

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

CELEBRATING OUR FOURTH YEAR

Asheville, NC

Serving the Southern Appalachian Gay/Lesbian Community

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Asheville Gay and Lesbian
Information Line:

253-2971

A project of the Asheville Gay and Lesbian
Community Council

Gay and Lesbian Youth Hotline:

1-800-347-TEEN

Thurs.-Sun. 7 p.m.-12 a.m.

To report anti-gay/HIV+
discrimination/violence:

Asheville-Buncombe Community Relations Council:
252-4713

SALGA: 253-1656

U.S. Department of Justice toll-free:

1-800-347-HATE



(Both opponents and supporters of Asheville's Anti-Discrimination Ordinance express their views. Photos by Allen McNulty)

Asheville Passes Ordinance

by Charlotte Goedsche

On May 17 the Asheville City Council passed an ordinance prohibiting discrimination "in the hiring, promotional and disciplinary practices of the City of Asheville...against any person for any reason that is not related to bona fide occupational qualifications for the relevant job classification or job performance."

Gays, lesbians and bisexuals who work for the City, and those who apply for City positions, are now protected from discrimination by this ordinance. This is a major victory, since neither federal nor state legislation protects us against discrimination.

The ordinance passed by a vote of 4-3, with council members Leni Sitnick, Barbara Field, Chris Peterson, and Mayor Russ Martin voting for the ordinance, and Carr Swicegood, Rock McClure and Herb Watts voting against it.

The ordinance had been introduced by Sitnick at the City Council meeting on May 3, and was passed on the first reading by a vote of 4-3, with council members divided as on May 17. Before

the second reading, the Council voted to amend the ordinance, and it was the amended ordinance that then was passed.

The original draft of the ordinance specified 18 reasons for which discrimination would be prohibited, including "sexual orientation."

According to David Hurand of WCQS, Council member Sitnick received calls from "a lot of people" who felt that the proposed ordinance was not inclusive enough. "What about smokers, people with epilepsy, the homeless?," they asked.

Calvin Allen, Director of the Investigative Reporting Fund, reported that, according to Council member Field, the Council wanted to "strengthen the ordinance" and "make it more inclusive." The Council thus amended the ordinance by deleting all specific categories and adopting the broader wording.

The ordinance also urges "All citizens of the City, individual and corporate,...to use their power and influence to the end that this City shall be one of equal opportunity for all citizens." With this, the City of Asheville has clearly taken a stand for equality for all.

Over 1300 Attend Ordinance Debate

by Charlotte Goedsche

At the Asheville City Council meeting of May 17, Barbara Field, Chris Peterson, Leni Sitnick and Mayor Russ Martin, i.e., the four Council members who had voted for the non-discrimination ordinance on May 3, introduced an amendment to that ordinance.

The amendment removed the long list of categories of people against which discrimination would be prohibited, and substituted broader wording protecting "any person" against discrimination "for any reason that is not related to bona fide" job qualifications. The amendment passed 4-3.

After the proposed ordinance had been amended, Mayor Martin opened the floor to discussion, and gave everyone present the opportunity to speak. It was only after the public input that the Council then voted on the amended ordinance. Once again, Field, Peterson, Sitnick and Martin voted for the ordinance, thus making it law.

The entire meeting lasted about five hours, and was attended by more people than any other City Council meeting in the history of Asheville, according to David Hurand May 20 on "Byline," Hurand's weekly show on WCQS. Police estimated the crowd at 1,300.

According to several other sources, roughly two-thirds of the audience opposed the ordinance, while one-third supported it. However, a lot of the opponents of the ordinance weren't prepared to speak.

Fundamentalist pastors, upset by the inclusion of the term "sexual orientation" in the original ordinance, had urged their congregations to attend the meeting.

Calvin Allen of the Investigative Reporting Fund, Hurand's guest on "Byline," stated that the fundamentalists "were afraid there was some kind of gay or lesbian agenda that would force an unwanted lifestyle onto their lives."

Rev. J. B. Higgenbotham told City Council that the gay community was "trying to destroy our families," according to Allen.

Hurand noted that all the fundamentalists he had interviewed refused to use the term "sexual orientation," insisting that it was a "behavioral or lifestyle choice."

Not all clergy opposed the ordinance. Paul Clark reported in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* of May 19 that "nine pastors...spoke against the ordinance," while "six clergy members spoke in favor, and 30 in the Asheville area back it, according to a letter Martin received."

Hurand quoted Rev. Andrew Gentry's remarks to the Council: "It's sad--anyone who uses religion in order to deny the dignity of another human being...."

Anyone who uses religion to deny a person their inheritance as a child of God...commits the greatest blasphemy, because they are trying to sanctify their own bigotry in the name of their religion."

Joan Marshall, deacon at All Souls Episcopal Church and mother of a gay son, told the Council, according to Allen, "I do not have one immoral child and four moral children.... But I do have four children who had a happy childhood and one who did not, because he was

"...that lady over there...called me a 'faggot'...."--Carlos Gomez

discriminated against and teased and tormented and ostracized, not only in school but also in his church."

Monroe Gilmour, coordinator of WNC Citizens for an End to Institutional Bigotry, who is not gay himself, related "one of the most poignant things at the

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