

# Fritz Stays Close to Her Activist Roots

## New city commissioner outlines long-term ambitions, strategies

BY JAKE THOMAS  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When Amanda Fritz made her first foray into local government in 1996 by accepting an offer to join Portland Planning Commission, some of her friends wondered if she'd gone to the "dark side."

When she further deepened her civic involvement by running for and being elected to City Council, Fritz found herself assuaging the same anxieties among the community activists she used to run with.

"They're trusting that I'm not going to suddenly become an evil person," she said. "Not that anyone in the city is an evil person."

In an exclusive interview with the Portland Observer, Fritz talked about her ambitions and strategies as one of City Hall's newest additions, and her strenuous efforts to keep from straying from her neighborhood activist roots.

Fritz was assigned the Office of Human Relations, a relatively recent office that is geared toward improving—among other things—race relations. Because the office is so new its purview isn't completely fleshed out.

Fritz said the office has a clear scope over civil rights issues and outreach into the community, but isn't sure exactly what will be done with the office, since it depends to an extent on what policies the

City Council wants it to enact.

However, one of the biggest challenges facing all appendages of City Hall is an increasingly common one: falling revenues. Fritz said that revenues from business licenses have fallen sharply and the city has less to work with. Overall, the city is facing a \$6.4 million budget shortfall.

Currently two out of four positions in the Office of Human relations are unfunded.

"That greatly influences what that office can do," she said.

Fritz said she is concerned that the city may cut some programs that don't produce immediately tangible results, but are invaluable in the long term.

"Feeling safe isn't necessarily a quantifiable measurement," said Fritz.

She points to a program funded by



Amanda Fritz

the city and managed by the Northeast Coalition of Neighbors to alleviate gang violence. Fritz argued that the recent gang-related shootings demonstrate how crucial it is for the city to think long term in making budget decisions.

"I'm going to want to look at every-

thing. It is going to be very challenging to decide the relative merit of all these worthy programs," said Fritz.

Fritz was also assigned the Office of Cable Communications and Franchise, which negotiates service agreements with telecommunications companies for consumers.

Unlike many other city agencies, this office actually generates revenue for the city. Fritz explained that she hopes to use the office to squeeze as much money out of telecommunications companies as possible to help with the revenue shortfall. Recently the office came up with a \$400,000 settlement with a company, which will add to starved city coffers.

"I want them to continue pursuing that," she said.

Fritz moved to Portland in the 1980s with her husband and worked as a psychiatric nurse at OHSU. She was a long-time community activist. In 2006 she was the first person to qualify for public campaign financing, a recent initiative that gives qualifying candidates access

to public money to run her campaign. Armed with \$150,000 in public funds, she made her first bid for city council running against Dan Saltzman.

Unsuccessful, she made another bid last year (also with public financing). She ran another shoe leather campaign. She knocked on doors, pounded the pavement, worked marathon days and visited every neighborhood in the city. Her efforts paid off. She won with 70 percent of the vote.

Throughout the interview, Fritz stressed that she has gone to Herculean efforts to satisfy her City Hall responsibilities and keep engaged with the public. She continues to go out of her way to show up at community meetings and keep her ear to the street.

However, there remains work to be done.

"Part of our problem with citizen engagement in Portland is that citizens expect to show up at council at the last hearing and talk for three minutes and somehow that's going to change the outcome of something that's been worked on for two years," said Fritz.

She wants to citizens to have a better handle on how city government works so that they can more effectively shape the policy making process. She hopes that even if a citizen doesn't get their desired outcome, they'll at least understand how and why a decision was made and will be better prepared in the future.

Fritz hopes to accomplish this with her meticulous work to stay informed on the issues and a very wonky blog at amandafritz.com.

## Fritz on Obama: 'A Beacon of Hope'

Portland City Commissioner Amanda Fritz celebrated the inauguration of President Barack Obama while looking at the city's own progress for equality and justice.

"He's a beacon of hope," said Fritz of Obama. "There's a sense of accomplishment that that we have taken a huge step to get over some of our

historical barriers for African Americans and people of color."

Fritz grew up in Britain, but still has memories of the seeing the country's own brand of racism. She remembers people being historically disadvantaged as well because of the color of their skin.

Fritz is only the seventh woman to ever serve on Portland's City Council.

She said that she keeps her son's basketball jersey with Fritz and the number "7" on the wall.

"I'm really proud to be the 7th woman on the council," she said. "It shouldn't be that unusual."

She added that it is also regrettable that "we've only had two people of color on the council in 157 years."

## Portland Mayor Goes Back to Work

(AP) -- Mayor Sam Adams is back but his spokesman is gone.

A week after knocking Portland for a loop by confessing that he had a sexual relationship with an 18-year-old and then lied about it, Adams returned to work at City Hall Monday.

But the mayor's communications director, Wade Nkrumah, announced he was resigning.

The 48-year-old Nkrumah declined to comment on his reasons, but said his departure was

voluntary and Adams was disappointed. A former Oregonian reporter, Nkrumah said he has no new job lined up.

Meanwhile, Adams is projecting an air of business as usual at City Hall.

Reporters rushed to meet him as he walked toward the City Council chambers on Monday morning. He said only that he was happy to get back to work.

The council members discussed the I-5 bridge project

and didn't talk about last week's events, which included calls for Adams to resign and days of seclusion during which the mayor said he consulted with friends and advisers about his future.

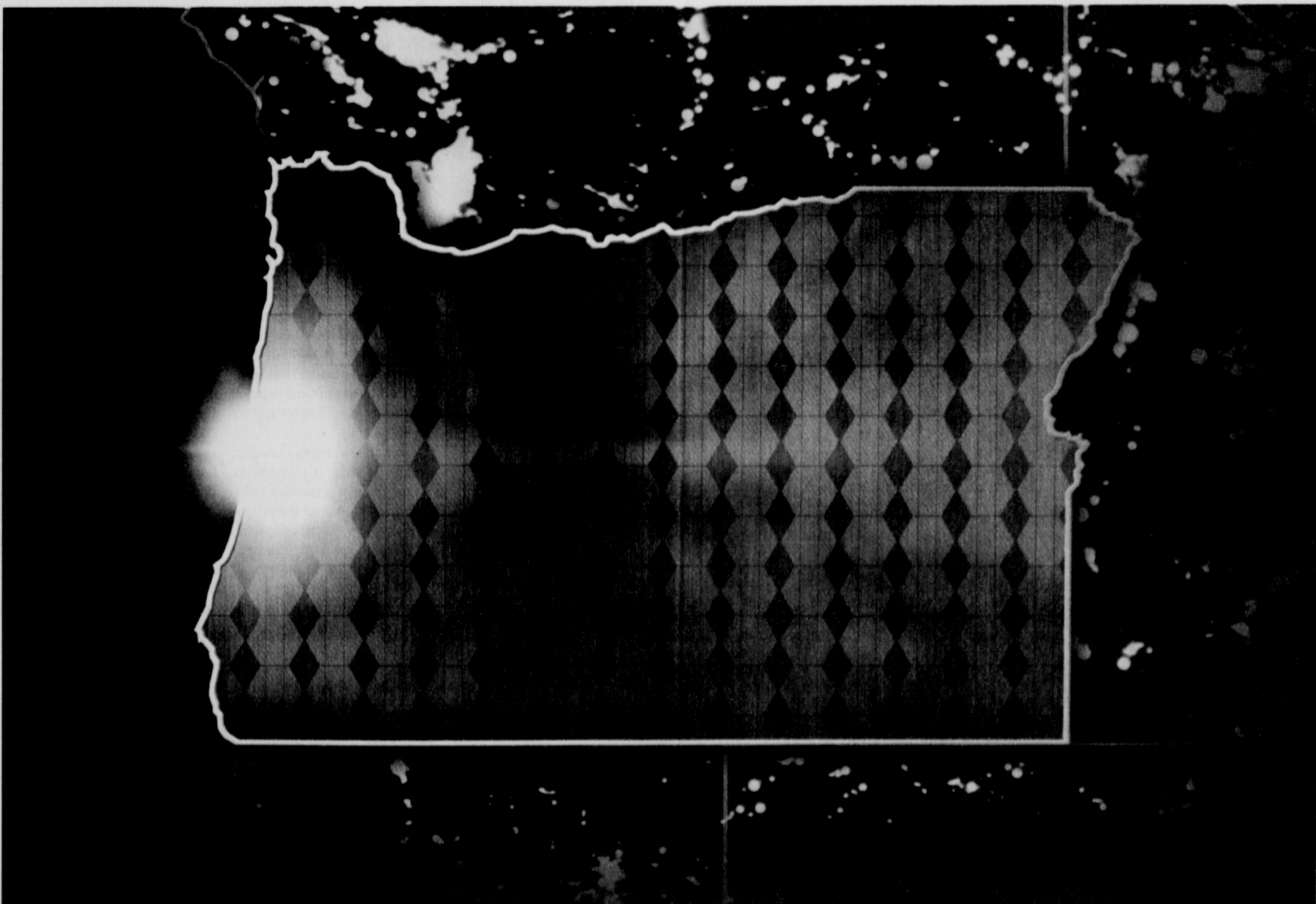
After meeting with council members on Saturday, Adams said Sunday he would not resign.

At the beginning of his campaign for mayor in 2007, Adams denied he had a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old legislative

intern. But Adams admitted last week that they had sex after the young man turned 18 and tried to cover it up.

The scandal has resulted in an investigation by the Oregon Attorney General.

Michael Sweeten (from left), Michael Hearn and Chris Skrapits attend a Friday night rally supporting Portland Mayor Sam Adams. (AP Photo)



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