

**DELEGATION TO THE GENERAL ISSUES COMMITTEE
HAMILTON CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2019
LYLA MIKLOS**

My name is Lyla Miklos. My pronouns are she and her. I am a member of Hamilton's Two Spirit and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Plus Community.

18 years ago in 2001 when I was a member of Hamilton Pride's Board of Directors then Mayor Bob Wade invited me along with others to sit down with him and strategize ways that the City could improve its relationship with its 2S & LGBTQIA+ residents.

Mayor Wade had come to power after over two decades of Mayor Morrow at the helm. Mayor Wade wanted to set things right with the queer community after a hostile history that included his predecessor being found in violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code after refusing to issue an official proclamation in honour of Hamilton Pride in 1991.

One of our asks 18 years ago was a 2S & LGBTQIA+ community centre. Unfortunately Mayor Wade told us that what we wanted and more importantly NEEDED was something the City could not provide.

18 years ago Hamilton's 2S & LGBTQIA+ community had multiple spaces to meet and congregate. Mostly bars. At one time we had 5 different bars in the downtown core alone. We even had a bookstore! Regularly scheduled women's dances! And more. And now. None of these things exist.

Currently the programs and services for Hamilton's 2S & LGBTQIA+ community are located across the city via a patchwork of social service agencies and volunteer run organizations. Ideally if there was a main community hub for every member of our 2S & LGBTQIA+ community to access; what is now a patchwork of services could all be housed in one centralized location.

In multiple 2S & LGBTQIA+ needs assessments over the years the ask for a community centre has always been a top priority. We need a space to feel safe and call home. An intergenerational space where we can network not just with like-minded individuals, but also with those who have a common lived experience. Where everyone from the youth who has just come out, to the queer elder who has lived through hate, discrimination and persecution and can still find hope can all create community together. A space where we don't have to "code switch" and tone down our identities so we can assimilate into the heteronormativity that surrounds us wherever we live, work or play.

18 years ago I was living in Hamilton, but working in Toronto. As a bisexual woman it was very difficult for me to find community in Hamilton to connect with. Luckily for me I was able to access the services at The 519, which is a community centre in the heart of Toronto's Queer Village at Church and Wellesley. There I found my tribe via the Toronto Bisexual Network and Bisexual Women of Toronto. Later on I would help to facilitate TBN and BIWOT meetings at The 519, because the staff at The 519 provided free training on facilitation to anyone who chose to run a support group in their space. Every time I would walk into The 519 I would be greeted by 2S & LGBTQIA+ community members of all ages and backgrounds taking part in everything from square dancing, to support groups, to arts initiatives, to AIDS memorial planning, to community posting boards, to safe needle exchange, to newcomer services, to socializing over coffee and more. The 519 continues to thrive and grow and is a shining example of how a Municipality and Community can work together to provide a safe space for its residents.

Hamilton's 2S & LGBTQIA+ community's dream of a 519 here in our hometown has always seemed like an impossible one until the proposal from Councillors Nann and Wilson came forward. By putting multiple services for several of Hamilton's diverse communities under one roof we have the potential to create a new model for how Municipalities deliver and house services for marginalized communities with intersectional identities.

The Vision & Mission Statements for The City of Hamilton are “to be the best place to raise a child and age successfully” by providing “high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner” and we do this with a Culture of Collective Ownership. So despite what our Premiere may say, socialism hasn’t been destroying our city. Hamiltonians defy that statement every day by working together and providing supports to residents. Let us carve out a model of civic leadership that others will envy and want to follow.