

HOP Admits Corporations Buy Parade Placement

At town hall focused on Stonewall's 50th anniversary, critics keep pressure up.



DONNA ACETO

Eugene Fedorko, who marched as early as 1970 and 1971 in New York's Pride Parade, said the event's current "focus" is an insult to the movement's original activists.

DUNCAN OSBORNE



DONNA ACETO

Marianne Roberto Fine, a co-chair of HOP, seen on the left with Sue Doster, the group's director of strategic planning, acknowledged that some agreements with corporate sponsors guarantee coveted early spots in the lengthy line of march.



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Activist Emmaia Gelman termed any guarantee of parade placement based on corporate sponsorship "disgusting."

The organization that produces New York City's annual Pride Parade and related events said that its contracts with parade sponsors allow those companies to purchase a place in the parade, but do not guarantee that their contingents would be included in the three-hour live broadcast of the parade on local broadcast TV.

"I can tell you that there are some multiple-year agreements that include float participation or vehicle participation," said Maryanne Roberto Fine, a co-chair of Heritage of Pride (HOP), during an August 13 town meeting held at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center. "There have been contracts that will give a range, but nothing that would specifically say you will be on the broadcast... There are contractual obligations to placement."

While community groups and non-profits comprise most of the contingents in the Pride Parade, which commemorates the 1969 Stonewall riots that mark the start of the modern LGBTQ rights movement, for-profit companies dominate the event because they use large floats and can field more marchers. Complaints about those companies are longstanding, but in 2017 and particularly in 2018 activists with deep roots in the LGBTQ and other movements began to more aggressively press HOP to limit the corporate presence in the march among other demands.

While activists have long suspected that sponsors can purchase a spot in the parade, inevitably toward the front, this was the first confirmation of that from HOP. It offends activists because the companies are effectively buying a status that they never worked for and have not earned. That the companies are privileged misrepresents the broader community, activists said.

"The issues that our community is working on are not being represented in the best way in this march," said Cathy Marino-Thomas, a longtime LGBTQ activist, at the town hall. "We have a media opportunity for three hours every year now, thank you very much, but nothing that this community is working on is represented in those three hours."

While some in the community see the corporate floats as evidence of the community's success and improved status in the US, Eugene Fedorko, who was in the 1970 and 1971 marches, objected to the current nature of the parade and how it misrepresents of the community's history.

"I cannot believe the focus of the parade has been taken from the heroism of the early activists and their political points," he said. "Corporations were nowhere to be found in

1970 and '71... Now they are acting as though they threw the first brick on Christopher Street in 1969... It's a huge insult to the early activists and the current activists."

In 2018, activists organized as the Reclaim Pride Coalition and, like 2017, demanded a resistance contingent in the parade, which they won. They opposed the required use of wristbands to identify marchers, a practice first employed this year that will not be repeated in 2019. They objected to the new route, which began in Chelsea, headed south on Seventh Avenue, east on Christopher and Eighth Streets, and then north on Fifth Avenue to end at 29th Street. It is unknown if that route will be used in 2019, which will mark the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots.

Chelsea residents were unhappy with the parade being staged in their neighborhood.

"This has to be done differently next year," Paul Groncki, the chair of the 100 W. 16th St. Block Association, said at the town hall. "The impact on Chelsea residents was immense. I had complaints from almost every block in the neighborhood."

The new route was supposed to shorten the parade's run time. In 2017, the parade, which always begins at noon, ended at 9:38 p.m. This year it ended at 9:14 p.m. The parades in 2016 and 2015 were each about eight hours long. In 2010, the NYPD, which issues parade permits, issued an edict requiring that all parades last no more than five hours. The Pride Parade, which is among the four largest public events in the city, has not been close to five hours long in years.

While activists this year were initially focused on demands related to the 2018 parade, they were aware early on that they would also need to tackle 2019, given the significance of the Stonewall anniversary. A concern at the town hall was that HOP may have already signed agreements that require HOP to put sponsors at the front of the parade.

"Stop selling places in the parade," Emmaia Gelman said. "That's disgusting."

Chelsea Angry Over New Pride Parade Route

BY DUNCAN OSBORNE



Pier 97 at West 57th Street and the Hudson River will be the site of Pride Island, HOP dances to be held on June 23 and June 24 to close out the city's annual Pride Month. | DUNCAN OSBORNE

Not a single marcher has set foot on any street or avenue to join New York City's Pride Parade, but at least one Chelsea resident is threatening to sue the group that produces the annual event if it again attempts to stage the start of the parade in that neighborhood.

"For the future, this is not going to happen," said Kimon Retzos, a co-president of the West 15th Street 100 and 200 Block Association, during a June 13 meeting with Heritage of Pride (HOP), the group that produces the parade and related events, and representatives from City Council Speaker Corey Johnson's office. "We will get legal representation to stop this from happening."

For the first time, the 2018 march will be staged in Chelsea, with contingents lining up on the blocks from 15th Street to 19th Street between Seventh and Ninth Avenues. The march will head south on Seventh Avenue then east on Christopher and Eighth Streets then north on Fifth Avenue to end at 29th Street.

With HOP expecting 43,000 marchers this year, Chelsea residents can expect the last contingent to leave the neighborhood at about 6:30 or 7 p.m. on June 24. HOP volunteers will arrive for set-up as early as 5 a.m. that day, though HOP has said in

earlier meetings that its volunteers begin work at 4:30 a.m., so the staging could last for 13 or 14 hours.

In meetings last week, residents complain they only recently learned of plan

Detective Mike Petrillo, a community affairs officer in the 10th precinct, which covers Chelsea, said that clean-up should be completed by 8:30 p.m. on that Sunday assuming that HOP's time estimate for the last step-off is correct.

Since the first march, which commemorates the 1969 Stonewall riots that mark the start of the modern LGBTQ rights movement, the route has gone from the West Village to Central Park or from Midtown to the West Village. The first parades were small with a few thousand marchers and were less disruptive in a residential neighborhood. As the parade has grown larger, it has been staged in Midtown, which is not a residential neighborhood, and headed downtown.

While the city has pressed all parades to limit their duration to no more than five hours, the Pride Parade has routinely run longer. It traditionally steps off at noon, and last year's parade ended at 9:38 p.m. The parades in 2016 and 2015 were each about eight hours long. The route this year is a test for next year's parade, which will mark the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, and is expected to shave roughly 90 minutes off the run time.

The Chelsea residents at the June 13 meeting were uniformly opposed to staging the parade in Chelsea and were particularly angered that they were told this would happen only recently.

Bill Borock, president of the Council of Chelsea Block Associations, was first told of the plan in a May 22 email from Julian Sanjivan, HOP's march director. Paul Groncki, president of the 100 West 16th Street Block Association, learned of the plan roughly two weeks before the June 13 meeting. Another resident, who left the meeting early, first heard of the plan by reading an article in Chelsea Now, a sister publication of Gay City News.

HOP first began discussing a new route for the 2018 parade in December 2016. It had a series of meetings on the route with city agencies, including the NYPD, beginning in August 2017. Ultimately, HOP presented the NYPD with six routes and that agency had selected one by January 22 of this year.

The new route is also controversial in the LGBTQ community.

City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, who is openly gay, was not informed of the route change until well after the decision was made, and he first learned about it by seeing a post on Facebook. Erik Bottcher, Johnson's chief of staff, opened the meeting by saying of the new route, "We don't like it."

Midway through the meeting, Bottcher took the floor again to note that there was press in the room and expand on his comments.

"Last month, the speaker called the mayor's office and said, 'I want this route changed,'" Bottcher said and added that he then went to a meeting with the mayor's office. "At the conclusion of that meeting, I made it clear that there is going to be a different process for picking the route next year."

Sanjivan apologized for the lack of communication at a contentious June 5 town hall on the route that was held at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, and he apologized again at the June 13 meeting.

"I apologize," he said after making a PowerPoint presentation to the residents. "We could have done a better job communicating."



HOP's march director Julian Sanjivan, Detective Carl Locke, the NYPD's LGBTQ liaison, Patrol Borough Manhattan South Executive Officer James Kehoe, Patrol Services Bureau Executive Officer Fausto Pichardo, and Joseph Gallucci, the commanding officer of the NYPD's citywide counterterrorism unit, at a June 5 town hall, the first of several meetings this month where HOP got blowback over its new parade route. | DONNA ACETO

It appears that Community Board 4, which covers the neighborhoods from 59th Street to 14th Street on Manhattan's West Side, is generally unhappy with HOP's handling of the Pride Parade and related events. Johnson once chaired that board.

"A lot of these same concerns were reflected last week at Community Board 4," said Jeffrey LeFrancois, the 2nd vice chair on the board, at the meeting.

Dina Homayuni, an HOP staffer, attended the June 14 meeting of the board's Waterfront, Parks & Environment Committee to finalize plans for HOP's June 23 and 24 dances, called Pride Island, that will be held on Pier 97, which is at the end of West 57th Street on the Hudson River. As a member of that committee began to question Homayuni about the march, Lowell Kern, a committee co-chair, cut her off, noting that HOP had been "beaten up" enough at the prior week's meeting and the night before. Kern had not attended the June 13 meeting, suggesting there is at least some conversation among residents and community board members outside of these meetings.

In a March agreement between HOP and Community Board 4, HOP agreed to take a number of steps to mitigate the sound coming from the dance and to sell no more than 5,250 tickets to the event. The issue of when the June 24 dance will end was unresolved, with HOP saying 11 p.m. and the board asking for 10 p.m.

At the June 14 meeting, Homayuni said the June 24 dance will be "completely done by 10:15" with the final 15 minutes for the fireworks display that ends Pride festivities.

HOP sold out the June 24 dance well before the June 14 meeting, but as of June 15 it was still showing 11 p.m. as the end time for the dance. James Fallarino, HOP's media director, did not respond to an email asking if ticketholders, who presumably purchased tickets to a dance ending at 11 p.m., had been informed of the change.