

# Hamilton police propose action plan to move 'forward' with LGBTQ community

Proposed actions include a hate crime portal and revived advisory group

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Hamilton police are proposing a plan to improve relations with the LGBTQ community. (Imgur)

Hamilton police are proposing to revive a long dormant advisory group as part of an action plan to rebuild trust with the LGTBQ community.

A document obtained by CBC Hamilton, called *The Way Forward*, outlines the police response to concerns raised by members of the LGTBQ at a meeting in August. The document was presented to the committee at a followup meeting earlier this week.

Proposed actions include creating an online portal to report hate crime, appointing a uniformed officer to be a liaison with queer and trans residents, implementing more officer training and bringing back a committee that advises police, which has been dormant for years.

"*The Way Forward*" also outlines desired outcomes from these measures.

Hamilton police hope that the hate crime portal will improve efforts to increase awareness of hate crimes and their seriousness. They also hope that the liaison and reinstated task force/advisory committee will help develop links and improve the relationship between the police and the community.

"The service is committed to self-reflection — words matter," say Hamilton police in the document. "[Hamilton police service] must consider the impact of its words, active listening, learning and working towards restoring trust is the way forward in its relationship with the community."

## **'They have a long way to go' says activist**

Chief Eric Girt and others had a second meeting with LGBTQ residents this week in an effort to repair ties after some violence at a Pride festival in June.

But some say there's still a long way to go.

Topping the list of what police heard from the community during the first meeting are comments made by the service that have further "angered the community and created distrust of the police."

Some, like long-time activist Lyla Miklos, say Hamilton Police Service (HPS) wants to repair its broken relationship with queer and trans residents, but "they have a long way to go to rebuild that trust."

"At this point," Miklos said, "the level of trust is below ground."

Cam Galindo attended both sessions and says police are trying. About 18 people attended the meeting Tuesday, he said, and it was a diverse group.

People still feel like they can't trust HPS leadership, he said. And some older residents said this is a repeat of 20 years ago.

"Certainly some of us are feeling optimistic, and some of us are saying 'this isn't the first time we're having this conversation,'" he said. "Overall, I think people were optimistic. People were skeptical as to whether these action items will be action items at the end of the day."

Relations with the LGBTQ community came to what Miklos describes as "a flash point" in June.

That's when a group of people with homophobic signs crashed a Pride festival in Gage Park. A group of anarchists wearing pink masks used a portable barrier to block them from view, and violence broke out between the two groups. Police arrested four people on the Pride-supporting side and only one person on the anti-Pride side. The first arrest was an anarchist who was transgender, and who a parole board later ruled wasn't at the festival.

In the "Way Forward" document, the service says that regular reporting for staying on track with the plan will be determined in consultation with the community.

According to police, it's this reporting that will help promote trust and accountability by pointing to "genuine progress and genuine change." Meeting attendees also raised their desire for more transparency and accountability in the August meeting. Police added that they "hope to engage in this path with the community."

Spokesperson for the Hamilton police, Jackie Penman said that the draft actions still require "further development" and that there is "much more work to be done."

She added that the police are "grateful for the community's willingness to continue this dialogue and recognize this is not an easy process."

Other concerns listed in the report as being raised by the LGBTQ community at the first meeting include:

- Feeling targeted and unsafe as a result of inaction from government institutions, including police.
- Worrying for LGBTQ youth, who may fear for their future in the community.
- Experiencing frustration in recounting their lived experience and not feeling heard despite years of doing so.
- Experiencing a communication gap because of the disbanding of the advisory committee.

Attendees to the first meeting also said that the police service has not learned from past mistakes, and that their actions do not appear to align with their new mission, vision and values. They called on the police to:

- Be more transparent and accountable for their actions.
- Do more to respond to the rise of hate in Hamilton.
- Invest in cultural competency building within the community.
- Ensure consultation is reflective of the community's numerous intersectionalities.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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*With files from Christine Rankin*