

3 complaints about police at Pride filed — board will consider independent review

Meeting shut down, people locked out after protests from gallery on Thursday

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Police officers block the door to council chambers after the meeting was temporarily shut down on Thursday. One member of the public stared an officer down. (Laura Howells/CBC)

Hamilton's police services board has decided to explore the costs and benefits of doing an independent review of the events around Pride, during a meeting Thursday that was temporarily shut down amidst heated protests from several people in the gallery.

While the board decides what to do, the police revealed Thursday there are already three complaints filed over its handling of Pride violence, one of which will be investigated by the provincial review agency.

Hamilton police will do an internal review of two service complaints, which protocol requires, while the Office of Independent Police Review Director will review a conduct complaint.

Some board members voiced concerns about complaints being reviewed internally, questioning the optics. Police Chief Eric Girt said he would "not shy away from holding our members accountable."



The meeting was shut down during Detective Paul Corrigan's presentation on hate crimes, when gallery members angrily shouted and chanted against the mayor. (Laura Howells/CBC)

Meeting shut down, people locked out

More than 40 people, including several uniformed police officers, came to watch the afternoon meeting at city hall. But the board walked out within 30 minutes, after people in the gallery started chanting "Fred, you suck" and "Drop the charges."

Mayor Fred Eisenberger was chairing the meeting, and had given "warnings" to the vocal gallery.

People remained in the gallery as board members left the room, calling "shame" and angrily shouting against the mayor and police.

"I've been called faggot more times in the last month than I have in my entire life," a man shouted, condemning police. "This city is not safe."

'No offence' to lack of recruitment booth

The meeting itself heard different views from both the Chief and Pride officials about the Pride controversy. Before the shutdown, Chief Girt discussed the Pride events on June 15.

"Just for clarity again," Girt said, "I take no offence" to Pride's decision to not allow a police recruitment booth at the Gage Park event. His comment was quickly followed by a loud laugh from the gallery.

Pride organizers did not want officers at the festival and he respected their request, Girt said, adding that a couple of plain-clothed officers were on scene.



Members of the public in the gallery at the Hamilton Police Board Services meeting, before it was shut down and people were locked out by police officers. (Laura Howells/CBC)

Pride wants to 'set the record straight'

Later, Pride organizers said they wanted to "begin to set the record straight" in a deputation to the board.

Pride board member Tanya Hendriks said police contacted Pride two days before the event to discuss an operational plan.

Pride made it clear "exactly" where they expected protesters to show up, she said, and they believed police would be outside and ready to intercept potential violence.

"In fact," she said, "We only saw two police cruisers on site, at the opposite end of the park, as far from the protesters as possible while still considered on park grounds."

After the violence — but while the event was still happening — she said officers made "chilling" comments while speaking to two Pride board members.

"Police used this opportunity to ask us why we didn't let them have a recruitment booth, why we didn't hire paid duty officers, and why we didn't want armed and uniformed officers in the event space," Hendriks said, reading from the deputation.

"It was suggested to us, clearly," she said, "that things would have turned out differently" if they had allowed police in such ways.

Hendriks called the comments "unprofessional, harmful, and completely inappropriate."

Neither Mayor Eisenberger nor Chief Girt have reached out to Pride Hamilton since June 15, she said.

Prior to Hendriks' comments, Girt said police "have to rely on the best intelligence you have at the time," and countered the idea that there were just two officers at Gage Park. He said officers were spread between Pride and a rally at City Hall, and were redeployed when conflict started.

Meeting shut down

Hendriks spoke after the meeting was shut down and members of the public were locked out. The gallery had become particularly heated when Detective Paul Corrigan began a presentation on hate crimes.

After about 30 minutes, staff led media and some others back into the council chamber through a side door.

Police officers blocked off the public entryway as the meeting resumed.

Eisenberger later allowed more people to come in, saying he wanted the meeting to be "as open as possible" and that he didn't see anyone outside who might disrupt proceedings.



Miriam Novik stands outside council chambers after the meeting was temporarily halted on Thursday afternoon. Novik said there were "constant calls for civil dialogue," at the meeting "with a total refusal to actually listen to [...] real pain." (Laura Howells/CBC)

Possible special meeting in August

The internal police review of the service complaints must be done within 60 days, the board heard. In the meantime, nobody was opposed exploring the option of an independent review.

Councillor Tom Jackson suggested having a special, earlier meeting in August to discuss the independent review, instead of waiting until the next board meeting in September for the "very timely and important matter."

Eisenberger said the matter is complex and they may be "creating a new wheel." But, he said, they will have the meeting to discuss an independent review as soon as they receive the proper materials.



Mayor Fred Eisenberger chaired the Hamilton Police Services Board, as Chief Eric Girt answered questions from councillors. (Laura Howells/CBC)

Advocate hopeful for independent review

After the meeting, LGBTQ advocate Lyla Miklos said she's hopeful for an independent review.

When a group is internally "investigating each other, it's a very inside baseball perspective," she said.

The Chief said he wouldn't hesitate to discipline members for criminality or misconduct. But the queer community is not looking for individual police officers to get disciplined, said Miklos, a past chair of Pride Hamilton and the LGBTQ Advisory Committee.

"This wasn't the actions of just one officer, this was a systemic problem."



Lyla Miklos, past chair of Hamilton Pride, says she's hopeful for an independent review. (Laura Howells/CBC)

A representative from the Community Coalition Against Racism, Ken Stone, also called for an independent review at the meeting.

We "would like the HPS and the city to be more proactive," said Stone, who was among several people reading deputations at the meeting.

Instead of "constantly telling us that the bar is high for hate speech," he said, the mayor and councillors should work to curb the proliferation of hate groups. He said they should also lobby the government to lower the bar on hate speech.



People shouted from the gallery during the Hamilton police services board meeting, during which members walked out after less than 30 minutes. (Laura Howells/CBC)

Miriam Novick, a member of Hamilton's queer community, sat in the gallery during the meeting.

She was frustrated by the "constant calls for civil dialogue, with a total refusal to actually listen to [...] real pain," she said.

"The anger comes from places."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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