

To: Hamilton City Council
Cc: Hamilton Police Services Board

I'm writing this letter to you as a resident of the City of Hamilton. I am not writing on behalf of any organization to which I may be affiliated. I'm asking that City Council seriously consider reviewing and revoking the process that it recently used to select a citizen representative to sit on the Hamilton Police Services Board.

I am confident that the current process must be improved and that serious mistakes were made when this process was used to select Fred Bennink as a citizen representative to the Board. I should state clearly, at this point, that I am thankful to Fred for his willingness to put his name forward to serve his community. My comments are not about Fred specifically, but about the process used for his selection. I want to make sure that this is clear so that no one misunderstands and so that what I say is not misconstrued in any way.

I am writing this letter, in part, because I identify as queer and am a member of Hamilton's 2SLGBTQIA+ community and feel that a disservice has been done to our community. For me, representation on the HPSB matters and I think that the current composition of the Board does not represent Hamilton's citizens and residents.

I realize that the City has little say in the HPSB's composition. The Province chooses some roles and others are filled by members of Council. In fact, that's why I think that the recruitment process for this citizen role is so important and must be done in a way that instills confidence in our communities and is representative of the concerns and aspirations of Hamiltonians with respect to its police services.

This position is also unique in its standing as an appointment when compared with most other agency, board, or committee positions because it is a paid position (not common). There is a burden, in my opinion, borne by this payment that exceeds the routine appointment of unpaid volunteers.

Apart from that, there are 2 specific things I would like to take this opportunity to outline:

Interviews for the position were often short, at about 10 minutes. In my opinion, this is not a sufficient amount of time to discuss someone's qualifications, suitability, expertise, education, or community involvement as it relates to a (paid) position of this nature. This is especially true when trying to evaluate how individuals from diverse communities might bring additional skills to the HPSB or how they might offer an important but as yet unheard perspective. The notion that transformative justice can come about quickly is not only misplaced but it fundamentally, and structurally, misunderstands what it means for the City to be willing to welcome underrepresented voices. Quick interviews like this can also leave candidates with the impression that either the position has already been filled or that the committee isn't interested in a dialogue with the candidate outside of the scripted questions that have been prepared.

Again, this is not the way to move forward in the spirit of change that recognizes a need for community input but, instead, the way to further instill the status quo.

Interviews were conducted by Councillors only. While it's important that Councillors are in the room to act as decision makers around the appointment process, it's not necessarily appropriate for Councillors to conduct the interviews themselves. The City has paid Human Resources professionals who should conduct these interviews. Those professionals have the necessary expertise and training to conduct interviews as well as the ability to answer questions about the position in an appropriate manner. As is evident from recent committee meetings, very few Councillors have this training (as they have admitted publicly) and many don't see the need to be trained to perform this work. Not only is this insulting of the staff who have spent years building up their professional profiles and honing their expertise in these areas, but it suggests that there isn't a genuine desire on behalf of Council to approach these processes with equity, diversity, or inclusion in mind.

In the case of this particular appointment, it's well-known to Council that there have been major public issues between Hamilton Police Services and the community, especially those that would make it obvious that welcoming members of marginalized and underrepresented communities to the Board would be in its best interest. As these issues are well-known to the public, and Council, I will not summarize them here.

As is clear now, members of marginalized and underrepresented communities came forward publicly to say that they had applied, had been interviewed, but had not been selected. Their qualifications and community activism are widely known, so I will not summarize those here. It is, to say the least, disappointing to me that one of these candidates was not selected for the position considering what I have outlined in this letter.

As a result of the things I mentioned above, and others which I have not detailed here, I strongly recommend that a full and open public review of this process take place before another appointment is made. Further, and perhaps more importantly, I also strongly recommend that Council revoke the current appointment (and the recent appointee, Fred Bennink) and restart the selection process under completely new terms of reference involving consultation from diverse, underrepresented, and marginalized communities in Hamilton.

I have also copied the Hamilton Police Services Board (HPSB) on this correspondence because I think it's important for that body to put this recommendation before Council if Council is unwilling to do so.

Sincerely,

Cameron Kroetsch
Hamilton, ON