

Mark White

The City Council candidate takes his supporting role to a larger arena, with plenty to say about East and West, and how to respect the real values of Portlanders on both sides of the river

BY JAKE THOMAS
STAFF WRITER

Mark White isn't quite sure how many city boards, committees and commissions he's served on over the years (he estimates that it's a couple dozen), but is hoping to add one more to his resume: City Council.

For the past seven years, White has been a full-time volunteer, working on a number of community projects, as well as serving on city boards set up to get input from the public on issues that span housing, urban renewal and many others. Most notably, White serves as the co-chair of the Charter Commission, which recommends changes to what is essentially the city's constitution.

White, 52, moved to Portland 20 years ago from California and eventually made East Portland home. He has served as president of the Powellhurst-Gilbert Neighborhood Association for the last three and a half years. He is challenging Steve Novick, a well-connected and popular candidate, for the seat being vacated by Commissioner Randy Leonard.

Jake Thomas: *You've served on a lot of city boards and commissions. What lessons have you learned from serving on them that you would bring to City Hall?*

Mark White: Well for one, I bring an understanding of how City Hall works and what the real deal is behind how decisions are made. I'm not deluded to think that what happens in a committee is something that City Hall is going to take seriously. I've had numerous times when the city folks hear what they don't want to hear, and their usual refrain is, you're just an advisory

I feel very confident that the housing bureau is wanting to do the right thing, but I don't know if they have the ability to do all the things that are necessary in order to do the right thing. There are political pressures that guide some of the things they do with collaborations and partnerships.

committee. I have a true respect for folks who serve on committees and commissions and boards because I've done so many of them, and the folks who sit on them are incredibly, incredibly, incredibly passionate about what they do.

Frankly, I'm not really one for the paternalistic approach that's been done in the past and believe that folks who live in the areas in which they live or are involved in the things in which they're involved have a much better perspective and better insights than people in City Hall.

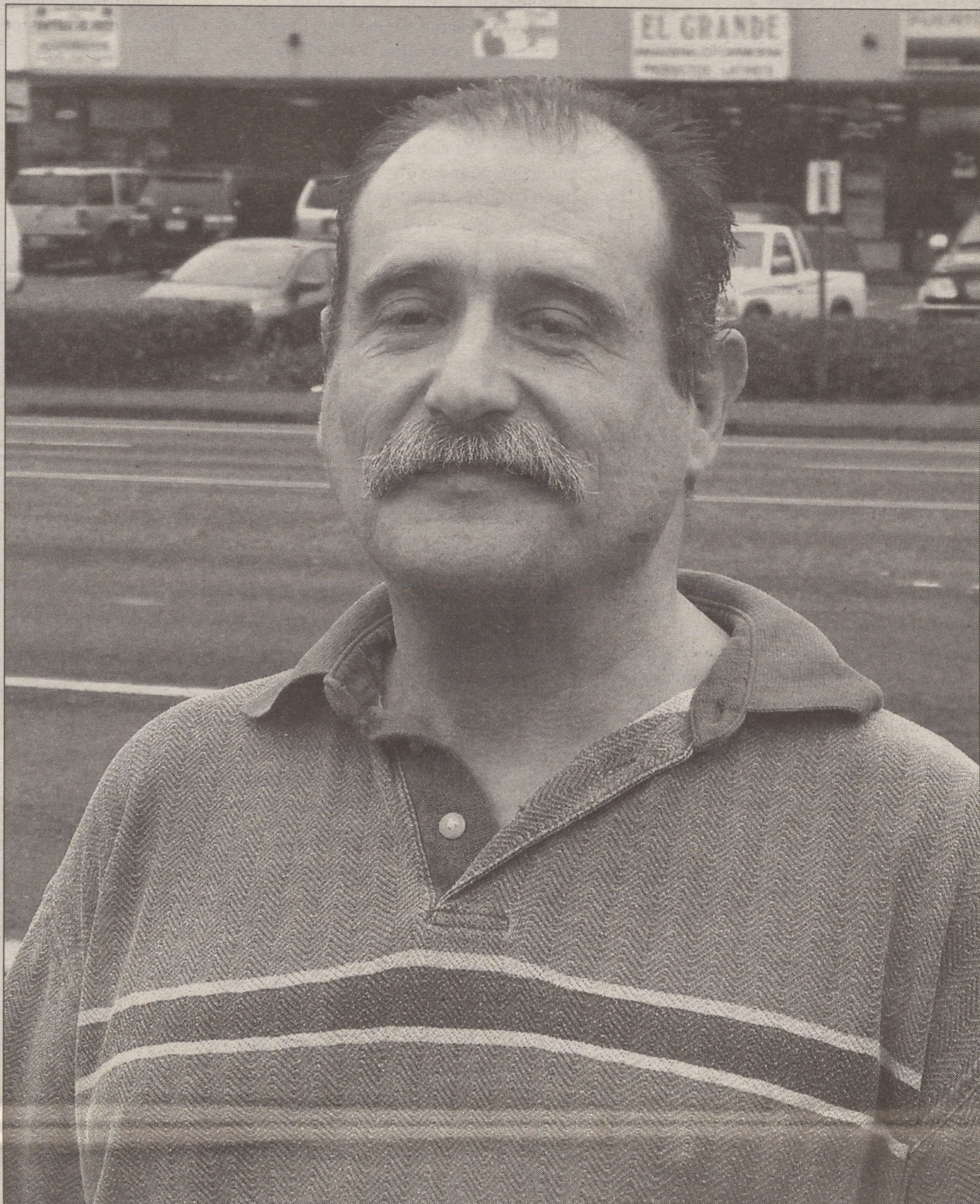


PHOTO BY
JAKE THOMAS

J.T.: *You served on the Portland Housing Advisory Commission, which was set up to advise the Portland Housing Bureau (PHB). What is your assessment of how the Portland Housing Bureau's plans are meeting the needs of low-income Portlanders?*

M.W.: The Portland Housing Bureau is relatively new. It's actually kind of a reinvention of the Bureau of Housing and Community Development. But I think they're trying to create their own path, and so in some ways they are essentially starting over. In some ways I think that's good, in some ways I think that's not so good.

I was on that commission for about a year. I could tell that there was definitely a commitment from the bureau to listen. I kind of felt like they were a bit more preoccupied with the transition of responsibility from the Portland Development Commission and the monies generated from urban renewal and how it applies to housing and homelessness and all those other kind of things and trying to make that transition as smoothly as possible.

I feel very confident that the housing bureau is wanting to do the right thing, but I don't know if they have the ability to do all the things that are necessary in order to do the right thing. There are political pressures that guide some of the things they do with collaborations and partnerships. What's nice right now, I think, is the new director, Traci Manning, is one of the original members of the Housing Advisory Commission. So she can see both sides. She has housing experience. She has experience with the commission, and now she's the director. So I think that's a really good thing. I know Traci. She's a great person.

J.T.: *So the purpose of the commission was to advise the Portland Housing Bureau. What advice do you have for the PHB?*

M.W.: I was the only representative from

East Portland. I think the reason I was appointed was because I had been very vocal about a lot of things with regard to housing out in our area. My neighborhood, all by itself in the last 10 years, has added thousands and thousands of households, and it's a lot different from a lot of other parts of the city.

For example, there's an affordable housing complex around the corner from my house. It has 37 units, but it has 174 people living in it and 126 of them are children. So it's a really different dynamic from downtown, for example. You could have a multi-story condominium complex that has eight or 10 stories or more and not have that many people.

In my neighborhood, there's no services for folks, so everyone has to travel to get groceries and just about everything. So it's very problematic when you throw tons and tons of people in an area with limited services and tremendous infrastructure problems and are low-income and have lots of social service needs. It complicates their lives even more. I was hoping to bring that voice to the table to let folks know that in order for Portland to be the best city it possibly can be, we need to all be lifted up together, and if we don't recognize or understand the issues being put on our most vulnerable citizens, then we have no right to be talking about equity and sustainability because the truth of the matter is that it's not so copacetic and groovy in Portland.

The city of beer, bikes and bridges: it's not the way we think it is, and I think it's not because of the people in the city. I think it's their government not responding in a way that respects the values of the citizens of Portland.

J.T.: *What would you do with housing in East Portland?*

See **WHITE**, page 4