



COMMUNITY NEWS

BBH Pride proposes ‘equity statement’ to condemn discrimination in Broadview Heights

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Broadview Heights residents gathered outside City Council chambers May 2 to share their feelings about Pride Fest, an LGBTQ+ event scheduled for June 8. (Bob Sandrick, special to cleveland.com)



By **Bob Sandrick, special to cleveland.com**

BROADVIEW HEIGHTS, Ohio -- BBH Pride, a local LGBTQ+ advocacy group, has asked the city to post on its website an “equity statement” that would condemn homophobia, racism, sexism and xenophobia.

A draft of the statement given to city officials says that Broadview Heights historically has welcomed all people and has recognized the rights of individuals “to live their lives with dignity, peace and free of discrimination.”

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“We feel strongly that it is time to put this commitment to equity and inclusion into writing for all current and future residents of our city,” the draft statement says.

Mayor [Sam Alai](#) told [cleveland.com](#) that the city is working on the equity statement. He said administration officials, including Law Director Vince Ruffa, have reviewed the statement and “were fine with it.”

“However, no action will be taken without a (City) Council discussion,” Alai said. “No date has been set for that discussion, but it will be announced to the public when it comes forward for council’s input.”

[Jennifer Speer](#), president of BBH Pride, a nonprofit, said other Cleveland suburbs, including [Shaker Heights](#) and [South Euclid](#), have created equity statements similar to the one proposed for Broadview Heights.

Speer said the City of Strongsville is working on an equity statement as well.

Strongsville Mayor Thomas Perciak didn’t return emails asking about an equity statement in his city.

Also not returning emails on the subject were Brecksville Mayor Daryl Kingston and North Royalton Mayor Larry Antoskiewicz.

“Just like corporations and school districts that are developing statements, as well as implementing DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) departments, city leaders are realizing that it is time to declare their communities welcome, affirming and safe for all,” Speer told [cleveland.com](#).

Speer said equity statements enrich a community, send a welcoming message to anyone considering a move to a city, boost the economy and attract talent.

“Cities without up-to-date non-discrimination policies, hate ordinances or equity statements risk falling far behind when it comes to housing value and quality of life,” Speer said.

Speer first mentioned an equity statement to Alai in February, according to an email she sent to him that month.

Councilwoman Jennifer Mahnic was copied in the email.

In the email, Speer said that [Equality Ohio](#) -- a nonprofit that advocates for fair treatment and equal opportunities for Ohioans regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity -- is watching what is happening in Brecksville and Broadview Heights when it comes to Pride Fest.

The City of Broadview Heights is hosting and co-sponsoring Pride Fest June 8 at the city's amphitheater in front of City Hall.

BBH Pride and the City of Brecksville had been unable to agree on a location for the event.

"Additionally, I'd like to set up a meeting with both of you (Alai and Mahnic) to discuss how Broadview Heights can recognize Pride month (in June)," Speer said in the email. "There are lots of wonderful ideas."

Speer said she, BBH Pride member Laura DeJulius and a representative of Equality Ohio met with Alai, Mahnic and Councilman Brian Wolf March 4 to discuss the equity statement, which would make clear that acts of intolerance or aggression against LGBTQ+ residents would not be tolerated.

Equality Ohio did not return emails.

Speer told [cleveland.com](#) that BBH Pride is now conducting a "community needs assessment," which involves polling LGBTQ+ residents in Broadview Heights.

"We have already seen proof that they want their leaders to stand up for them and declare that they are welcome there, whether that is to walk about town, attend church, raise families, spend their money or just feel safe,"

Speer said.

The equity statement draft proposed by BBH Pride says the city was built on diversity and individuality and believes the commonalities and differences among residents are assets.

The statement calls Broadview Heights a “dynamic community that welcomes, respects and encourages the contributions of all people.”

“Broadview Heights commits itself to ensuring equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of local governance and community life,” the draft equity statement says.

“Therefore, we strive to make these values operational and will approach all areas of servitude with fair treatment, equal access and full participation in all of our institutions and programs.”

The statement pledges the city to practice non-discrimination.

“No resident shall feel separate or treated differently whether due to race, color, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital and/or familial status, language, mental and/or physical impairment and/or disability, military status, economic class, immigration status, foster status, body size, criminal history or any of the other characteristics that are often used to divide people,” the draft statement says.

The equity statement ends by saying, “We believe in the public sector for the public good. Advancing equity and inclusion is critical to the success of our community.”

Read more from the [Sun Star Courier](#).

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