

Mayor expects Heber City to consider new policies after backlash to Pride banners

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by Jeremy Harris

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Heber City Mayor Kelleen Potter says she expects the city to consider official policies for Main Street banners after taking some serious criticism over privately funded banners hung for Pride month. (Photo: KUTV)

HEBER CITY, Utah (KUTV) — Allison Phillips Belnap wanted bring the energy of Pride month to her hometown of Heber City. She contacted Mayor Kelleen Potter in May to ask if the city would hang privately-funded banners with a rainbow flag and the words “Pride in the Wasatch Back” along Main Street.

For that reason, Potter says she expects the city council will discuss how to handle the banners on the city-owned poles along Main Street.

“I think there will be enough of fallout like that,

that there will be an official policy,” Potter said.

Monday morning, Heber City got a pat on the back from the ACLU of Utah, which said in a statement that the city is doing the right thing by leaving the banners up, despite criticism.

“A big part of wanting to get these flags up was being able to say, ‘you’re not alone’,” Phillips Belnap said. “There’s so much stigma attached to coming out as LGBT in our community.”

Mayor Potter thought the idea sounded great and approved the banners, unaware of the controversy it would stir.

“I didn’t expect it to get to be this big of an issue,” Potter said.

While most of the feedback has been positive, Potter tells 2News that some of it has been shockingly hostile.

One woman wrote the mayor to say she was going to tear down the banners herself if the city didn’t remove them. The mayor says a local preacher wrote her to ask if the city was planning to put up banners honoring criminals in an effort to “make them feel accepted.”

“We have a lot of people telling me, ‘We’re going to bring anti-abortion flags and anti-immunization flags, etc.’,” Potter said.

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“They can’t start taking things down or putting thing up based on their agreement or disagreement,” ACLU of Utah Legal Director John Mejia said. “In this case, it’s not the city taking the position, it’s the city saying that the lampposts are available for people to apply to put up their banners.”



Heber City Mayor Kelleen Potter says she expects the city to consider official policies for Main Street banners after taking some serious criticism over privately funded banners hung for Pride month. (Photo: KUTV)

The ACLU says the city poles are considered a "limited public forum," meaning the government-owned venue is open to private expression and the city may not exclude messages because of content or viewpoints of the speaker.



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“Removing the banners would be a serious mistake, since, as noted, viewpoint discrimination is not allowed in a limited public forum. As such, capitulating to public complaints about the banners would likely violate the First Amendment rights of the person who applied for and was granted the ability to place the banners,” the ACLU statement reads.

ACLU of Utah letter:

<https://www.acluutah.org/newsroom/item/1547-aclu-of-utah-letter-to-heber-city-about-pride-in-the-wasatch-back-banners>

The banners' creator says she maintains her original hope that the Pride message will help LGBTQ+ people feel accepted in Heber City.

“I’ve been getting story after story about people who grew up in Heber and feared they could never be accepted here, and now there’s hope that they can,” Phillips Belnap said.

