

Hamilton police services board clears the way for review of conduct during 2019 Pride event

By Don Mitchell * Global News * Posted December 12, 2019 5:15 pm



A review of how Hamilton police dealt with violence at the city's 2019 Pride event at Gage Park is expected in April of 2020 at the latest. (Don Mitchell/Global News Hamilton)

An independent investigation into police conduct at the Hamilton Pride Festival in Gage Park this past spring has been given approval by the city's police services board.

The man who will lead the probe, Toronto lawyer Scott Bergman, addressed the board on Thursday and said his investigation will be guided by feedback from the LGBTQ2 community.

"We incorporated in our draft many of the comments and many of the concerns that had been expressed to us by many community members," Bergman told the board.

In his outline for the independent review, Bergman said issues related to the “culture” of the Hamilton Police Service and whether or not it contributed to the violence at the Pride event will be examined.

He also says supports for “processes and procedures” to eliminate hate or phobias related to the LGBTQ2 community at future Pride events will be a priority.

Critics have argued that police were too slow to react to violence between Pride supporters and opponents during the event.



Toronto lawyer Scott Bergman has been tasked with conducting a review of how police responded to violence at Hamilton Pride celebrations in June. (Cooper, Sandler, Shime & Bergman LLP)

In early October, the police services board unanimously voted in favour of having an external legal counsel lead the review of police actions before, during and after the June 15 event at Gage Park.

The review was initially tagged as a look into criticisms from members of Hamilton’s LGBTQ2 community about how police responded when homophobic and far-right protesters showed up at the Pride festival, violently clashing with Pride supporters.

Four members of the LGBTQ2 community and one from an anti-Pride contingent were arrested after the altercation at Gage Park.

Bergman’s appointment was initially met with some criticism when announced in mid-November.

VIDEO LINK: <https://globalnews.ca/video/rd/1559259204002/?jwsourc=cl>

Former Hamilton Pride chair Lyla Miklos — who spoke out and supported a motion for a review at a July police board meeting — told Global News her excitement over the announcement was “coloured with a lot of caution” and “a slight wave of disappointment.”

What also stood out to Miklos during Bergman’s first presentation to the board in November was the stipulation that the review would not place blame on any party.

“I think that was the one that really jumped out at me, was the fact that it is not his role to place any blame,” said Miklos. “That was a bit of a red flag for me, because if we’re not going to place any blame, then it also seems to me that there’s not going to be any accountability for what happened.”

Meanwhile, Cameron Kroetsch – a member of the city’s LGBTQ advisory committee – says it was good that Bergman met with the LGBTQ2 community before drafting the terms of his review.

He also supported addressing the police “culture” issues the reviewer said he would investigate.

“I am pleased to see that there is some discussion about police culture in there,” Kroetsch told Global News. “So it’s not just limited to discussing the sort of technical aspects of what happened at the Pride event, but it’s also looking at how does the police force’s culture lead to that as well?”

AUDIO LINK: <https://omny.fm/shows/bill-kelly-show/cameron-kroetsch-a-member-of-the-citys-lgbtq-advis>

However, Kroetsch doesn’t have a lot of faith in the review, saying Bergman’s recommendations could be “very damning” and may not be implemented by the “old guard council” currently on the board.

“It’s going to be up to the police services board as to what they do with those recommendations, whether they implement those recommendations, and it looks like no matter what the public says to the board, the board’s going to do what it wants to do.”

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