

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 13, 2023

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: COUNCILMAN R. KIRK McPIKE *RKM*

SUBJECT: PRIDE ARTWORK ON KING STREET

In a memo dated April 29, 2022¹, the City Manager affirmed the City's support for the LGBTQ+ community and efforts to promote greater awareness, particularly those that lead to inclusivity and a safe environment in Alexandria for LGBTQ+ persons. However, he also relayed the City's reasoning behind rejecting a request of the Human Rights Commission to paint rainbow stripes in the crosswalks at the intersection of King Street and Washington Street. According to the memo, Transportation & Environmental Services interprets Federal Highway Authority and Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices standards as precluding artwork in crosswalks.

However, more than 100 cities around the world, including many in the United States such as our neighboring jurisdiction of Washington, DC, have painted rainbows (or rainbow and other colors such as light blue, white, pink, brown and black) in crosswalks to denote their support of the LGBTQ+ community. While there has been Federal government pushback in some cases, there are no studies indicating that such crosswalks reduce pedestrian safety.

In February, I met with members of the Human Rights Commission, who were understandably disappointed by the City's decision to reject their 2021 request for Pride crosswalks. During the meeting, I noted that the crosswalk they requested was across Washington Street, which is part of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, and thus both a fairly high-speed street and one the Federal government has more interest in than they do the average street in Alexandria. At the meeting, the Commission members suggested an alternative to rainbow crosswalks: painting Pride elements along the 100 block of King Street, which, of course, is permanently closed to vehicle traffic.

¹ See memo "Council Update: Rainbow Crosswalks to Support LGBTQ+ Community."

In recent weeks, I have discussed this issue with several other members of Council, and the City Manager. In those discussions, there has been an openness to using the pedestrian courtyard in the 100 block of King Street for this sort of purpose, but greater interest in finding a way to have more traditional Pride crosswalks. For the second alternative, I have suggested rainbow crosswalks crossing King Street in the 300 block directly in front of City Hall, just to the west of Fairfax Street and the east of Royal Street. This location would be suitable, in my opinion, for two reasons: first, it is a very prominent location in the City and, second, it is a low-speed area, with significant transit and pedestrian traffic.

As we hold our first meeting in Pride Month of 2023, I would like to ask the Council to take the following actions:

1. Request that the City Manager work with staff to report back to Council by October or November of this year on the feasibility of completing Pride artwork elements on plaza at the 100 block of King Street or the 300 block of King Street crosswalks before next June, so that the Council can make a decision on which project to pursue;
2. Request that the City Manager have staff coordinate with the Human Rights Commissions, the LGBTQ+ Task Force and the Commission for the Arts to develop recommendations for Council to consider for Pride artwork in the chosen location, including ways such a project could involve local artists; and
3. Request that the City Manager then work with the relevant departments of the City to implement the approved artwork before the City's June 2024 Pride Celebration.

This process would allow us to respond to the reasonable request of the Human Rights Commission for a permanent LGBTQ+ Pride display in the City, would allow that Commission, the Commission for the Arts, and City staff to weigh in regarding the best option for such a display, and would allow the Council to use input from City staff to make a final determination on where and how to implement this proposal.

With the Council's support of this proposal, we can mark the start of Pride 2024 not just with our annual Pride Festival, but also with the unveiling of a permanent piece of Pride artwork.

Cc: Jim Parajon, City Manager
Jean Kelleher, Director, Office of Human Rights