

**A Brief History of Long Beach LGBTQ+
from 1970 to 2024**

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Long Beach earned a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipality Equality Index (MEI) last year, in 2023 (City of Long Beach, 2023). This score is just the most recent perfect score in an 11-year streak of perfect scores on the MEI starting in 2012 (Munguia, 2020). This index is meant to analyze the adequacy of inclusive policy and government representation of LGBTQ+ people specifically (Human Rights Campaign, 2024). Moreover, it paints a beautiful picture of how welcoming a place Long Beach is for LGBTQ+ folks and its commitment to the LGBTQ+ community. A veritable queer paradise. However, Long Beach has not always been so welcoming and has a sordid past in opposing LGBTQ+ civil rights. Most famously, the 1914 arrest of 31 men in a series of police raids. The police raids of the 606 Club and the 96 Club came from the suspicion of male homosexuality thinly veiled as "social vagrancy." Then-Long Beach mayor Louis Wheaton and Long Beach police chief Charles Cole hired actors W. H. Warren and B. C. Brown to lure and entrap gay men, paying them \$10 for each man they caught. In the ensuing aftermath, John Amos Lamb, one of those arrested and suspected of homosexuality, tragically took his own life because of the shame. Following this very high-profile case, Long Beach made oral sex illegal the very next year. California followed suit banning oral sex in 1916 (Giardina, 2018; Moroney, 2020). Finally, in 1987, a new state law permitted officers to ask for money during stings without fear of entrapment (Zappe, 1987a). Unfortunately, this incident marked the advent of harassment of LGBTQ+ people at the hands of police that would persist for many years to come.

Rob Kramme, then-president of the Long Beach Chapter of the Lambda Democratic Club, in 1984 tried to change the policing practices of vice officers unsuccessfully (Bailey, 1985a). Lambda, whose functions include legal services, also kept records of police harassment of gay men. Fast forward three decades to 2014, where undercover officers arrested Rory Moroney in a sting operation after using suggestive body language to solicit a sexual encounter. Surprisingly and in a historic first, Los Angeles Superior Court judge Halim Dhanidina sided in favor of Moroney and dismissed his charges on the grounds that he was the victim of discriminatory practices (Moroney, 2020; Queally, 2016). Moroney's attorney, Stephanie Loftin had been representing gay men who were victims of these sting operations since the 1990s. At one point she had started a support group for victims at The Center which ended after learning that undercover police had infiltrated the group to spy on them (Lucas, 2020). However, this ruling alone would not solve the anti-LGBTQ+ violence of the Long Beach Police Department. In 2017, while in the custody of LBPD, Sophia Larios was groped, harassed, physically abused and intentionally misgendered by officers (Gazzar, 2019). Larios' case reached an apparent settlement in 2022, though the specifics were not reported through local papers ("Sophia Larios v Long Beach", 2022).

Though much activism was happening in small instances through the years, the burgeoning LGBTQ+ community found itself congregating at small local bars that respected their sexuality. Bars like Li'l Lucy's, which opened in 1966, and Club Ripples in 1972 paved the way for a gay community to grow. Gay people moved into the area from the Midwest (Bailey, 1985a), started businesses and made the area more welcoming (Haldane, 1985; Zonkel, 2019). Later on, LGBTQ+ bars like The Brit, the Falcon, Sweetwater Saloon and the Mineshaft opened up and created more queer spaces. Long Beach joined the realm of the International Imperial

Court in 1971. The Imperial Court is a non-profit organization largely consisting of drag queens that participate in fundraising events for the LGBTQ+ community. The Long Beach chapter serves many surrounding cities (Imperial Court of Long Beach, 2024). One of its members, a local drag queen, Jewels received a key to the city from former mayor Robert Garcia in 2019 for her philanthropy (Ruiz, 2019). In a major step toward equality in Long Beach for LGBTQ+ folks, the Long Beach chapter of the Lambda Democratic Club was founded in 1977 to oppose the barring of gay and lesbian teachers from the classroom. The Lambda Democratic Club took an active role in engaging with the community and supporting LGBTQ+ friendly politicians (Saltzgaver, 2016). Other groups like ONE in Long Beach, Inc., founded in 1977 and formally incorporated in 1980, aimed to provide a variety of services to the Long Beach LGBTQ+ community. The biggest concern for ONE was the growing threat of AIDS and they started one of the first case management services exclusively for persons with AIDS/HIV. They became the Gay and Lesbian Center of Greater Long Beach in 1997 and finally The LGBTQ Center of Long Beach in 2014, lovingly known as The Center (LGBTQ Center, 2024).

Progress was still slow in Long Beach for a few years despite the existence of a group dedicated to the civil rights of LGBTQ+ people. In 1983, Fred Covell, an ally and the owner of the Executive Suite, expressed an interest in giving back to the LGBTQ+ community for the success of the Executive Suite. Bob Crow suggested starting a Pride Parade and Covell funded the endeavor. Bob Crow recruited Judi Doyle and Marilyn Barlow and together they founded Long Beach Lesbian and Gay Pride Inc. to put on a Pride parade for the city (“Bob Crow”, 2012). The first Pride parade happened in 1984 and was met with much push back. The city council was not receptive to the idea of public displays of homosexuality. The most outspoken opponents to a Pride parade at the time were then-Mayor Ernie Kell and Councilmembers Eunice Sato, Warren Harwood and Edd Tuttle (Addison, 2013b; Zappe, 1985). Judi Doyle, then-president of Long Beach Pride, received what she believed to be credible death threats, while the police were not much help prior to any violence arising. Judi Doyle decided that she would march anyway and donned a kevlar vest to march with her fellow community members in a historic moment (Haldane, 1989; Giardina, 2019). The parade next year was met with more anti-queer protest mostly from religious groups opposed to homosexuality (Cairns, 1985; Houser, 1985). The city council banned the sale of alcohol in Shoreline Aquatic Park during the summer months, when the Pride parade is held, with the support of conservative Christian groups. The sale of alcohol was an important fundraising tool, and this effectively stopped the parade. One Christian leader referred to the banning of the Pride parade as a victory (Bailey, 1985b). The Pride parade was moved from June to May in response to the ban. In 1986 the largest hurdle became the insurance of \$1 million (Bailey, 1986). The city laws required that large events held on public property protect potential damages via insurance, however, the fact that the organization’s name featured Lesbian and Gay made it difficult to find willing insurers. In an oral history interview, Bob Crow mentions that this wasn’t an issue for Pride organizations that did not feature “lesbian” or “gay” in their names (“Bob Crow”, 2012). The parade was eventually insured that year thanks to Fred Covell who provided the money, and the organization sued the city over the \$1 million insurance requirement (Brown, 1986; Russell, 1991). Long Beach Lesbian and Gay Pride, Inc sought co-sponsorship from the city to legitimize the event to

those evangelical groups that opposed it every year, but the city refused in a unanimous vote in 1987 (L.A. Times, 1987a).

The LGBTQ+ activism of the 1980s was fraught with city council resistance. Much of the city council directly opposed homosexuality and others simply bent the knee. It was important for victories to secure city councilmembers that would fight for LGBTQ+ rights on the government level. Wallace Edgerton was one of the first people backed by Lambda Democratic club to do just that. Edgerton was at first an opponent to LGBTQ+ people, however a sizeable portion of his district was made up of queer folks. Meeting with them eventually changed his point of view and he became one of their most outspoken allies (Bailey, 1985a). In a series of council votes that led to the dissolution of a nightclub for drag queens, Wallace Edgerton stood among the few who opposed fellow-councilmember Warren Harwood and Long Beach resident Carol McDonald's campaign to essentially shut down a queer space. Harwood made arguments that didn't let slip the discriminatory nature of his decisions, but McDonald was much more open about her disgust of queer people (Addison, 2013a).

Long time Councilmember Jerry Shultz gave a speech during the push for domestic partnerships calling homosexuality immoral in 1996 (Kaber, 1999; Heald, 1998). The speech received a lot of backlash from the LGBTQ+ community, but Shultz stood by his words (L.A. Times, 1996). Echoing the sentiments of former councilmember and former mayor, Eunice Sato who, in 1985, implied that homosexuals were repugnant and had no values (Bailey, 1985a). Such open dislike of LGBTQ+ folks on display by a city councilmember made it very apparent that there was still a long way to go.

The push for Pride in the 1980s spurred people who were hesitant into activism. The LGBTQ+ population was estimated to be about 50,000 people in 1989. Warren Harwood admitted that the community itself was responsible for its successful campaigning. Specifically, their advocacy to a range of local issues, not just the queer ones (Haldane, 1989). The queer community coming together was a powerful motivating force to not simply walk through life with their heads down but live authentically with their heads held high. A queer political awakening was happening in Long Beach and efforts were made to ensure that their voices were heard and represented at the levers of power.

Concerns brought up by the Community

Lambda fought for explicit sexual preference non-discrimination at work and in hiring practices. In 1987, after a failed attempt in 1984, Lambda finally got a draft ordinance in front of the city council to consider. They were backed by the Teachers Association of Long Beach and others and opposed by the Downtown Long Beach Associates business group, a "street preacher" named Bobby Bible Eagle and other Christian fundamentalist groups. Lambda and the LGBTQ+ community got their win in June of 1987 (Kopetman, 1987a; 1987b; L.A. Times, 1987b).

In the 80s, the threat of HIV/AIDS was sweeping the nation, and Long Beach was not spared from the disease. The nature of contracting the disease made ignorant people believe that it was spread by contact with gay men. As cases rose, heterosexual people were also appearing in the numbers. Combined with the anti-gay misinformation, LGBTQ+ people were discriminated

against for jobs and access to some facilities out of misplaced fear (Haldane, 1989). All the while programs and support were limited in scale and access for people affected with the disease. HIV/AIDS at the time was effectively a death sentence. In 1987, the Federal Government had issued funds to provide people with Azidothymidine (AZT), a medication that slowed the progress of HIV. Long Beach received \$200,000 to provide AZT to low-income people living with HIV; however, low recipients cut funding the following year. Though efforts were made to include more people as “low income” by loosening the income requirement, many people with HIV were still denied access¹ (Zeller, 1988). The Long Beach queer community once again banded together to help those afflicted by organizing the very first AIDS/WALK in Long Beach in 1989. Spearheaded by ONE in Long Beach, and supported by Long Beach Lesbian and Gay Pride Inc., Christ Chapel, Metropolitan Community Church and others; they made goals of raising money for HIV/AIDS research, to create support and healthcare programs for people with the disease and to destigmatize the disease through awareness.

While Wallace Edgerton claimed to be a staunch ally, he was reluctant to participate in the Pride parade which exposed a milquetoast attitude towards future activism. The community needed a more committed ally, so Lambda helped elect Alan Lowenthal to city council in 1992 (Peterson, 1992). Lowenthal was an outspoken advocate for the LGBTQ+ and communities of color alike. They didn’t stop there though, Lambda was an important backer of Dan Baker in 1999, Gerrie Schipske in 2006, Robert Garcia in 2009 for city council and 2014 for mayor. Lambda had recognized that the activism of the 1980s had brought more people seeking political victories to the LGBTQ+ community for both funding and votes (Saltzgaver, 2014). Lowenthal, despite religious opposition, would help usher in a huge victory in 1997 (L.A. Times, 1997); backing a city ordinance to allow same-sex couples to be recognized as domestic partners by the city, granting them some legal rights as a couple. Lowenthal was not only popular for pushing LGBTQ+ rights but also for things that everyone needed, specifically low-cost housing. Lowenthal credited the success of LGBTQ+ activism to their commitment to fight for everyone’s rights not just focusing on LGBTQ+ only issues.

In 2006, Long Beach City Council passed a resolution in support of same-sex marriage unanimously (Long Beach, 2006). While Long Beach recognized civil unions for same-sex couples in 1997, marriage was the next logical step. 2000 saw the passing of Proposition 22 that made only marriage between a man and a woman legally binding, disqualifying legal gay marriages from out of state (CBS, 2000). A 2008 California Supreme Court decision made the banning of gay marriage unconstitutional, rendering Prop 22 powerless. Unfortunately, that same year Proposition 8 passed and enshrined in the California constitution that legal marriage could only be between a man and a woman (L.A. Times, 2012). Later, in 2009, ensuring that LGBTQ+ folks don’t get left out anywhere, Councilmember Robert Garcia introduced an ordinance that would ensure equal employee benefits to employees-with-domestic-partners as employees-with-

¹ The denial of applicants came at the decision of Robert Salico, an epidemiologist with the Long Beach Health Department, who stated that, despite more funds being allocated later that year and orders from the Governor Deukmejian to continue to enroll applicants, he would rather give the small number of currently enrolled patients access to the drug for years than to give as many people as possible only a few months of access. It is hard to discern if this was because he was homophobic or trying to make the best of a really bad situation, but ultimately there was a lot of miscommunication that led to funds being cut.

spouses. Garcia wanted to make sure gay couples who couldn't get married would receive the same benefits from their partners (Press Telegram, 2009).

Experience of Elected Officials

Richard Gaylord, the chairman of the City's Planning Commission, ran for city council in 1982, losing to incumbent Eunice Sato. Gaylord wanted to conceal his gay identity but it was revealed and used against him (Bailey, 1985a). In 1999, Dan Baker became the first openly gay city councilmember to be elected. Gerrie Schipske became the first lesbian to be elected into city council in 2006. Schipske made government transparency and serving her constituents her ultimate goal (Zonkel, 2022).

Robert Garcia won his city council race in 2009 and became Long Beach's first openly gay Latino mayor in 2014. Despite his LGBTQ+ status, he believed that we had come a long way in Long Beach because he did not feel the need to address his sexuality during his run for mayor (Saltzgaver, 2016). As a councilmember, Garcia focused on adding green spaces and creating affordable housing. As mayor, Garcia connected the city with its residents through social media, improved transportation and created a school program that gave high school graduates a tuition-free semester at Long Beach City College (Hutchings, 2022a; Equality PAC, 2024). The former mayor was also praised for his leadership in navigating the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, he established trans-inclusive healthcare coverage and improved access to STI screening (Michael, 2022).

There is a lack of LGBTQ+ only concerns from our LGBTQ+ elected officials. A testament to the community's commitment to inclusiveness and a marker of their success. While candidates were voted in to bring LGBTQ+ representation to the city council, they were not elected to pursue LGBTQ+ exclusive policy.

LGBTQ+ Community Now

The Long Beach-L.A.-Anaheim area now boasts over 500,000 LGBTQ+ people as of a 2021 count (Conron et al, 2021). In 2022 Long Beach City Council made plans to make the Broadway corridor, from Alamitos to Temple, the LGBTQ+ Cultural District. Citing the rich and complicated history that the Long Beach LGBTQ+ movement has with the bars and clubs of the Broadway corridor. Proposing adding signage and markers for points of interest for people to learn about LGBTQ+ history. City officials surveyed local residents in 2023 for feedback on what will be done. The city suggested improving lighting and public transport in the area; while some residents asked for projects that were not only focused on businesses saying that such things would make the district accessible only to those with disposable income (Long Beach, 2013; Hutchings, 2022b; 2023b).

LGBTQ+ lifeguards painted a lifeguard tower in the rainbow colors of the Pride flag some time in 2020. It was burned down shortly after in 2021 and the city vowed to rebuild it promptly. It was rebuilt in about three months and the same lifeguards once again painted the tower in those six iconic colors (Martinez, 2021; Tat, 2021).

Long Beach dedicated a park to Harvey Milk in 2013. The first park in the nation to be named after Milk and the first park in Long Beach named after a gay person. At the same time, the city unveiled a wall to honor local LGBTQ+ activists into a Hall of Fame. The park features a Pride flag that is flown year-round (Bradley, 2013; The Sun, 2013).

Starting in 2023, Long Beach City Hall flew the progress Pride flag during Pride month for the first time following a resolution the city adopted unanimously to recognize Pride month and Harvey Milk day. The resolution requires the city to raise the progress Pride flag from May 22 through June, during the week of the city's Pride parade and festival and during important moments to show solidarity (Merino, 2024). The resolution was proposed amid a precipitous rise in anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes in CA and around the nation (Hutchings, 2023a). In 2023, three Long Beach business owners saw their windows broken for displaying the progress flag (Medina, 2023).

Long Beach is the queer haven that it is precisely because of its history, a history that deserves to be remembered and preserved. From a past marred by violence and vitriol, harassment and raids from police and stubborn opposition from city councilmembers who held despicable views; to a present that maintains a radiant reputation the nation over, built by people who were unwavering in their dedication to liberation and the masses of queer people who were spurred to action by rallying calls. A transformation that spanned decades and yet, one that must continue. Though much of the ugliness of the past is behind us, it still rears its head every once in a while. It is for those moments that the LGBTQ+ people of Long Beach remain committed to progress, peace and love.

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