

NEWS

Reps seek to end local topless rallies

Joanna Woodson

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N.C. representatives filed a statewide bill in late January, that if passed, outlaws the annual topless rallies held in downtown Asheville. **Tim Moffit, a Buncombe County representative, and Raye Brown of Davidson County** agreed to co-host the bill.

"I requested that we seek legislation in order to help address the issue. It's a state law, it's not a local ordinance and municipalities cannot preempt states," **Asheville Mayor Terry Bellamy** said. "It wasn't an Asheville-based issue. I have not had one person who lives in our city limits say, 'Hey mayor, I want you to work with me on supporting this effort.' The law was on the books that women could walk around like that."

Bellamy said the problem is not Asheville-based because organizer **Jeff Johnson**, of Alabama, brings the protest to Asheville.

"(He said) he can get away with it here," Bellamy said.

Johnson manages a pediatric practice for his wife, and works as a children's clown when he is not organizing topless rallies.

Although Bellamy said she does not have the authority to make these changes herself, several N.C. cities already have ordinances in place banning topless women who are not breastfeeding. Trying to ban toplessness in a highly liberal city when something is legal statewide could potentially have unwanted repercussions such as law suits, according to city officials.

"There are city ordinances all over the state prohibiting this kind of sexual performance in a public space. That's all we needed here. We've got what I view as a group of moral cowards on our city council who don't have the courage and conviction to take action," said **Carl Mumpower, a former city councilman and vice mayor**.

There have been no problems

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with the ordinances being in place in the other N.C. cities, but no other city in N.C. hosts a topless rally, let alone one with so much local support. Mumpower said he thinks the city government does not want to lose political favor by taking action, and is being let off the hook by passing the problem up to state government.

Bellamy said there was no point to the rally because the women argued for something that was already in place.

"Can't say there were a lot of points being made that day. It wasn't illegal, so what was the point? There was not a point to the rally because they were protesting a law that was currently on the books," she said.

According to Mumpower, the rallies just blurred the line between what he called "stupid stuff," which he said is peacefully walking around topless in support of normalizing breasts, and "illegal stuff."

"Illegal stuff is when you're grabbing breasts, fondling, nursing, dancing provocatively. That's sexual performance," he said. "All they needed was to cite them with a misdemeanor and nobody's going to jail. All they needed was to pay attention."

He said a lot of underage children watched the rallies, and underage women participated. According to N.C. state law, this is not much of a problem unless the adults present themselves in a provocative manner around a person under the age of 16, which, according to Mumpower, seemed to happen. However, rather than a simple misdemeanor as he suggested,

a public sexual performance like this could land a protestor with a felony.

According to **Sarah Bothma, a senior interdisciplinary studies student at UNC Asheville**, the nudity is a completely natural phenomenon, but in America, women's bodies are politicized and sexualized.

"As much as I support this movement and I support the idea behind it, I think that the onlookers don't understand the empowerment of being able to go topless and saying, 'I care about my body, and I stand against rape.' The onlookers don't get it, so what it does is further objectifies the female form. It's this catch-22," she said.

According to Bothma, however, women as well as men in America can be immature about rallies such as this, because there has always been a stigma--.

"Unfortunately a lot of people slutted it up, and that is the problem. That's where my problem with the rally becomes, is that they take this wonderful idea, but when you have women making a spectacle, then it corrupts the message you're trying to send," she said.

Although Bothma does not necessarily agree with the rallies, she said she definitely does not support the proposed legislation. Mumpower, proclaiming himself a proud Republican, said he does not agree with Moffitt's bill either, but for a different reason. He

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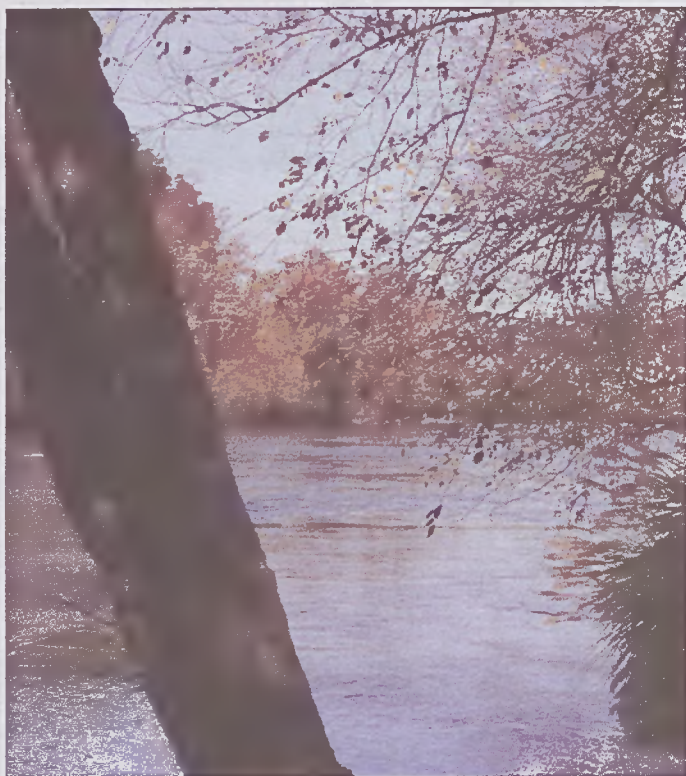


Photo by Ricky Emmons - Photography Editor

The French Broad River is one of the waterways that runs through Asheville and neighboring Tennessee.

Coal ash disposal threatens WNC environmental health

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Sandra Diaz grew up in a large family and had a difficult time making her voice heard. Now she works with Appalachian Voices, helping others find their voice when it comes to environmental issues like coal ash disposal.

As the North Carolina campaign coordinator for Appalachian Voices, Diaz focuses on protecting the Appalachian region's air, land and water. The nonprofit group specifically centers on reducing the negative effects of coal combustion, a large source of energy in the Appalachian region.

"We believe that when you look at the whole lifecycle of coal from mining to waste disposal, it is the single largest environmental issue facing the region," Diaz said. "Eventually

we'd like to see us not relying so much on coal for electricity."

A coal ash holding dam at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston Fossil Plant in Roane County, Tenn., broke on Dec. 22, 2008, causing one of the worst industrial waste spills in U.S. history and bringing this issue to national attention, according to Diaz.

"When the TVA spill happened (the EPA) kind of reassessed the situation with coal ash and the regulations around that. It hasn't really changed much in over 20 years," Diaz said. "The EPA set out to do a rule-making, which they committed to finalizing at the end of 2010, and we are here in 2013 without those new rules."

Coal ash, a product of burning coal to fuel power plants,

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