

No 'straight answers' from bathhouse meeting

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The city's gay community is still looking for answers following an inspection of a bathhouse where two men were arrested for indecent acts.

Lyla Miklos, a member of the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender advisory committee, said police failed to give full answers at a meeting Thursday about why the inspection occurred and about the role of the multi-agency task force.

Every member of the GLBT community came away unhappy, Miklos said yesterday.

"Nobody was really giving concrete, straight answers to what we were asking," she said, including not being told what complaint led to Tuesday's inspection of the Warehouse Spa and Bath on Main Street West.

Two men were charged with indecent acts after multi-task agency members entered a common area and allegedly found them performing a sex act in front of other people, said Deputy Chief Tom Marlor.

The city's multi-agency task force, made up of police, the fire department, health inspectors and city building and licensing officers, inspected the bathhouse after receiving a citizen's complaint of a bylaw infraction.

The multi-agency task force inspected 13 other premises that night, including the Skyline Bar and Billiards on Main Street West, Leaf's Sports Bar and Grill on Main Street West and The Blue Angel on King Street East.

But no one knows what the infraction was, Miklos said. She said the group will hold a meeting next week to decide what its next step will be.

Aside from the question of what led to the inspection, she said many other questions remain, including what the multi-agency task force is as well as its mandate and goals and who it protects.

Miklos said they are also looking for stronger communication with the police on what she called "queer safe space" in the city.

"There are very few spaces in town where you feel, as a queer member of this community, that you can be yourself and just do your thing and not have to worry about your space being violated," she added.

But Hamilton Police Chief Brian Mullan said the meeting helped put to rest misinformation surrounding the inspection, in particular, reports of a man being forced to change clothes in front of female members of the task force.

"We wanted to make sure the misinformation that was out in the media was corrected and I think we did that," he said.

Mullan said the inspection was similar to hundreds of others, including those conducted on steam baths and massage parlours.

"We have undertaken with this multi-agency task force to go into licensed premises -- and there's all different types of licences -- and conduct these types of inspections," Mullan said, adding that inspectors look for bylaw violations as well as criminal activity.

"We would keep our eyes open for anything. This was an inspection process ... that was looking for a myriad of things, which included infractions of the various bylaws or possible liquor violations. There are so many different things that we could be looking for," he added.

Mullan said he will be meeting with the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender police task force in the next two weeks.

"The misinformation is what has eroded (the relationship) and what has not helped the situation in the community. We will continue to endeavour to make sure the misinformation is corrected and ask that community if there's something we can do," he said.

Deputy Chief Tom Marlor admits the inspection caused damage to relations between police and the gay community.

"We want to continue to build a bridge with the gay community ... We don't want to see the relationship we've built over the years destroyed.

Neither Mullan nor Marlor knew what the bylaw infraction was that led to the inspection.