

Planned DougCo PrideFest event continues to spur concern



By Mike McKibbin / NewsBreak Denver / July 27, 2023

[DOUGLAS COUNTY, COLO.] — Castle Rock Pride organizers promised Tuesday night that the group's Aug. 26 PrideFest at the Douglas County Fairgrounds would not repeat last year's controversial incident.

The [LGBTQ+ support group](#) also explained what steps the group had taken since a drag show performer last year exposed fake female breasts to an audience that included children. The sheriff's department promised deputies would be on hand next month to ensure participants follow all rules, regulations and laws.

A full room and over 200 people online watched the [hour-long county commissioners' live town hall](#) meeting to explain the county's steps to ensure a "family-friendly" or "G-rated" PrideFest. Sheriff's deputies were also on hand in case the crowd became rowdy or people had to be removed. None were.

Citizen comments were roughly split between those who oppose and support PrideFest.

David Love, pastor of Calvary Castle Rock church, said he was "100% against bad behavior before children."

"I'm not against the First Amendment or any group of people," he added. "But if you want to have an honest dialogue, (last year's event) wasn't an incident. It was a plurality of things."



Castle Rock Pride President Anya Zavadil explains last year's PrideFest incident during a town hall meeting. Photo by Douglas County/YouTube

Promoters promise no repeat incident

Castle Rock Pride President Anya Zavadil said last year's incident occurred due to inappropriate clothing worn by the drag show performer and the performer's lack of cooperation with organizers before the event.

A designated Pride entertainment official also had a medical emergency during the planning process and did not adequately review the drag show performer's act, added this year's entertainment director, Arthur Casey.

Both Pride officials guaranteed this year's event will not repeat last year's incident.

Pride's chief of security, Michael Clarkson, said "Any performer who includes any nudity or any partial nudity will be ejected immediately and prevented from reentering the grounds. There won't be any lewd or lascivious behavior."



A self-described "G-rated" drag performer, Lala Queen, talks to a crowd at Tuesday night's live town hall meeting. Photo by Douglas County/YouTube

A self-described "G-rated" drag performer, Lala Queen, said she has performed in Colorado since she was 12.

"It's very possible for drag entertainers to do G-rated acts," she added. "We know the space on the 26th is G-rated, so we will change our acts accordingly."

Queen stated she is also a suicide prevention counselor for queer youth between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m.

"I want to see Pride events where they can feel at home, and if that's taken away, that's when we get child suicides," she said. "So I promise we can create a G-rated space and do it very well."

Policies ban sexually-oriented businesses and acts



Douglas County Attorney Jeff Garcia. Photo by Douglas County/YouTube

County Attorney Jeff Garcia said his first task after being hired by the county a few months ago was to help amend the county's fairgrounds policies and procedures.

"The U.S. Constitution and the Supreme Court say we cannot discriminate against free speech based on different ideas," Garcia stated. "We updated our policies to say any user, not just Pride, of the fairgrounds is not permitted to operate anything similar to a sexually-oriented business as defined by the county zoning code."

Garcia added that means no nudity, lewd or sexual behavior is allowed, along with many other specific acts. He noted last year's fairgrounds policy did not reference sexually-oriented businesses or behavior.

Garcia also said Kirk Hall on the county fairgrounds, where PrideFest is held, is subject to Castle Rock town zoning rules. This seems to counter a recent opinion by the town attorney. Other parts of the fairgrounds are outside town limits.

Commissioners optimistic event will be done right

Commissioner George Teal, who responded to last year's incident by calling for a ban of Castle Rock Pride from future fairgrounds activities, said he was open to working with the group on security at this year's event.

"We both need to keep our promises to each other," he said. "That can seem like added security is needed, but it may be working together to reach our goals."

However, he also said videos of last year's PrideFest before the fake breast exposure showed "fondling and simulated masturbation."

"We want a fairgrounds where a parent can take their child any time and not worry about what that child might see," Teal added.

Commissioner Lora Thomas said she had the county human services department review videos of last year's event, "and they saw no evidence of any child abuse."

She also noted that some commissioners, law enforcement, and Pride officials will be on hand to ensure the August event is done correctly.

Commissioner Abe Laydon, who publicly identified himself as an "aesthete" in an Oct. 11, 2022 tweet, said he supports the Catholic Church and the Boy Scouts of America, despite thousands of allegations of sexual abuse of children against both groups.

"But am I going to say the Boy Scouts can't come to the fairgrounds or Catholics can't come to the fairgrounds? No," Laydon stated to a few hoots and hollers over his comparisons of both groups with Castle Rock Pride.

"I support organizations having second chances to do what's right," he added.