

# Hamilton police pitch resurrected LGBTQ advisory group

But 'deep' mistrust is hampering efforts to repair a strained relationship with wary residents, says an activist.

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*More than three months since a July police services board meeting that saw vocal members of the public kicked out of the room, some members of the community believe the "mistrust is too deep" to start mending fences between police and the LGBTQ community. - Scott Gardner , The Hamilton Spectator file photo*

Hamilton's police service is eyeing the resurrection of an advisory committee to help repair relationships with a wary LGBTQ community.

But even the activist who pitched bringing back the long-abandoned LGBTQ task force months ago now says the "mistrust is too deep" to ask residents to sit down with current police leadership.

Police Chief Eric Girt and other brass met earlier this week with several residents to talk about how to repair relations strained by a summer of clashes and controversy.

In particular, police have been accused of not acting quickly enough to stop violence between homophobic demonstrators and counterprotesters at Pride in July. That clash prompted four complaints to a provincial watchdog and plans for an independent review.

Activist Lyla Miklos, who attended the most recent meeting, said police were seeking feedback on a number of proposals, including the creation of a hate-crime reporting web portal, more training for officers and — Miklos' own suggestion — a community advisory body.

No one from Hamilton police was available to talk about the meeting or proposals Friday, but a spokesperson told the CBC there is "much more work to be done."

Miklos urged the service at a July police board meeting to bring back an updated version of the mid-2000s GLBT police task force — an advisory body that "gradually disappeared" in recent years — that she argued encouraged understanding between officers and residents.

She pointed to police efforts in 2006 to protect a Pride parade from an angry mob, contrasting that "positive" experience with the controversial Gage Park violence during the summer. "I know you can do better because I have seen you do better," she said in July.

But three months later, Miklos said the tenor of Tuesday's meeting made it plain police have work to do to overcome "a fundamental lack of trust."

It doesn't help, she said, that Chief Girt referenced gay men having sex in public washrooms in a [September radio interview](#) about broader efforts to repair relationships with the LGBTQ community.

She suggested some residents feel joining a police committee now would make them "complicit in their bad behaviour."

"People need to see a change in culture at the police service, from the top down," Miklos said.

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