City of Radford says “NO” to Greek Life

When students are accepted and enrolled into a four year college or university, between 10 and 20 percent join a fraternity or sorority. As such, those students wear their organizations letters with pride and display their Greek affiliation on their selected houses for the community to see.
At Radford University, it is not uncommon to see these students showing off their letters. However, the City of Radford has passed a law that does not allow the Greeks to display their letters outside of their houses. They must have written permission from the city or may have them up on days the city has agreed to allow it.
“I think it’s stupid. I feel like if the landlords allow it, then it shouldn’t be a problem,” says Lora Caster a sister from Zeta Tau Alpha.
The law states, “Greek letters, banners and signs are only to be displayed during special events, which are ‘limited to Radford University Homecoming, Rush and Greek Week.’ The location, size and type of sign must be approved by Radford University's Office of Student Affairs and the city's zoning administrator.”
Kenneth Bonk, Radford’s Assistant VP of Student Affairs and Director of Student Activities, says, “It was this ordinance or the city could or would have eliminated all signs in residential neighborhoods.”
Three years ago in July, the American Civil Liberties Union, or the ACLU, threatened to sue the city if the zoning ordinance was not repealed. Today, the ordinance is still in place, and Greek organizations have given up on finding a way to redeem their first amendment right to display who they are.
Other Greek chapters across the state of Virginia do not have such restrictions and display their letters every day of the year. At Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA, Greek houses have their letters above the front door of each sorority or fraternity house.
Officials of the city have said that their goal with the sign ordinance is to preserve the integrity of neighborhoods, but students at Radford think it is for other reasons.
“Both Radford and the city need a scapegoat for drinking, and Greek life seems to be getting the blame,” says Caster,” you don’t see the Hockey house or the Rugby house getting reprimanded and yet they still get to promote their sport on their house.”
“I think it has to do more with the stereotypical image of Greek life,” says Theta Chi brother Matthew Bracy. Like other Greeks at Radford University, Theta Chi and Zeta Tau Alpha have tried to work around the ordinance and obey the rules; but even that isn’t easing the anger of having their first amendment right stripped away.
The ACLU has said that they would back up whoever wants to go against the city’s law, but it’s obvious that no one has wanted to take that risk. Many houses have gotten warnings from the city about letters on their houses and they were taken down, no questions asked.
“There are other things the city needs to worry about than Greeks having letters on their houses,” says Bracy,” but it’s a no win scenario. We can try to get the ordinance repealed, but what happens after that?”
It seems most of Greek life at RU is all on the same page, but they are just worried what could happen if they took the city to the next level. So who is willing to step up and take one for the Greek life team to reclaim their first amendment right?