

Occupy OKC designed to be driven by democracy

Protesters chanted slogans and carried signs during an impromptu march through downtown Oklahoma City Tuesday.

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No one is in charge of Occupy OKC protesters — and that's the way they like it.

Minutes after organizers told a group of Occupy OKC participants that a planned march Tuesday afternoon around downtown had been canceled, about 30 protesters were chanting and carrying signs on the sidewalks around Leadership Square.

“That's democracy in action right there,” said a 30-year-old marcher who declined to identify himself. “The people decided. This isn't really an organization; it's people coming together.”

Jay Trenary, a Guthrie attorney and one of the movement's organizers, said he had no problem with the spontaneous demonstration that immediately followed his announcement that the march was off.

Trenary said Oklahoma City police officers complemented the demonstrators' behavior.

“I'm very proud of my fellow citizens and my police department right now,” Trenary said.

The movement, modeled after and in support of Occupy Wall Street, is designed to raise awareness and bring people together to discuss problems and potential solutions, Trenary said. The group has no stated goals or plan of action.

“I'm not concerned by the fact that we don't have a single articulated mission statement for the group. I think that's what we're working on right now,” he said. “What we're trying to do is practice the democracy that we all say we love.”

Trenary compared the group's model, which is designed to reach consensus through assemblies of its participants, to the original Constitutional Convention.

“They had no real plan either, other than we want the place to be better than it is,” he said. “It took them a long time to formulate exactly what the plan of action was.”

The group has no timetable for developing its goals, Trenary said, although “we don't want to be here all month.”

Occupy OKC, which set up in Kerr Park on Monday, has a three-day permit to use the park. That permit may be extended on a day-to-day basis.

The leaderless group, which numbered about 100 on Tuesday, has created scores of protest signs on a variety of issues, ranging from the outsized influence of corporations to the NBA lockout to standardized testing.

Moira Leisy, of Oklahoma City, said she joined the effort because of her dissatisfaction with the nation's current political and economic situation.

“It's almost like there's not enough people to protest all the stuff that's wrong,” Leisy said.

“Something's amiss here,” she said. “The concept that if you did a good job, you'd get a fair shake isn't happening here anymore. It makes me wonder why it took so long for a million people to get mad.”

Occupy Wall Street, a protest that has spanned several weeks in New York City's financial district, sparked a “brush fire” that has spread to Oklahoma and dozens of other cities, Leisy said.

Trenary said Tuesday's planned march was canceled because that event's main organizer recently got a better job, which made it impossible for her to attend.

“Most of our members do have jobs despite what they say in the media about us,” he said. “Most of us are doing this in our spare time. ... If they think we're a bunch of smelly hippies, let them come down here.”

Retiree Maureen Dutton, who brought up the rear of Tuesday's impromptu march, said organizers don't control participants' behavior or opinions.

“They're not our bosses,” Dutton said. “We don't have bosses.”

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