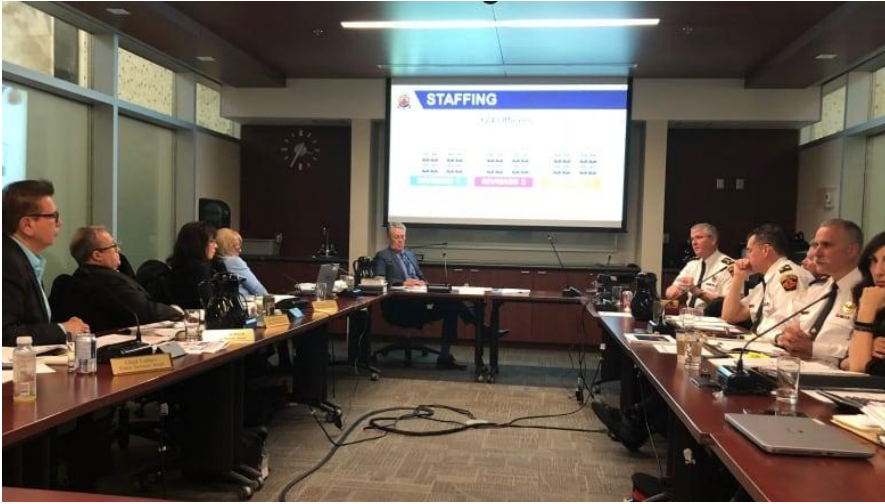


Critics call Hamilton police board appointment a missed opportunity to add diversity

Samantha Craggs · CBC News · Posted: Mar 29, 2019 6:23 PM ET | Last Updated: 4 hours ago



The Hamilton Police Services board has its next meeting in April. (Laura Howells/CBC)

Diversity advocates say they're disappointed Hamilton hasn't used its latest appointment to add some marginalized voices to the police services board.

The city, which appoints someone to the paid board position every four years, chose retired Zip Signs president Fred Bennink for the post this week.

Critics say they have nothing against Bennink. The former president of the Burlington-based company — whose business includes election signs — is likely a fine candidate.

But Matthew Green, executive director of the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI), says the mostly white, mostly male board has lacked "cultural competency."

Adding someone outside that demographic, he said, would show a desire to change.

"Every decision that a city makes, or that government makes, in its appointment of citizen representatives reveals the value system of the people making those decisions," said Green, who was a city councillor last term.



Ameil Joseph is an assistant professor at McMaster University. (Ameil Joseph)

"What we've seen is another example of city council protecting the status quo."

Three people who interviewed for the position echoed that sentiment. Ameil Joseph, a McMaster University researcher who's worked in community and forensic mental health, was among them.

Joseph's work includes dealing with courts and the justice system. He's interned with Waterloo police, he said. He's worked with committees and not-for-profit boards. His dad was even a police officer.

Joseph has applied for the board three times. The city interviewed him this time. He, like the others, wasn't even informed that he wasn't chosen.

"I'm still trying to make sense of it," he said. "I hope people take a good look at this particular example of a failure to be responsive to the community."



Lyla Miklos has served on several city council and community committees.

City council's selection committee also interviewed queer activist Lyla Miklos, who's served on several city and community committees. She's disappointed, she said — and not because she wasn't chosen.

Joseph, she said, would have been a great pick. "They had options."

Queer community has mistrust in police

The queer community, she said, often distrusts police. A recent example is the anger over how Toronto police handled the Bruce McArthur case.

There's only one female board member now, she said. That's disappointing given a recent report showing 70 per cent of sexual assault cases investigators deemed unfounded really weren't.

Hamilton police plan to hire 25 more officers this year

Evelyn Myrie, diversity consultant and Afro Canadian Caribbean Association president, sat for an interview too. She recently authored the city's new equity and diversity framework.

"What they were looking for," she said, "must not have been what we had."

Bennink joins three provincial appointees — Pat Mandy, Don MacVicar and Robert Elms — and three city council members. Elms, a former colonel in the armed forces, recently replaced Madeleine Levy. Mandy is Indigenous and former CEO of Hamilton's Local Health Integration Network.



Matthew Green was Hamilton's first black city councillor. He's long criticized the board for being "culturally incompetent." (Samantha Craggs/CBC)

Mayor Fred Eisenberger chairs the board. He's not on the selection committee.

Mayor had no say

Eisenberger says Bennink will likely be a fine member. But he too wanted to see some diversity.

"I don't know the rationale behind that. Who knows why it was one over the other?"

CBC News is attempting to reach Bennink. Several of the nine councillors on the selection committee weren't available for comment.

Sam Merulla, Ward 4 (east end) councillor, is on the committee but wouldn't say much. He had another meeting and wasn't there for the vote, he said. And the selection process in general is "highly confidential."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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