't want a gay bar at all," he says. "There are limited areas where a gay bar can be. It wouldn't surprise me at all if the bars were forced out. If the city had its way, (the bars) will all be divided up."

Rather than forcing businesses to move out of the neighborhood, the

nearby development actually might draw more in, Terry expects. That concerns him.

These days, the bars are not filled with just gay men, he says; they are filled with heterosexual patrons as well. He expects increased development would bring more foot traffic, more straight people and higher drink prices.

"It would affect me," Terry explains. He likes to go to gay bars because he feels at home and surrounded by his community.

John, also a patron at Scandals, says he doesn't expect anything to change. He thinks that all of the bars have long leases and that there is little else anyone can do to remove them.

At least one area bar, the Eagle PDX, has lost its lease and is operating on a month-to-month agreement with its landlord. It has not announced if or where it will move, although some speculate it might be headed for Old Town near the company's other establishment, C.C. Slaughter's. The Eagle's management says it will remain in its current location at the corner of Burnside and Southwest 13th Avenue at least through the end of the year but declined to provide any additional details.

"Portland is an open-minded town," says John, a native of the city. "We can accept exchanging of cultures and lifestyles."

John says change hasn't affected Jake's Famous Crawfish, one of the city's most popular eateries, so why would it affect anything else? "That's why we are in the city!"

THE FUTURE

The Bureau of Planning will be taking public comment for one more month before finalizing the proposal and publishing it. PABA members will continue to gather information and consider formulating an action plan, although the group is uncertain whether it will move forward in the end.

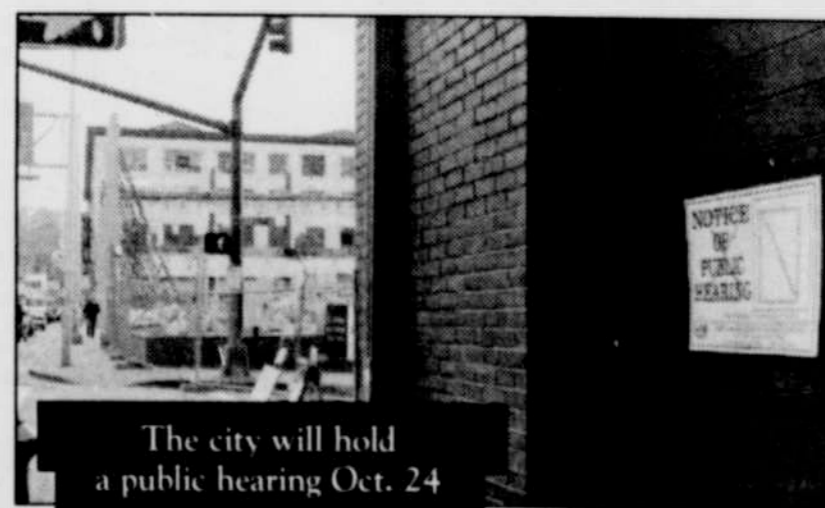
The Portland Planning Commission will review the proposal at a public hearing, tentatively set for Oct. 24. The Portland City Council is expected to hold hearings on the recommendations early next year.

Despite differing opinions about the future of the Burnside Triangle and what is best for the area's residents as well as the city as a whole, dramatic change is certain to be on its way. Portland's gay community only can guess whether the institution of gay Stark Street, draped in its seediness and rich history, will be a part of that change. Some will watch from afar, while others will move forward, have their say and exert their influence.

In the meantime, if you see a rainbow flag flying along Stark Street, you can assume that the party still is going and that it's not closing time—at least not yet. So park your Jaguar and stop in for a beer—you even might meet a stripper.

■ Contact Graham Clark of the BUREAU OF PLANNING at grclark@ci.portland.or.us for more information.

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The city will hold a public hearing Oct. 24