

Setting new sights on the city

Steve Novick returns to the campaign trail with a bid for Randy Leonard's open seat

BY STACY BROWNHILL
STAFF WRITER

Steve Novick, the currently uncontested candidate for Randy Leonard's spot on Portland City Council, has plenty of novel ideas for a City Council facing more change than it's seen in decades. With Mayor Sam Adams and Leonard leaving, and Commissioner Amanda Fritz facing a tough contest, as many as three of the five Council seats could change next year.

New Jersey-born and Oregon-raised, Novick graduated from University of Oregon at 18 and Harvard Law School at age 21 before launching prolific careers as an environmental lawyer, nonprofit director and community advocate. In 1998, Novick was chief of staff for the Oregon Senate Democrats, and has since eyed positions at city, county, state and federal levels, most notably running a close race for the Senate in 2008. The "fighter with the hard left hook," a pun addressing his left hand hook prosthesis, currently works for the Oregon Health Authority.

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Novick received the endorsement of Gov. John Kitzhaber last week, and has raised more than \$100,000 in the mere 52 days since his campaign announcement (in contrast, state Rep. Mary Nolan, Commissioner Amanda Fritz's opponent, has reported less than half of that amount). Street Roots grabbed coffee and kebabs with Novick this week, and picked his brain on everything from his ideas for health care and

public safety to his distaste for gentrification.

Stacy Brownhill: *The Portland Housing Bureau Director, Margaret Van Vliet, is moving to lead the state housing agency. In her interview with Street Roots, she talked about the need for housing to be "front and center," so that when we're talking about jobs or health or community issues, we're talking about housing problems that underlie those other things. What are your ideas for creating affordable housing in Portland?*

Steve Novick: Creating affordable housing is hard. Rent control and inclusionary zoning are ways to create affordable housing but are against state law, as I understand it. We have the low-income housing tax credit program, which ensures some affordable housing.

Urban renewal is a problematic tool for affordable housing because only 15 percent of the city can be an urban renewal district at any given time, and the districts tend to last awhile. So most people will never live in an urban

renewal district.

One question the council has to consider going forward is: Have we done urban renewal in a way that's made previously affordable housing unaffordable through gentrification? We have to be really careful that we're not just creating more neighborhoods for rich white people to live in.

I was not aware until recently that we spend \$106 million per year of property taxes on urban renewal — that's like 24 cents of every tax dollar.

To some extent, the city of Portland over the past 20 years has been blinded by cuteness. We keep thinking if we build more cute neighborhoods then that's an economic development strategy. But we've got cute neighborhoods coming out of our ears and we're still lagging behind comparable cities, like Seattle and Denver, in terms of income and jobs. So I would be very hesitant about where we put more urban renewal money.

Also, offering better jobs is a way of making housing more affordable. If we had a stronger economy, more people would be able to afford housing because they would be making more money.

S.B.: *You've been hailed as a big supporter of the East Side and proponent for creating equity between communities of color and whites. What are some of your ideas for urban renewal and equity on the East Side?*

S.N.: Bus service is a big thing I hear people on the East Side talking about. The 71 bus runs up and down Southeast 122nd Avenue, and I've been told it's the worst combination of demand and lack of service in the city: There are a lot of people who ride it, and it doesn't come very often. So I would ask TriMet, how much would it cost to run the 71 bus as often as the 14 bus, which comes every 10 minutes?

I feel guilty that a new light rail line is going up by my house in Westmoreland. I would use it, but I don't need it as much as somebody who can't afford a car. I think we need to prioritize the poorer areas of the city as we make future transit decisions.

What (Commissioner) Nick (Fish) is trying to do in terms of building new parks in the Outer East Side is also important.

Investing more in schools and less in fancy, cute stuff is part of dealing with equity. People

always argue that the city should stick to the basics and that schools aren't part of the city's mission, but every politician ignores that.

S.B.: *What ideas do you have for helping Portland schools?*

S.N.: I think that there are targeted investments that the city could make in the schools. (Commissioner) Dan Saltzman has come up with a special pot of money for social services for kids.

One thing I suggest in my campaign is an annual forum in the summer where we pay for teachers and principals to come and learn from schools with tough demographics where unusually good things seem to be happening.

Another idea that I've adopted from Bobbie Regan is to physically expose more kids to college. Let's take sixth graders on field trips to community colleges. I heard a teenager say at Mayor Adams' education summit that she hadn't heard of financial aid until an adult told her.

Another thing I'd like to restore to schools is financial education. Teaching kids about credit

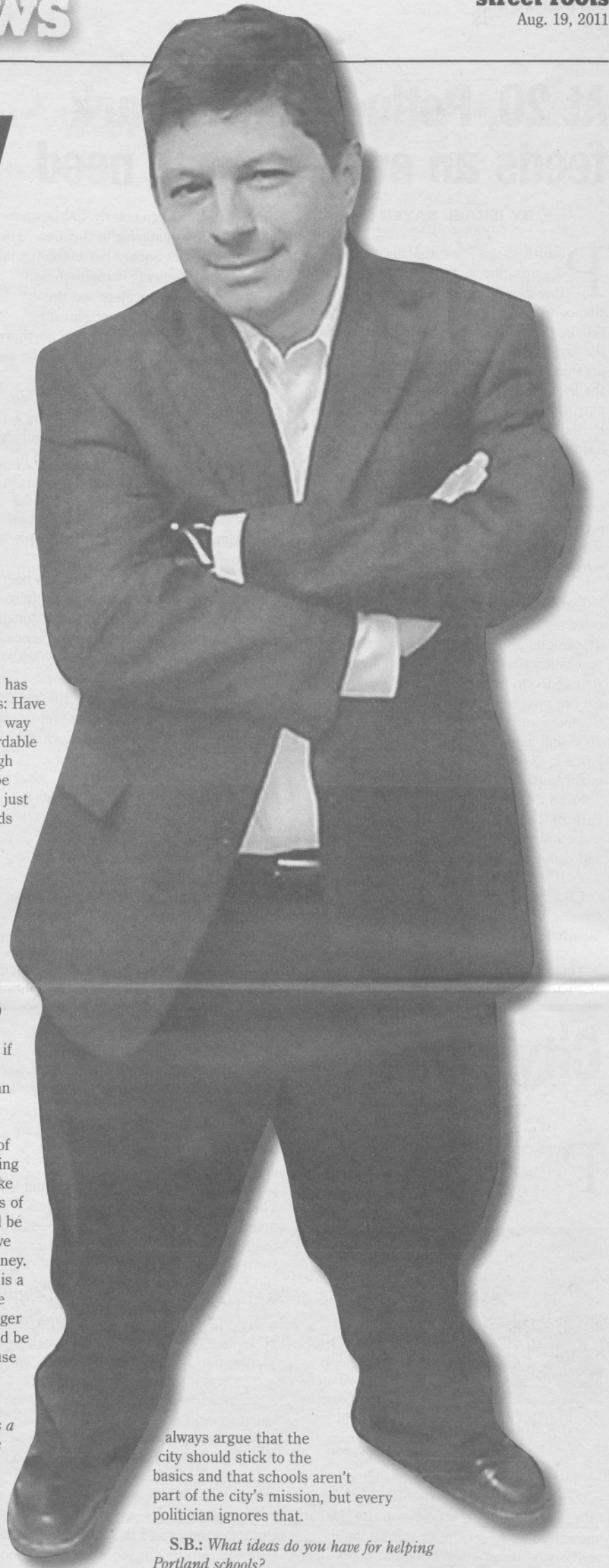


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