

## LGBTQ+ event regulation effort fails in Castle Rock

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Participants at a past Douglas County Pridefest in Castle Rock. Photo by CastleRockPride.org



By Mike McKibbin / NewsBreak Denver / June 8, 2023

**[CASTLE ROCK, COLO.]** — An effort by a town council member to further regulate events like the upcoming Douglas County Pridefest at the county fairgrounds in Castle Rock was denied by a split town council Tuesday night.

Last year's LGBTQ+ event [became controversial](#) when a drag show "wardrobe malfunction" exposed fake female breasts on a male performer while children were in the audience.

The county commissioners recently approved [new event guidelines and regulations](#) to prevent similar occurrences. The new rules did not bar such events and this year's Pridefest is scheduled for Aug. 26 at the fairgrounds.

### Letter to commissioners sought

Councilmember Tim Dietz said the commissioners did not go far enough and wanted the county to adopt an 18 and older requirement for Pridefest "to protect and not oversexualize children."

He asked his fellow council members to approve a motion to send a letter to the commissioners to urge them to make the change.

Several council members said they weren't aware the council would be asked to take the step before the meeting and wanted more information gathered by town staff before proceeding.

"I think we put too much on our staff to decide things in Castle Rock," Dietz responded. "This council needs to decide more things for ourselves."

Town Attorney Michael Hyman said the issue comes down to what the county gets to do with its own property.

"I tend to think it is within their purview to determine the events and the rules for what takes place," he stated. "It would be very difficult to enforce a discriminatory direction without something more to indicate a need for this age restriction."

Hyman also called the county's fairgrounds rules "fairly extensive." He noted, "They don't allow anything similar to a sexually oriented business."

The motion to send a letter was denied on a 2-5 vote, with Dietz and Councilmember Laura Cavey in favor. Mayor Jason Gray, Mayor Pro Team Kevin Bracken, Councilmembers Max Brooks, Ryan Hollingshead and Desiree LaFleur opposed.



Castle Rock Town Councilmember Tim Dietz. Photo by Town of Castle Rock

### **'Emotional night, very stressful'**

Dietz then motioned to continue the conversation at the council's June 20 meeting.

LeFleur said what was being discussed was a violation of constitutional rights and freedom of speech.

“If you don’t want to attend an event, don’t buy the tickets,” she said. “That starts in homes. It’s not for me to govern anyone or tell them what to do. I don’t want to be governed either.”

“This is a very emotional night, very stressful,” LeFleur continued, her voice breaking with emotion. “I don’t want to be a hater, a hypocrite, I want to follow the law and be a good person, and this just doesn’t feel right for anyone to infringe on anyone’s rights.”

“I can’t believe we’re having this conversation in Castle Rock,” said Hollingshead. “This is not a national news narrative. Whatever happens in other parts of the country, Castle Rock is an accepting place that lets people be who they are and has respect for their freedoms and rights.”

Hollingshead added that his constituents do not want the town to waste taxpayer money by “going after people to be hurtful.”

Dietz’s second motion was then denied on a 3-4 vote with Dietz, Cavey and Brooks in favor. Gray, Bracken, LeFleur and Hollingshead were opposed.

“Where do we draw the line?” Gray asked. “If we ban one group, we kind of have to ban them all. I will not put the town council or the town in legal jeopardy or spend hundreds of thousands of dollars that take away from police and firefighters or put anyone in town on the line for a lawsuit we won’t win.”

### **Most speakers favored town code change**

The council then listened to close to 30 people — most reading from prepared comments — on the issue. The majority of those who spoke in the packed council chambers were in favor of making the town code more restrictive concerning adult entertainment businesses and events.

The first row of seats was occupied by those in favor, and the second row featured many people wearing Pride t-shirts. One man in the first row often held his cell phone so the camera showing the meeting online and focused on speakers showed his screen with the words “Don’t target our children.”

Pastor Dave Love of Calvary Castle Rock church said the claim that backers of the change wanted to ban Pridefest was a “false narrative” spread by the council.

“That’s not why we’re here,” Love said. “No one here wants to cancel the Pride event or hate those who go to the Pride event. That’s a straw man, and you guys just lied to all of us here, and you owe us an apology. We’re here because we don’t want children in front of adult entertainers. So stop the false narrative. That’s ridiculous.”

Love added he believed in free speech but felt “some things shouldn’t be done in front of children, period, end of story and we all know that.”

Alex Darke said he was a drag queen who performed under the name Sister Dottie Bair. Darke said while those who spoke for the restriction “talked a good game about not hating anyone and just wanting to protect

children, the undercurrent of their arguments is I, as a queer man and a drag nun, are unsuitable to be around children because I'm inherently sexual or a corrupting influence."

"That just by knowing a child I'm somehow grooming them," Darke continued. "That rhetoric and on drag queens is barely disguised hatred and prejudice, and it has no place in our governance systems. It's crystal clear to me what their actual agenda is, and it's not protecting kids. They're not asking to prevent parents from taking their kids to Hooters."