

[BELVIDERE](#)

EXPLORE MORE:

[BELVIDEREMEETINGSCOMMUNITY](#)

Goblin Market Draws Backlash and Planned Protest Over Drag Story Hour



GOBLIN MARKET

A Gothic Pride Celebration of Art,
Queerness & Autumn Magic

Sunday, October 19 • 10 AM – 3 PM
Belvidere High School, Belvidere NJ (Indoors!)

🎵 Live Music • 🏳️‍🌈 Drag Story Hour @ 1 PM
✨ Free Face Painting • 📖 Banned Book Nook
🍁 60+ Artists & Makers • Food & Fall Magic

★ Follow @goblinmarketnj
#HallowQueerMarket #goblinmarketnj GothiPride
#autumnwithattitude

By Chip O'Chang, Contributing Writer
October 17, 2025

Goblin Market poster that started it all.

Art, queerness and autumn magic — that's the experience promised by flyers for this month's Goblin Market, a witchy art and vendor fair returning Sunday, Oct. 19, at Belvidere High School.

The Goblin Market, organized by Belvidere resident LisaBeth Klein since 2022, has grown from a small Halloween pop-up into a thrice-yearly event celebrating art, inclusion and community. The most recent summer market drew about 200 attendees and 90 vendors, some traveling from as far as Brooklyn.

This fall, however, the event has attracted a different kind of attention: intense local debate. Comments on social media, heated remarks at a recent Belvidere Town Council meeting and a planned protest have turned a community art fair into the latest flashpoint in a national culture war.

From Art Market to Controversy

After three years of relatively quiet events, the upcoming market drew criticism when its flyer included a line announcing: "Drag Story Hour @ 1 PM."

In Facebook community groups, where most of the backlash has been concentrated, some concerns refer to a Banned Book Nook planned for the event. Most of the discussion, however, centers on misunderstanding what a drag story hour actually is.

Drag, Drag Shows and Drag Story Hours

To start, almost everyone knows what drag is — the act of dressing in clothing traditionally associated with another gender. This can be a man

wearing a dress (a drag queen) or a woman wearing a man's suit (a drag king). It's distinct from transgender identity; many drag performers do not identify as transgender.

Drag has long been seen as an art form in the LGBTQ+ community, a celebration of identity as well as an act of resistance to gender norms and societal expectations. Outside of the LGBTQ+ community, drag is usually seen as performance-based entertainment — think “RuPaul’s Drag Race,” a popular reality show that features drag queen performers compete in challenges with lip sync battles, makeovers and dancing.

Opponents often describe drag as inherently sexual, whether provocative clothing or movement is involved or not, but [a PBS analysis](#) found that drag doesn't usually involve nudity or stripping, though performances in adult venues can be more sexualized.

What is Drag Story Hour?

Drag story hours, which began in 2015 at a San Francisco public library, feature performers using the playfulness of drag to encourage reading. San Francisco writer Michelle Tea organized the first event after attending storytime programs with her newborn and wanting more diverse representation in the setting and stories.

After the success of that first event, drag story hours have since been held in libraries, museums, schools, and bookstores nationwide. Supporters see the events as a playful, dress-up version of storytime meant to encourage reading and acceptance.

Critics, however, often describe drag story hours as inappropriate for children, portraying them as inherently sexual despite evidence to the contrary. Some perceive drag story hours as subversive attempts to recruit young children into the LGBTQ+ community, to erode traditional values or to commit pedophilia.

In these heated conversations, actual evidence of predatory behavior by drag performers is rare, but that hasn't stopped anti-LGBTQ rhetoric from spreading. [Drag story hours have become the target of heated political debates nationwide](#), leading to bomb threats, protests and attempts to restrict drag performances through local law.



A June 2024 Instagram

post by the Goblin Market. This was the first public mention of drag readings at the fair.

Goblin Market's Drag Story Hour

What happens at story hour? At the Goblin Market's drag story hour last June, the crowd was small but cheerful under the hot sun. One reader was a Belvidere resident and father who had previously volunteered for the role when Klein had trouble finding actual local drag queens. There were no wigs, makeup, or accessories beyond a couple of chain necklaces the main component of his drag outfit was a modest housedress.

During the roughly twenty-minute reading, the two readers read selected books focused on inclusion, acceptance, and belonging. When they finished, the gathered crowd applauded and the event ended.



Big man, beard, wearing
dress telling stories to
innocent children

Drag story hour reading at the June 2025 Goblin Market. Photo by Chip O'Chang.

The Post That Sparked the Backlash

*Go Chris!
Our Hero!*

Klein said she listed the story hour on this year's flyer simply because attendees had asked for it to return. The Goblin Market has hosted drag story readings since June 2024 without controversy. In fact, it was a popular highlight of past events.

That changed on the morning of Oct. 9 when Belvidere Councilman Chris Allen posted a screenshot of the flyer to Facebook, writing: "Call me crazy, but a drag show shouldn't be held at a school. Who approved this?"

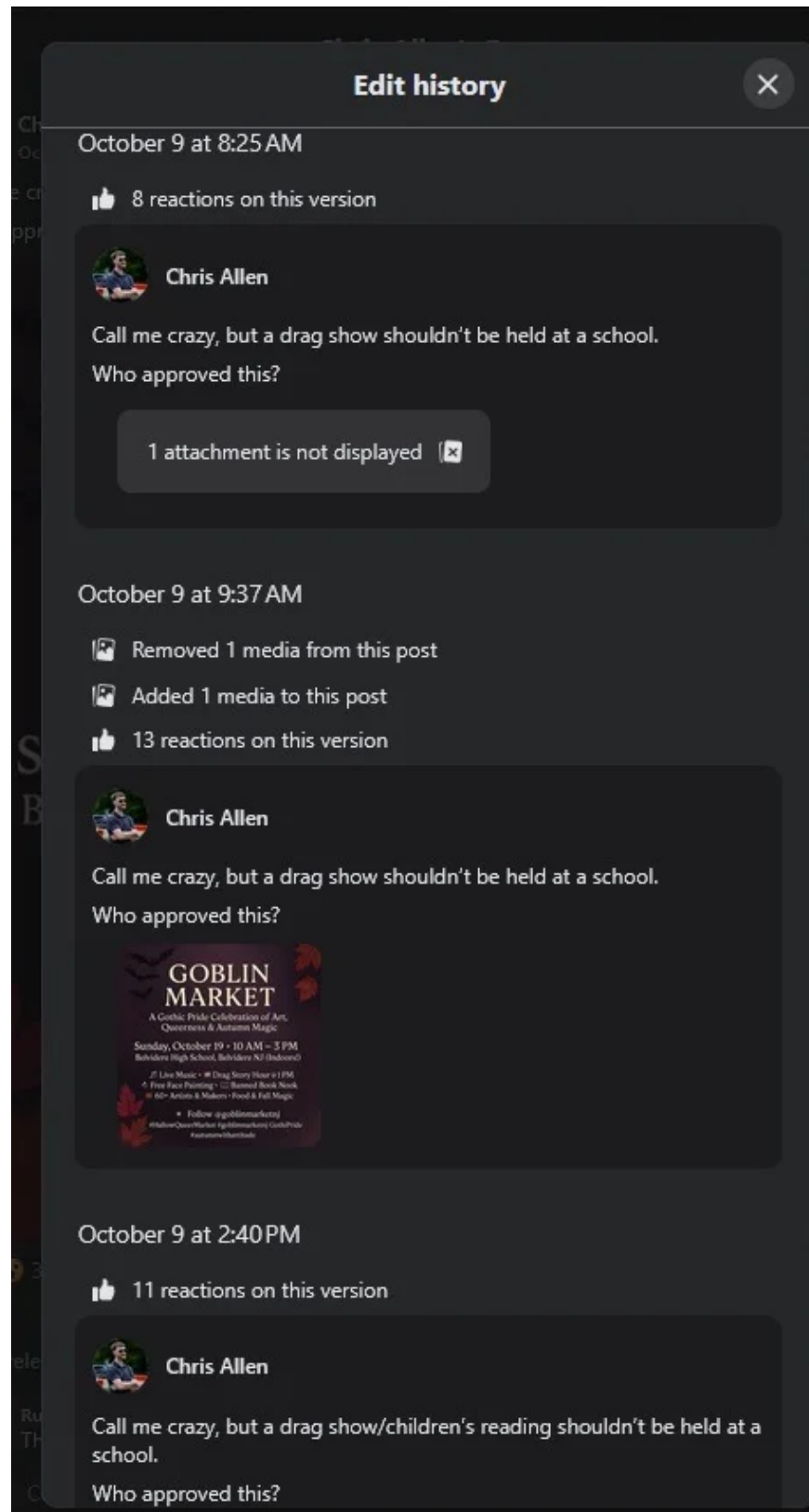
Within hours, a similar post, with a screenshot of a different version of the flyer, appeared in the "Growing Up in Belvidere" Facebook group, asking, "What is going on in our school?"

The posts quickly generated a flurry of comments. Opponents expressed an array of objections, including using Belvidere High School as the venue, the presence of drag performers and even the market's Banned Book Nook, which includes titles such as "This Book Is Gay," "Genderqueer," "The Hate You Give," "1984" and "The Bluest Eye." The Banned Book Nook



debuted at the June market

as a response to nationwide book bans.



Banned Book Nook at Goblin Market. Photo by Chip O'Chang. Arguments on the posts attracted counterarguments, with users clarifying procedures for renting school space, defending LGBTQ+ expression, distinguishing drag shows from drag story hours and expressing anger and disappointment.

By midafternoon, Allen had edited his post from "drag show" to "drag show/children's reading," but by then, the perception that an adult drag show was taking place at the high school had fully taken hold.

A screenshot of Belvidere Councilman Chris Allen's Facebook post and subsequent edits on Oct. 9.

On Oct. 13, a user announced plans for a protest outside the market, scheduled to begin an hour before the fair. That post in "Growing Up in Belvidere," drew more than 700 comments in a 1.3 square-mile town of about 2,500 residents.

Tensions Spill Into Town Council Meeting

At the Oct. 14 Belvidere Town Council meeting, discussion of the Goblin Market dominated public comment.

Unable to attend because of the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, Klein submitted a letter condemning what she described as "a manufactured fire storm spread through town, one fueled not by fact, but by deliberate lies, fearmongering and bigotry." Not because of what the Goblin Market is, but what it represents.

She explained, "A family-friendly, inclusive art market has been deliberately twisted into a target for outrage sparked by Councilman Chris Allen and amplified by those who never bothered to check a single fact."

The letter also referred to a previous incident with Allen at the center. As covered by [Lehigh Valley Live](#), at last July's town council meeting over a dozen residents expressed concern over Allen's social media posts, which included divisive rhetoric and photos of private residences that displayed address information.



Belvidere Councilman Chris Allen holds up a copy of the Goblin Market flyer during the Oct. 14 town council meeting.

Allen defended his social media post and read aloud excerpts of Klein's emails with school officials, arguing that holding the event in a public school was inappropriate. "My problem, along with many other people, residents in this town, is not the event itself," Allen said. "We were fine with it when it was in June at the park. That wasn't a public building that is supported with taxpayer dollars. It's the fact that you bring that nonsense into a school where the Trunk or Treat is operating in the same parking lot."

Belvidere PTO's Trunk or Treat is scheduled for 3 to 5 p.m. on Sunday in the Belvidere Elementary School parking lot. The Goblin Market is scheduled to take place next door in the high school from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., with the drag story hour at 1 p.m.

The public comment also featured remarks from Rev. Gregory Quinlan, president of the Christian advocacy group Center for Garden State Families, who described LGBTQ+ identity as scientifically baseless and dangerous to children. Pastor James Sipes of the First Baptist Church of Belvidere called drag “abnormal” and said more families are homeschooling to avoid such influences.

Other residents defended the event and challenged misinformation. Rebecca Lucas corrected Allen’s deleted post that inaccurately tied the Goblin Market to the Belvidere PTO and suggested a more logical, less emotional approach. Nancy Mason echoed that sentiment, describing the controversy as “much ado about nothing.”



Residents fill the room during the Oct. 14 Belvidere Town Council meeting, where discussion of the upcoming Goblin Market dominated public comment. Photo by Chip O’Chang.

This is Not Us

Mayor Kathleen Miers closed the meeting by urging unity. "I'm deeply saddened by the divisiveness, intolerance and lack of perspective about who we are," Miers said. "This is not us. We are a community of neighbors and friends who have never been divided like this."

She concluded: "I know we can do better to serve the entire population without creating issues and problems. Let's work on that going forward, and remember kindness and understanding for your neighbors. Have a great night."

Her remarks were met with applause.

A Difficult Week

In the days following the meeting, Klein said she faced personal and professional fallout. The local who had read at past drag story hours fears that the backlash could endanger his family. Klein paused her usual event promotion to address concerns from vendors and protect them from potential harm.

To her, the uproar feels like part of a longer pattern of quiet hostility. Klein, who is Jewish, said she hasn't always felt welcome in Belvidere. She recalled seeing antisemitic flyers posted along Mill Street that featured Nazi symbols and falsely accused Jewish people of causing COVID-19, as well as a swastika spray-painted on the train trellis.

As the mother of a nonbinary child, she said the rise in anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment has felt personal. Last Saturday, while walking her dog, an older man approached her and accused her of "grooming children."

"He said, 'You're the problem. We don't want your kind here,'" Klein recalled. "I asked what he meant, but he was already walking away."

At the town council meeting, Klein characterized the religious objections to drag story hour as part of a broader trend of Christian nationalism nationwide — a remark that drew audible scoffs from attendees. Reverend Gregory Quinlan described her statement as "hate speech."

Klein stands by her view.

"When one faith is presented as the only moral authority in a civic discussion, it excludes everyone else, she said. "That's not just anti-LGBTQ+; it's a form of religious bias that tells non-Christians we don't belong."

Despite the tension, she said the Goblin Market's small size doesn't make it insignificant.

"It's a tiny little art market, but it's a microcosm of the bigger picture," Klein said.

The backlash has left her questioning what she thought she knew about her town, but it also reaffirms why she continues.

"Why am I even bothering? I can't say that that thought didn't pop into my head," she said. "But it was drowned out by something else: they're proving my point about why this is necessary."

The [Goblin Market](#) is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 19, at Belvidere High School.

Editor's note: Reporting for this story includes public comments, verified social media posts and firsthand accounts from the Oct. 14 Belvidere Town Council meeting.

Writer Profile [More by this writer](#)



Chip O'Chang, Contributing Writer

Contributing Writer

Chip O'Chang is an educator, fiction writer, and lifelong resident of New Jersey. He has also written for My Life Publications and NJ Indy. He lives in the NJ Skylands with his partner, two cats, and a bearded dragon.