

IF YOU BUILD IT...

Portland queer community center inches toward reality

by Sarah Dougher

A group of queer leaders met March 30 at City Hall to discuss the feasibility of establishing a Portland GLBT Community Center.

The meeting was facilitated by City Commissioner Sam Adams and two committee members who have been exploring the project for two years, Gwenn Baldwin and Susan Bremmers.

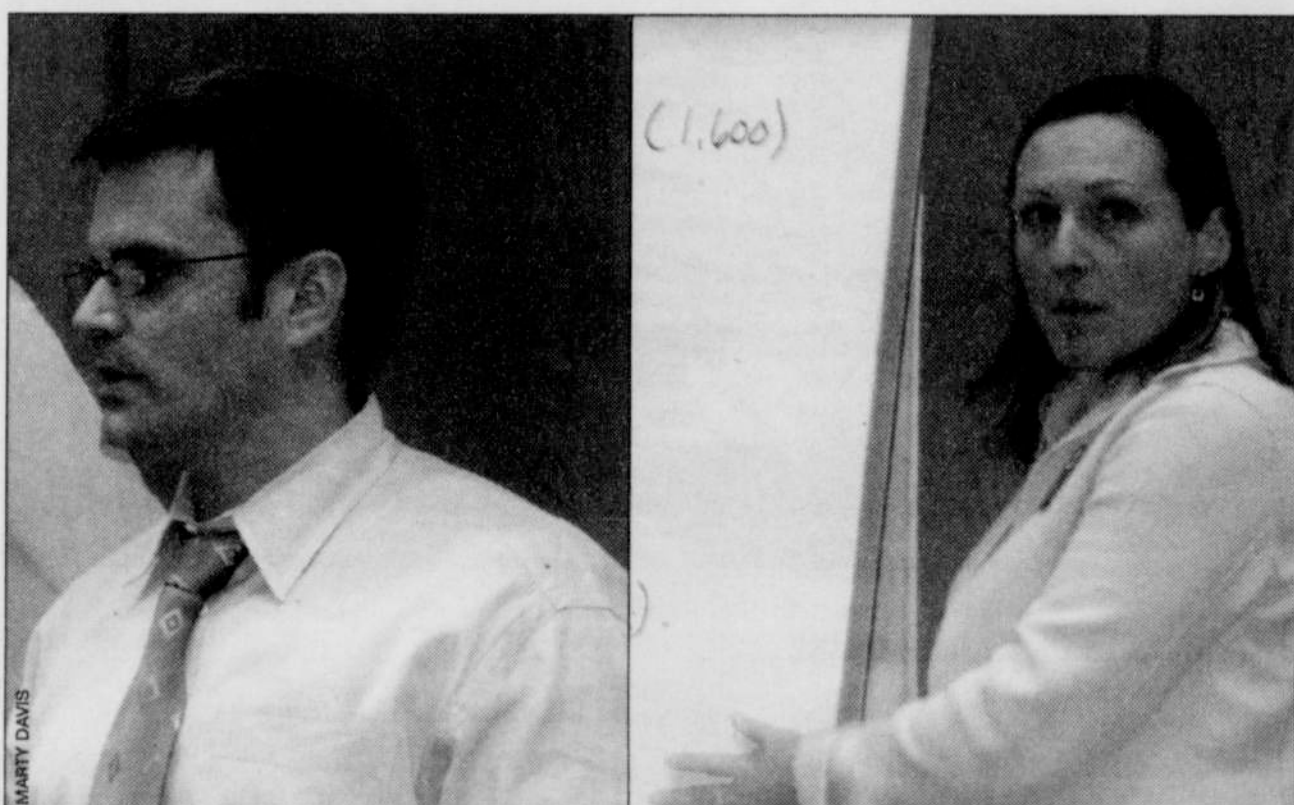
The meeting began with an overview of the history of the project, which began during Portland Pride 2003. At that time, a group of interested parties formed a nonprofit organization and conducted a survey to assess the feasi-

no longer in question, as Adams reiterated, since 90 percent of the people surveyed wanted a community center very much. "My conclusion is that this would grow and strengthen our community," he noted.

In the meantime, volunteers have been looking at potential properties around town to get an idea of what is out there and what kind of price range the center would need to consider.

"We looked at a handful of sites in a variety of locations," Bremmers observed. "Each site had a lot of possibility."

Most of these properties were between 4,000 and 6,000 square feet, although some were 18,000 to 20,000 square feet. "None of



Sam Adams and Gwenn Baldwin facilitate queer leaders in a discussion of community center plans.

bility of such a project. The election intervened, so the center organizing has been on hold until now.

The survey had approximately 1,600 respondents and gives a clear and consistent message of community desires with respect to a center. Community need fell in three main areas: HIV/AIDS prevention, civil rights (marriage, health and housing) and a social center—a place for meetings, job contacts and resources.

The survey seemed to indicate top priorities for center programming, including HIV testing, arts and culture, youth services, business referrals and activities for queer families.

In addition, the initial committee talked with more than 30 organizations, and their desires largely matched those indicated in the survey. They also recommended the center address senior services.

For the past two years, a group of core volunteers has been meeting to discuss the feasibility of the community center.

At the heart of the project as it stands now is to develop a business plan that not only makes sense to community members but also to potential donors. When the group began discussion of the budget, it landed on the figure of between \$225,000 and \$228,000 to begin the project. To attract potential donors, the group decided that it needed a refined business plan with a budget based on real numbers relating to central program offerings.

As it stands, community center planners must work to get donors on board and to refine the project plan. The viability of the project is

these are ones we would sign on the dotted line for, but these are instructional. This is where it really hits the ground," noted Bremmers.

There are a number of sites under consideration on both sides of the river, each close in. As the different possibilities were weighed, the group also discussed partnering with other organizations so that some of the space could be leased for satellite offices.

Adams gave those assembled the homework assignment of looking around for potential board members to continue work on the project.

"We need money, and we need diversity," he said. "We don't want this to be perceived as a community clubhouse where no straights are allowed.... We need a new board of directors. The old ones have done a great job, but now we need to put our egos behind so we can get this over the finish line."

In terms of community involvement, the group has approximately 250 organizations claiming to be supportive. In addition, it has e-mail lists with more than 800 citizens and 300 businesses that receive information about the center's plans.

Between 100 and 150 people have indicated they are willing to volunteer on the project. "We didn't want to contact everyone and say, 'We'll get back to you' before we were more organized," noted Baldwin.

Keep looking in the pages of *Just Out* to get updates about the community center as it develops. For more information contact Gordon Johnson in Adams' office at gjohnston@ci.portland.or.us. 



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