

Digital Pride a celebration — but blood boils over Hamilton police issue

Emojis and also calls to defund police flood livestream comments, as annual celebration turns virtual due to COVID-19

By Fallon Hewitt

The Hamilton Spectator

June 14, 2020

Clapping hands, heart and crown emojis. Calls to defund the Hamilton police. Wishes for a “Happy Pride.” And countless, “yas” and “slay” queens.

Hundreds of those comments filled the space below Pride Hamilton’s live stream on its Facebook page Sunday afternoon as the city’s LGBTQ community gathered to celebrate this year’s Pride.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw the annual celebration turn virtual due to physical distancing and gathering size restrictions.

“We’re very disappointed that we can’t be together in person,” said Cameron Kroetsch, a Hamilton Pride board member. “This pandemic has meant challenges for everyone and we know it’s disproportionately affected folks in two-spirited and LGBTQIA communities.”

Hosted by Ladybird Fancypants, the celebration included sets from Hamilton-based drag queens Jizzabelle, Kamilla Flores Kameleon and Irma Vep as well as Toronto-based drag queen Priyanka.

Touching on the likeness of an actual drag show, community members commented with dollar bill emojis.

There were also performances by Hamilton musicians including Darcy Feaver, Calvin Procyon as well as Nettish.

Despite celebrating through the small screen, the sense of community could be still be felt through the dozens of shares and thousands of views.

Sunday also marked one year less a day since the Pride 2019 celebration that ended in violence and a number of arrests when radical evangelical protesters crashed the annual picnic at Gage Park.

Lawyer Scott Bergman’s independent review of how Hamilton Police responded to the violence before, during and after that day dominated the conversation throughout this year’s event.

Made public on June 11, Bergman provided the force with 38 recommendations to aid in the repairing of a “damaged” relationship with the LGBTQ community and to ensure they protect them against future anti-LGBTQ aggression.

Those recommendations included a formal apology, better operational plans, a diversity audit, enhanced media training for top brass, in-depth seminars on two-spirit and LGBTQ issues and creating a full-time LGBTQ liaison solely dedicated to the file.

Ruby Hye, speaking with the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI), said she was “beyond disappointed” with the suggestions.

Pointing to the bathhouse raids of 2004 and Project Rosebud, Hye also questioned how a larger police presence at Pride would help queer folks feel safe.

“It fails to address the needs of Black, Indigenous and racialized queer people and trans people,” said Hye. “If you really spoke to the most vulnerable of us, then how are you recommending more police at Pride? It does not make any sense.”

Hye, who is also one of the organizers behind the call for the defunding of the Hamilton Police, reiterated that call on Sunday.

The group is hoping to see funds from the annual police budget moved to housing, mental health supports and anti-racism strategies.

“Then, talk to me about wanting to support the queer community in this city,” said Hye. “I’m tired, and I know the rest of my people are too.”

Sahra Soudi criticized a number of recommendations that include the issuance of apologies from the force.

During the Hamilton Police Services Board meeting on June 11, Chief Eric Girt offered an apology for last year’s actions but it was described as “insincere,” by Lyla Miklos, who also performed Sunday.

“Apologies and statements are useless and do absolutely nothing to genuinely bridge gaps in trust and address why it is that the community feels unsafe,” said Soudi.

Local politicians were also part of Sunday’s dialogue, with Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, Hamilton Centre MP Matthew Green and Ward 3 Councillor Nrinder Nann making an appearance.

“We have a lot of work to do here in Hamilton and we must stand in our accountability to our residents, to ensure what happened here [Gage Park], never ever happens again,” said Nann. “I stand committed ... to ensure that accountability takes place.”

From: https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/digital-pride-a-celebration-but-blood-boils-over-hamilton-police-issue/article_f629cbdd-15f1-5ed5-9bcb-47bf535f1bce.html