

WE SHOULD FORM OUR OWN LGBTQ COMMISSION.

On December 2, the City Council Finance Committee addressed a proposed Ordinance to form a LGBTQ Commission. to advise, assist, and support city leaders on LGBTQ matters. The commission's purpose went on to include recommending legislation, policies, programs, procedures, or administrative actions that advance social, economic, and political equality or oppose those who do not. It went on to provide to establish Mayoral and district powers of appointment of the thirteen members.

The idea, on its own is exciting, compelling, and overdue. However, wisdom includes knowing who to ask for something that they can give and when. This includes the question of whether it is something you and others are able do themselves. The crucial question is why a City Council formed LGBTQ Commission needed now, what will it accomplish, and are there better ways to accomplish the motivational goals.

The HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT began by the vision of a handful of activists in 1989. I chaired HRP from 1990 through 1993. In the 1991 election HRP endorsed ten of the thirteen winners. The City Council did not bestow on us the authority to endorse; we seized it. After years of painfully learned political skills, on June 4, 1993, the Human Rights Ordinance passed eight of thirteen for and zero against. The vote only occurred because Councilwoman Swope provided the ninth vote needed to bring the matter to a vote. Over the next few years our success resulted in the slow deterioration of the incredible political machine we built. The power of the "Gay Vote" is now the even greater "LGBTQ-family, friends, and neighbors vote." However, it is a power without leadership and direction.

The singular and most tangible result our 1993 success is that since 1993 we had and continue to have the full power and authority to protect LGBTQ rights through the KCMO Human Relations Department and its Human Rights Commission. Our representative on the Commission has served since his appointment in 1995. There are seats open for volunteers. It was the Human Rights Commission that requested the City Council update its anti-discrimination prohibitions to include gender identity. The ordinance passed unanimously on April 4, 2008.

City Council actions occur among the morass and weight of all the, both urgent and mundane city-wide issues and concerns. Authority and inclusiveness granted by them is as much a burden as it is a boon. Today they are functioning amidst the worst pandemic in our country's history, KCMO fiscal deficits for 2020 and the years to come will be massive. Ordinance Number 2000907 is not the appropriate action we should demand. It is counter-intuitive to the stated goals to seek political equality and representation to advance LGBTQ representation through empowering and tasking a city-wide legislative group with choosing who of us will serve. Such action gives the power of representation to a body that does not include us.

The LGBTQ support to create a representative group identifies the need for us to come together under our own authority and create an umbrella organization with duly chosen representatives from our constituent groups. We have abundant leadership to organize, fund, and set goals. This group could select liaisons to the Mayor's office, council members. They should reestablish screening and recommend candidates running for elected positions that represent our needs and concerns. This group could be an empowering clearing house for LGBTQ individual appointments to serve throughout city committees, boards, and commissions. Open positions are abundant; the key is matching skills and interests with openings and providing community endorsement.

Katheryn Shield's legacy as a LGBTQ advocate screams for a LGBTQ to follow her exemplary history. In her tenure she has demonstrated that a good councilperson represents the needs of the entire community including, neighborhoods, community organizations, and individuals. An independent LGBTQ organization could and should vet LGBTQ candidates for not only the Fourth District at large but county, state, and national offices. Having an LGBTQ individual or individuals in every elected or volunteer seat means we are there to speak up.

Electing folks who know we supported them openly creates and maintains freedoms for LGBTQ and all disenfranchised groups. LGBTQ members and participants on every board, commission, task force, and public meeting is the open road to LGBTQ voice and influence regarding issues that affect us and intersect with others throughout the community.

Our community intersects with all shades of diversity, spirituality, nationality, and ideology. The political power of this reality has not been structurally operationalized. We are an iceberg of votes without leadership. Our freedom to act, organize, fund raise, and advocate as a non-governmental group unbound by the Sunshine Law surpasses the illusionary joy of a City Council or Mayoral established Commission. The LGBTQ leaders of 2020 and beyond need to formalize and operationalize the unity and voting power of our visible and invisible constituency. If not now? When?

I support the need for a city-wide organization that represents the LGBTQ community. There is a great and lasting value in an organization that can build leadership, encourage LGBTQ community members to apply for appointments in leadership positions throughout the Kansas City Missouri Commissions and committee appointments.

There is untapped talent throughout the LGBTQ community and its supporters to identify needs and provide funding to meet those needs. We are already volunteering throughout Kansas City. In times of prosperity it would be reasonable to ask for city, county, state, and federal support. However, this is not possible at present and it is unreasonable to think that it is. An independent umbrella organization organized without dependency on elected officials could also seek philanthropic support. We proved with our response to the HIV / AIDS pandemic that we could do what others could not or would not.

I recommend that the Finance Committee permanently table Ordinance 200907 and LGBTQ advocates not petition City Council members to further consider it currently.

Voting for or against this ordinance or voting to table Ordinance 200907 is not a litmus test for Council Members support of the LGBTQ community or its needs. We know there are council members who support our community's needs. Council members demonstrated this when they unanimously passed the Human Rights Commission's request to add gender identity as a protected class in 2008. Presently and in the near future our City Council has community wide needs that surpass their capacity to meet them.

We should ask not what the City Council must do for the LGBTQ community but what we can do for ourselves.

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