



## Wilton Drive Voice Wants To Protect City's LGBTQ Heritage

John Hayden - Category: [Wilton Manors](#) - Published: 09 April 2024 - Hits: 11369



Photo via Carina Mask.

A new, mid-rise apartment building will soon cast a shadow over the heart of Wilton Drive. But a fight for the city's soul already casts a long shadow that extends well beyond the vaunted Drive.

With the Wilma project at The Shoppes of Wilton Manors and a hotel nearby on Dixie Hwy., growth is coming. The question is, who is coming along with the growth?

Wilton Drive Voice (WDV) held a town hall at Eagle, which focused on fears that Wilton Manors will lose its LGBTQ vibe. City Commissioners Don D'Arminio and Chris Caputo were on the panel. They were joined by gallery owner Claudia Castillo, Eagle owner Chuck King, Lorenzo Robertson from Ujima Men's Collective, and Patrick Volkert from Hunters Nightclub.

While concerns about the future motivated WDV to hold the meeting, immediate threats dominated the conversation. Specifically: rents. Like housing around the area, prime retail fronts cost more and more with no ceiling in sight.

King's Eagle has a long lease, but when they went to the property owner to discuss creating an outdoor patio, King says the owner wanted to write up a new lease — at triple the rent. Eagle isn't the only example. Businesses up and down The Drive face similar situations.

WDV formed last year in an attempt to give business owners a collective voice in the future of the city, specifically nurturing the city's LGBTQ presence.

Founder Jude Belanger is promoting San Francisco's model of an All Cultures Heritage Strategy Plan. Driving concerns are that heterosexuals will move into the new housing, bring "straight" businesses in (whatever that means) and de-queer the city.

WDV's website says its mission is "to safeguard diversity and cultural heritage by preserving and advancing traditions, businesses, arts, health, non-profits, and practices for future generations." The focus of the meeting was the queerification, or re-queerification of the city.

However, the event started on a decidedly anti-straight note. Local actor and comedian Peter Bisuito did about 10 minutes of standup to warm up the crowd. The material focused on the lack of baby strollers and crying toddlers on Wilton Drive, and he wants to keep it that way.

It was the kind of standup that, if "babies" and "strollers" were swapped out with "faggots" and "dykes," we would be boycotting, picketing, and doing interviews on CNN.

Belanger says that is not what WDV is all about, telling OutSFL, "We love our straight allies. WDV is about including all cultures."

He also wanted to stress that WDV does not endorse any candidates for office. At one point, Belanger recognized a candidate running for mayor of Wilton Manors and gave, at minimum, encouraging words for the campaign.

None of the panelists were on stage during the comedy set or the political comments, nor did they openly endorse either of the actions.

WDV plans to hold similar events every three months or so.

*Full Disclosure: Reporter John Hayden was invited to attend and ask a question. He did so as a journalist covering a newsworthy event and not as a member of WDV.*

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