

Time Runs Out

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

in city neighborhoods.

He also represents the elderly who find it difficult to keep up with house maintenance, and the costs and fines he faces could put him at risk of becoming homeless.

Harris says the city has not given him any accounting of what it will charge for the removal of his personal property, and a cost estimate was not readily available from the city when the Portland Observer sought more information. Harris says there were threats of assessments of \$500 a day and he claims the personal loss for the seizure of his possessions alone could run in excess of \$150,000.

On the potential for more big fines and liens, he said, "I don't plan on paying a penny."

In 1986, Harris purchased the home at 4015 N.E. 10th Ave., a house located in the King Neighborhood in the heart of a historic African American community.

Back then most of the dozen or so houses on both sides of his street were occupied by black residents, he says. Today, Harris believes he's the only African-American left on the block.

City nuisance records dating to 2007 describe trash and junk, broken fences, stored vehicles, and other items surrounding his home.

Harris says the complaints are harassment. He sees them as part of a pattern to get disadvantaged residents to move out and make way for an incoming population. Like many longtime residents, he's had scores of solicitations to buy his property as builders, realtors and more well-to-do forces work to open up new development in a desirable inner-city neighborhood.

If Harris were to move, the property would be ripe for demolition, which is exploding in north and northeast Portland, as developers look to create expensive new homes for a new population that has trended to be a higher income, urban professional and white.

Harris admits his property needs work and updating. Many people would see his collection of materials, including parked cars and motorcycles, as an eyesore.

But Harris says he had a lot of good stuff, including a barbecue pit in the back yard and a freezer on his back porch with meats and ice cream inside. He is a neighbor you would also like personally. He likes to engage in friendly conversation, reminisce about the past, and get people engaged in the political process.

On Sunday, he was taking his regular seat on public access TV, lobbying for the creation of the Oregon Black Museum to save local histories and preserve important artifacts from black families.

Harris comes from a family who valued the work ethic, he said. His brother is Roy Jay, one of Portland's biggest political activists, a longtime promoter for the black community who serves as the executive of the African American Chamber of Commerce.

As far as what's next, Harris says he looking for help in his battle against the city and the fight against displacement for other members of the black community facing similar pressures.

Harris asks people to give him at call.

"We must stick together, that's what I want to hear," he said.

To reach Harris, you can call 503-388-2963.

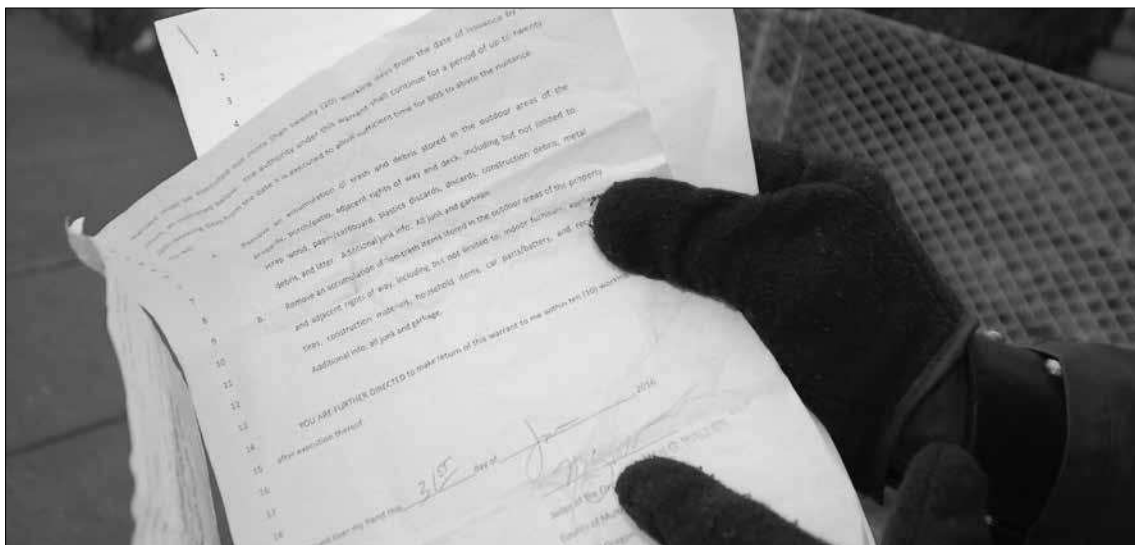


PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When Joseph "King J" Harris received a court order to remove all the possessions from the outdoor areas of his home because of a nuisance complaint, he thought it fit into a pattern of historic racism against African Americans. Harris pointed to three initials that looked like KKK to the right of the judge's printed name and was upset. The Portland Observer brought the document to the attention of the court and found the letters may actually be KRR, the initials of a court clerk who works for the judge.

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