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City Council expands on gender identity

The city expands gender definitions to non-binary individuals.

By Maria Kuiper

maria-kuiper@uiowa.edu

On Tuesday night, the Iowa City City Council voted 7-0 to update the city ordinances concerning gender identity and human rights. The City Council agreed to amend Title 2, "Human Rights," Chapter 1, "Definitions."

Currently, the ordinance defines gender identity as "a person's various individual attributes, actual or perceived, in behavior, practice or appearance, as they are understood to be masculine and/or feminine."

The new amendment will remove these terms to make it inclusive for nonbinary expression. Nonbinary expression means individuals who believe that they do not fall under male/female identities.

According to the American Psychological Association, it is difficult to estimate the number of individuals who identify as nonbinary because of limited research. However, it estimates that nonbinary individuals make up 25 to 35 percent of the populations that identify as transgender.

The ordinance defines these terms in order to protect community members of Iowa City against discrimination and to be consistent with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states that the United States outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin.

The Iowa City Human Rights Commission was established to spread information, educate the community on discrimination and human rights, provide necessary enforcement, and to protect individuals from discrimination.

City Attorney Eleanor Dilkes said she believed the ordinance needed to be updated.

"Our current gender-identity definition talks in binary terms," Dilkes said. "This change recognizes that gender identity is not binary and should include any number of identity expressions."

City Councilor Kingsley Botchway said he was excited about the change.

“As a progressive city, our policy should speak to [and] continue the conversation on gender identity,” he said.

City Councilor Mazahir Salih agreed with Botchway.

“I am really glad our city is looking to define these terms,” she said. “This way we can make our city inclusive for everyone.”

This is not the first step Iowa City has taken toward gender inclusiveness.

As previously reported by *The Daily Iowan*, as of 2016, University of Iowa students had the option to self-report a variety of gender identities, such as he, him, his, she, her, hers, they, them, theirs, ze, hir, hers, and ze, zir, zirs on the MyUI system.

In 2013, the UI also became the first public university in the country to allow students to identify as transgender on admissions applications.

In a 2017 message from UI President Bruce Harreld, he said the university “will not tolerate anything but a safe and inclusive campus for people of all backgrounds, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or country of origin.”

Several states in the U.S. are making strides in becoming more inclusive toward nonbinary individuals. D.C., Oregon, and California offer nonbinary people the option to put X on their driver’s licenses in place of male or female, and other states have introduced legislation for this and for changes on birth certificates.

<http://daily-iowan.com/2018/02/07/council-moves-on-gender-identity/>