

Front Page News

Grants Pass City Council declines to change process for proclamations

By Vickie Aldous of the Daily Courier

With Grants Pass Mayor Sara Bristol planning to issue a proclamation honoring LGBTQ+ Pride Month in June, a City Council majority on Monday rebuffed an effort to rein in her ability to make proclamations.

In an email sent to at least one council member Monday morning, Josephine County Republican Party Chair Holli Morton said she is hearing from multiple citizens that they don't want Grants Pass associated with a month of celebrations of LGBTQ+ activities.

"Please do whatever is necessary to prohibit this from taking place," Morton wrote in the email. "This is a very conservative county and most citizens want to focus on Boatnik, Fabulous 50s, Music in the Park and other activities that support ALL citizens — not just a few who many feel are off track."

Bristol said she received a request from Rogue Community College's Rainbow Club to issue a proclamation recognizing Pride Month in June.

Pride Month, typically held in June in America, grew out of Pride marches that started in the 1970s to publicly advocate for equal rights.

During a Monday workshop meeting, Councilor Dwayne Yunker brought up the issue of the mayor making proclamations that he believes are political.

He pointed out the rules for proclamations.

Rules adopted by the City Council in 2020 state, "Proclamations should reflect inclusiveness, not exclusiveness, and recognize that the strength of our democracy is our diversity. It must not take sides in matters of political, ideological or religious controversy or individual convictions."

The rules say a proclamation should have citywide significance and be relevant to Grants Pass. Proclamation requests must come from a local resident or organization, not for example, a national advocacy group.

Yunker said the mayor shouldn't make a proclamation unless she believes all eight City Council members and all Grants Pass residents would support it.

"Should we be taking sides on anything? Should we be promoting things that aren't backed by 100% of the residents of Grants Pass? If the answer is 'no,' the question should never even be brought up," Yunker said.

Yunker said he personally would favor a right-to-life proclamation, but knows such a proclamation would be divisive.

His request to address proclamations died when a majority of councilors expressed no interest in tackling the issue.

Councilor Rob Pell was with the majority of councilors who didn't think the proclamation process was in need of a fix.

After Monday's workshop, Pell provided a copy of the email sent by the county GOP's Morton, plus his response to her request to stop the LGBTQ+ Pride Month proclamation.

"I feel fortunate that we live in a constitutional republic where the rights of the minority are respected and protected," Pell wrote back to Morton.

Pell said in his email response that proclamations come and go, and very few reflect the direct interests of everyone — except in the sense they respect and celebrate collective and individual freedoms.



The Josephine County Republican Party has fielded a slate of local school and library board candidates concerned about LGBTQ+ and racial issues — prompting a rupture with some local Republicans who believe that focus is divisive.

During the Monday workshop, Pell said no proclamation will please everyone. He said religious groups that avoid eating certain types of meat might be aghast at a proclamation recognizing Future Farmers of America, while communists might get upset by a proclamation that appears to support capitalism.

City Council Chair Valerie Lovelace said respecting diversity is part of the council's mission. She said she is comfortable with the mayor's proclamation planned for June.

"By making an issue of this, we are doing more damage," Lovelace said.

Councilor Vanessa Ogier said the topic of changing the proclamation process was brought up in a spirit of intolerance.

"This is a colossal waste of our time to even have this discussion," she said.

Proclamations are typically read at the beginning of regular City Council meetings to raise awareness or show appreciation for something.

The mayor's proclamations this year have covered a range of topics, including awareness about the often-deadly drug fentanyl, Drinking Water Week, Grants Pass being named a Tree City USA and equal pay for women, according to past meeting agendas.

Mayors in other towns also commonly issue proclamations to celebrate or raise awareness of an issue.

The Medford mayor's proclamations this year have covered topics that include Black History Month, Veteran Suicide Awareness Month, Child Abuse Prevention Month and Fair Housing Month.

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