

ELSEWHERE

N.O. advocates seek Congress's intervention to save housing

Housing advocates in New Orleans are hoping Congress will intercede in the plan to save a public housing building damaged in Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The building was one of the "Big Four" buildings at the center of a suit against the Housing Authority of New Orleans and HUD, claiming they violated the Fair Housing Act by failing to repair and reopen the developments. The suit was brought by a group of displaced housing residents of the buildings. On January 26, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a judge's 2006 decision that allows continuation of the demolition of the public housing complexes.

In upholding the district judge's decision, the federal appellate court stated that "the record indicates that it was reasonable for the district court to conclude that there were no illegalities in the demolition application approval process." The residents claimed the building was easily repairable, and one of the few remaining options for people needing public housing.

Three of the four developments have been completely razed, and demolition on the fourth has begun. Advocates hope Congress will intercede before the demolition is completed, which is scheduled for March of this year.

Study indicates homes with lower prices decline faster

On Jan. 27, Standard & Poor's published its most recent set of monthly Home Price Indices, revealing that lower cost homes continue to see the greatest price declines, suggesting lower-income neighborhoods continue to bear the brunt of falling real estate values.

Looking at the change over the past two years, housing prices in the lower cost tier (bottom third of the housing market) have declined 34 percent, while the prices of houses in the higher cost tier (top third of the housing market) have declined by 20 percent, on average, across metropolitan areas.

Some of the steepest declines have been in cities such as Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix and San Francisco. In comparison to the average metropolitan area, all of these cities saw larger declines (approximately 40%) in prices for lower-tier homes since 2006.

Portland and Seattle, however, bucked the national trend and saw much smaller declines in low-tier housing prices. Portland saw low-tier housing prices, those priced below \$232,305, fall 10 percent, while high-tier homes, those priced above \$325,253, saw nearly equal losses of 12 percent. Seattle's housing market displays similar trends to Portland, with little difference in the price declines between low-tier housing and the high-tier housing.

Standard & Poor's housing price data is collected from 17 regional metropolitan areas. The index is a repeat sales index, which measures changes in the sale price of the same homes over time.

City housing director resigns post

Will White steps aside as city restructures its affordable housing programs

BY JOANNE ZUHL
STAFF WRITER

For five years, Will White has been at the helm of the city's Bureau of Housing and Community Development. It's the arm of the city that administers the 10-year plan to end homelessness, among other projects related to housing the city's poor and homeless. On Feb. 2, White announced he was resigning from the bureau, just as the department itself undergoes a major shift in priorities and obligations.

Soon, that bureau will be all but history, replaced by a new Housing Bureau still being crafted by new housing commissioner Nick Fish. While the roadmap for the city's new affordable housing structure is in its early stages, it's envisioned that the new bureau will consolidate affordable housing efforts formerly divided among city and the quasi-government bureaus the Portland Development Commission.

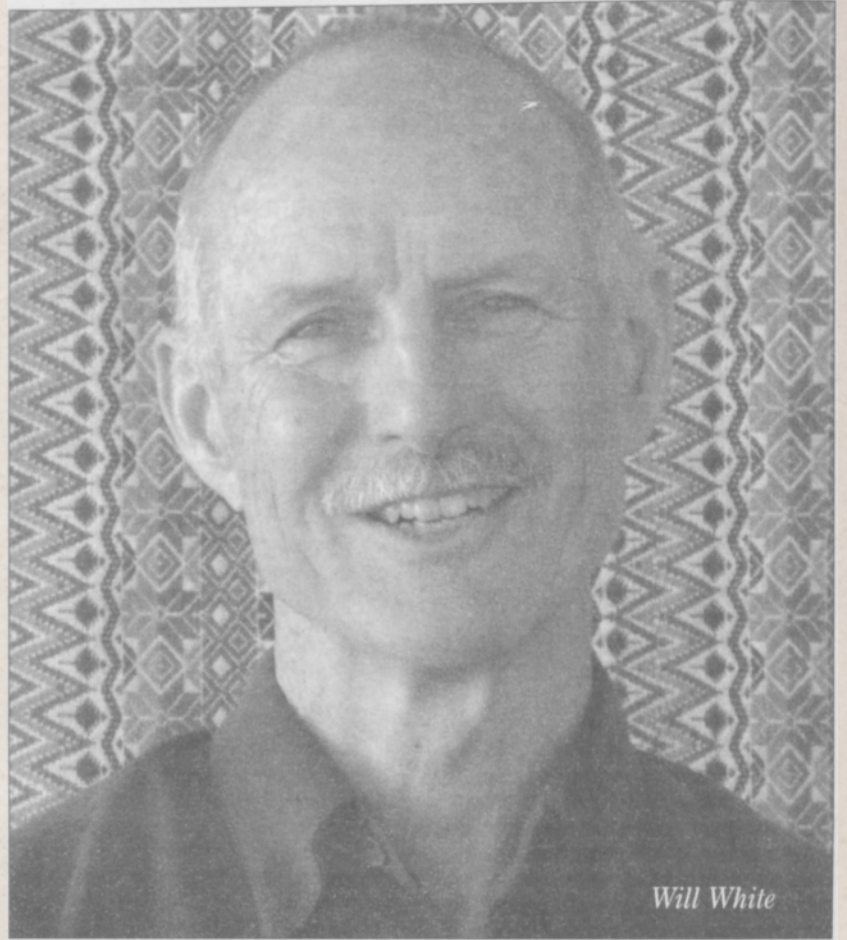
Joanne Zuhl: *How is the new bureau's administration going to be different from your role with the BHCD?*

Will White: It will be a larger responsibility with roughly double the number of people and double the amount of resources, and there will be a broader mission. BCHD was focused primarily on creating opportunity for low-income people including those with no home whatsoever. The new Bureau of Housing will be responsible for the whole spectrum, from homelessness to homeownership.

J.Z.: *What is your take on the restructuring underway that will essentially dissolve the BHCD, create a new Bureau of Housing, and redistribute affordable housing and economic development priorities with the Portland Development Commission? In this economic climate, is this the right time to change everything?*

W.W.: I think it is. This is going to create a much stronger and more focused housing system that is less fragmented compared to what is happening right now, and I'm hoping it will also result in a stronger Portland Development Commission as they narrow their focus more to economic development and incorporate the BCHD's Economic Opportunity Initiative. It will leave the new Bureau of Housing focused really on housing and homelessness, and PDC focused just on economic development and not having one of their departments focusing on housing.

There will still need to be strong collaboration between the two, because the new bureau will be responsible for the



Will White

TIF set aside for urban renewal districts (managed by the PDC)

I think this is a good time to make the change, it's been needed for a long time. It's something that I've pushed for a long time. In particular, I would say there hasn't been a clear and direct alignment between the setting of broad policy, the allocating of resources to support that, and the implementation of those policies. So the responsibilities have been dispersed, and each of the organizations responsible for carrying those responsibilities out report to different leadership, and so it made it hard to have a unified system where everybody was naturally moving in the same direction.

J.Z.: *Will this effect the development of the 10-year plan to end homelessness? How do you hope it will continue?*

W.W.: I think that's not completely clear. That will be a matter for the housing commissioner and the City Council to clarify, and I'm assuming there's no reduced commitment to the 10-year plan.

J.Z.: *What advice do you have for your successor?*

W.W.: This person is going to be

stepping into a very big job. There are some major challenges that include the fact that the financing systems that generate the housing that we work to produce are seized up right now. The banks aren't lending, bonds are not available, tax credit investors are not investing in equity, so there's that whole frozen market issue that Congress is trying to deal with.

Secondly, there is the need to design an entirely new bureau structure, and how it should be organized to carry out its new mission.

And thirdly, the blending together two disparate cultures, the PDC and the BHCD, so there's going to be leadership needed on a number of different levels, organizational development, establishing a new culture, and being on top of all of the complex technical requirements to meet the varying and sometimes conflicting requirements of money. So it's going to require a very smart, committed, inspiring new leader to be successful, but at the same time I think the opportunities are huge. It's going to be an unprecedented amount of resources, potentially bringing together some skilled people from two organizations in combined thinking into new and better ways to carry things forward.

Need help
finding help?
Dial 2-1-1

From your cell phone dial 503-222-5555.

75 CENTS OF EVERY \$1 YOU SPEND TO BUY THE STREET ROOTS STAYS DIRECTLY WITH THE VENDOR WHO HANDED IT TO YOU. WE COULDN'T DO THAT WITHOUT YOU. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.



www.streetroots.wordpress.com