

Springfield News-Sun, OH, USA

Springfield commission may vote to change non-discrimination ordinance

By Michael Cooper - Staff Writer

Posted: 6:00 p.m. Monday, January 29, 2018

SPRINGFIELD — Springfield city commissioners may vote Tuesday on whether to add sexual orientation to its non-discrimination ordinance.

The commissioners will vote on the issue at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 30, at City Hall Forum, 76 E. High St.

**RELATED:** [Springfield to vote on adding sexual orientation to discrimination law](#)

The current ordinance prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, ancestry, sex, national origin, age and disability. If approved, sexual orientation would be added to the ordinance.

However it wouldn't apply to portions of the ordinance that may affect "religious schools, churches engaged in religious activities and owner-occupied residences with not more than three unrelated renters," according to the proposed legislation.

That specific language was included to not infringe upon religion to address the concerns of local residents, leaders said.

The ordinance might be changed to clarify the word religious and add language to protect religious organizations that aren't directly affiliated with a specific church but were started based on their belief of a holy text, Springfield City Commissioner Rob Rue said.

Both Mayor Warren Copeland and City Commissioner David Estrop told the Springfield News-Sun they each plan to vote yes on the ordinance. Rue also plans to vote yes at this point, he said. Commissioners Kevin O'Neill and Joyce Chilton remain opposed to the ordinance.

**RELATED:** [Board: LGBT discrimination exists in Springfield](#)

A 2017 report from the city's Human Relations Board said discrimination based on sexual orientation exists in Springfield and should be covered by local laws. The report recommended adding sexual orientation to the city's non-discrimination ordinance.

In February 2012, commissioners voted 3-2 against amending the city's anti-discrimination codes to include sexual orientation. The topic was debated for months before large crowds.

Chilton, O'Neill and former Commissioner Dan Martin voted against the issue, while Copeland and former Commissioner Karen Duncan voted in favor of it.

A group of residents opposed the amendment, including local churches and religious organizations. The opponents said evidence of specific cases of discrimination in Springfield couldn't be produced.

Since that time, gay marriage was legalized by the U.S. Supreme Court and an LGBT Pride Festival has been held in Springfield each of the past three years.

The discussion has continued over the past five years at city commission meetings with Equality Springfield — a local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual advocacy group — asking commissioners to reconsider it.

In 2014, the Human Relations Board began collecting data through surveys and public meetings to gauge discrimination in Springfield. The three most common concerns cited included racial discrimination, the north/south divide and LGBT discrimination.

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### **Staying with the story**

The Springfield News-Sun has written extensively about possible changes to non-discrimination laws since the issue was first debated in 2011-2012.

#### HOW TO GO

What: Springfield City Commission Meeting

When: 7 p.m., Tuesday

Where: City Hall Forum, 76 E. High St.

<http://www.springfieldnewssun.com/news/local-govt--politics/springfield-commission-may-vote-change-non-discrimination-ordinance/D0qkPr7f4uTQZtb5gV4m0O/>

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