

Diversity ordinance debated

Dearborn Heights looks to stop bias

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The Detroit-based Triangle Foundation, which serves gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals, pushed Monday night during a Dearborn Heights meeting to show why including sexual orientation and gender identity language is necessary in an ordinance that creates a commission to promote diversity in the city.

The town hall meeting comes less than two months after the Dearborn Heights City Council unanimously approved the ordinance to form the Community and Cultural Relations Commission. The ordinance has come under fire from the American Family Association of Michigan, a Midland group that promotes

what it calls family values and has a strict stance against abortion and homosexuality.

According to the organization's president, Gary Glenn, many Dearborn Heights residents were against the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity language in the ordinance.

Glenn is considering launching a ballot initiative that would require residents to vote on whether they want the language in the ordinance.

The Triangle Foundation, which helped get the gender identity language in the ordinance, says the American Family Association just wants to divide the residents of Dearborn Heights.

"We believe outsiders from Midland are trying to stir up hate in the community," said Sean Kosofsky, director of pol-

icy for the Triangle Foundation.

About 30 residents from Dearborn Heights and neighboring communities attended.

"I'm a resident of Dearborn Heights and I knew about what was going on so I decided to come over here," said Lori Moos. "I am in full support of this ordinance."

The Dearborn Heights ordinance was created as a way to address a string of incidents including several cross burnings and the vandalism of a mosque in the city. Police say the vandalism at the mosque was not anti-Muslim.

The original ordinance just included language from the state Civil Rights and Disabilities acts. The ordinance was later amended to include sexual orientation language. The motion to add the language carried 6-1. The ordinance as a whole passed unanimously.

"We are confident one way or another that the language will be removed from the ordinance," Glenn said Monday, referring to the possibility of launching a ballot initiative that would require Dearborn Heights to vote on the issue.

But the controversy over the ordinance has caused several problems, said Dearborn Heights Mayor Daniel Paletko. In spite of the conflict, Paletko said he is prepared to submit his five appointments for the seven-member commission to the City Council at its first meeting in December.

"The commission has no regulatory power. It was created to foster better relations and diverse groups and better understanding," Paletko said. "The commission will have no investigative power."

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