

# The Oregonian

SURVEY SUPPORTS SEXUAL MINORITY CENTER

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Summary: Steps after the questionnaire include raising money and determining budgets to operate a support facility in Portland

More than nine in 10 respondents to a survey of Portland's lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people and other sexual minorities called a community center for them very or somewhat helpful.

Those involved in the nonprofit Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Questioning (**LGBTQ**) Community Center Fund say such responses and others to its survey demonstrate enough need and interest to keep going on the project.

"This tells us to take the next steps," said Sam Adams, a key organizer and former chief of staff for Mayor Vera Katz. "It does not give us what we need to put a shovel in the ground."

Next steps by the end of this year include raising money and figuring out budgets to open and run a center. Another task: easing any concerns from other sexual-minority organizations that money for a center would squeeze out donations for their groups.

The survey, though unscientific, is billed as the first comprehensive survey of Portland's sexual minorities. It offers glimpses into local residents' views about violence and discrimination against them along with the community's assessment of its top needs.

In addition to support for the center, the survey found that:

\* Seventy-five percent of respondents said they are open about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

\* Sixty-eight percent feel a part of the gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning community, but 71 percent wish they were more a part of that community.

Organizers say that wish to feel a larger part of the community dispels perceptions that deep fractures exist among the community's components.

"They may feel good about themselves, but there's this sense out there that there's more," said Gwenn Baldwin, the fund's co-chairwoman.

\* Respondents rated the top three civil rights issues facing them as health insurance or other job benefits for same-sex partners; legally recognized gay and lesbian partnerships

with the same rights and obligations as marriage; and hate-crime protections based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

\* More than seven in 10 rated the amount of violence against sexual minorities the same as a year ago. Twenty percent reported less violence, and 9 percent said more violence is directed against the community. One in three reported discrimination based on individual sexual orientation.

"The first incident that comes to mind is when I gave a friend (though not boyfriend) a hug before boarding a bus," one respondent wrote. "For the entire trip, this man kept lecturing me about how 'God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,' etc. Two other boys on the bus were laughing at the topic, while the rest of the bus seemed to be trying to avert their eyes and pretending they weren't hearing anything. I just wanted to take the bus home in peace."

\* Ninety-three percent said they would use a community center, and 30 percent would volunteer to help create that center.

More than 1,500 people answered the survey questions, which were available this summer on the Internet, in publications such as Just Out and at gay-pride events.

About 42 percent of respondents identified themselves as gay, 32 percent lesbians, 10 percent bisexual, 5 percent straight, 1 percent transgender and 1 percent questioning, with the rest checking multiple boxes.

Respondents' top-rated programs and services for a center were prevention, testing and counseling for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases; art, culture and music; and youth services.

Top-ranked functions were a building that serves as a visible symbol of the gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning community, office space for organizations and a library/history center.

A glance at comments accompanying the surveys shows a wide diversity of opinion. Many were thankful and offered assistance. Others warned of the need to start slowly, citing financial and low-usage problems elsewhere along with past local efforts that collapsed.

"I feel that Portland's gay community is in a rut," one respondent wrote. "Please don't allow a new community center to be simply a new home for the same ol', same ol'."

"I really feel the idea of a community center is completely on track," another wrote. "Portland needs to unite its GLBT residents into a stronger community. Coming from someone like me, a 34-year-old male who is struggling with coming out, finally, it would be nice to have resources or even friendly faces who know what coming out is like to help guide."

Katz endorsed the idea of a center, citing it as a place where young gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning people could feel less alienated and as a meeting place other than bars, which the survey showed as the top meeting place.

Katz said it's too early to decide whether city money would be tapped for the project's next steps. The city has provided \$5,000 of federal Community Development Block Grant money, although most of the work so far has relied on in-kind volunteer contributions.

Groups that describe themselves as favoring traditional families have objected to the use of public money for centers designed for sexual minorities.

Organizers of the local effort do not know yet what the mix of public and private money might be. They are equally adamant that they -- like any other minority group -- should not be precluded from consideration of financial support.

An advisory group for Portland's Burnside Triangle in downtown's West End has recommended that a community center for sexual minorities be located there. The survey said the favored location for a center would be on the eastside.

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