

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Correspondence for September 27th Council Meeting Re: THE HAMILTON AVIARY**From:** Marissa Casale**Sent:** September 25, 2023 10:34 PM**To:** clerk@hamilton.ca; Office of the Mayor <Officeofthe.Mayor@hamilton.ca>**Subject:** Correspondence for September 27th Council Meeting Re: THE HAMILTON AVIARY

Attention: Public Works Committee

Dear Councillors,

I write you this in hopes that you will see the value in The Hamilton Aviary that the community, volunteers and especially myself see. This is my personal story.

In 2015 I was in a severe accident. I was the victim of a random shooting when a man shot into the apartment I was visiting with a two barrel shotgun. I was forced to the balcony where I jumped from the third story. I injured my hip in the jump.

Fast forward to 2017 where I underwent hip surgery and was left bed bound for 7 weeks and months of physiotherapy. Not being mobile for such a long period time put me in severe depression, as I also dealt and still deal with crippling PTSD.

I was sent to do Dialectic Behavioural Therapy (DBT) in January of 2018. Little did I know it wasn't the therapy that was going to save me, it was the aviary. The nurse knew about my love of birds, (having one myself) and told me about The Hamilton Aviary.

The next weekend my little cousin and I went to visit. I walked into the greenhouse and was blown away by these big beautiful creatures that I had no idea existed in Hamilton. There was one specific bird that especially caught my attention, Baby. Baby was a Moluccan Cockatoo in his mid 20's. I never realized parrots could have such personality and affection. I started volunteering a couple weeks later. I volunteered on Monday morning's crew and also ran the Open Houses we had every Saturday from 1:00pm- 4:00pm. I then became a Board Director and have been ever since.

After being in such a terrible place with my mental health, I finally had a reason to get out of bed in the morning. I was there whenever I could be. Through that time I developed a personal bond with Baby. I adored him, he was my Saturday buddy. He would be out with me all afternoon. He was the sweetest and funniest parrot I had ever met and I loved him like he was my own. One night I was called because Baby had possibly injured his claw. I rushed down to the aviary to see him. After taking him to the vet the following day, we learned he was actually suffering from bone cancer. As a Board we had an impossible decision to make and in the best interest of Baby due to pain that bone cancer causes, we decided we needed to be his voice and end his suffering.

My heart shattered into a million pieces. Baby was being kept at Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph. The next day myself and fellow board member Tom Priestly drove out to Guelph to spend our last afternoon with Baby. I will never forget the moment I held him and he spread his wing to stretch over my chest as if he was giving me a goodbye hug. Baby was a Hamilton Aviary staple. He was born into the aviary and the community knew him. Still to this day we have people ask about Baby.

This is just one example of the heartbreaking decisions we have had to make as a board when it comes to aviary birds. The City has never had to make those decisions. They have never had to sit and worry about what the outcome of a vet visit would be. Yet here they are making this decision about our existence? It was mentioned that the Aviary doesn't meet the City's manifest however, I was under the assumption that the City values safe inclusive environments for their communities. That is what the Aviary is. Our volunteers pour their hearts into caring for the birds 365 days a year. The City is taking our organization from our volunteers. We have a volunteer who has been with us for over 25 years. If birds aren't of the City's interest, I would hope humanity is. The City isn't having to deal with our volunteers' emotions of losing something so close to their hearts. Our volunteers have grown bonds with these birds. These bonds will be ripped from our volunteers if we have to rehome the birds. There's many stories within our organization like mine. I would not be the person I am today without the Aviary and I can't fathom not being able to see them whenever I want. I have sat in our Umbrella Cockatoo Jessie's cage on countless occasions crying over life with her head in my lap while I give her scratches and it's those moments I couldn't imagine not having. These birds have been together for over 15 years and they have put their trust in us. They are being failed by the City at no fault of their own.

The City doesn't recognize that we are a part of Hamilton history. The aviary was started at Dundurn Castle in 1927 and has been running ever since. We are the longest running Aviary in North America. We've had visitors from around the world. We are a staple in the Westdale community and many families who come visit on Sundays. I ask you to see our worth. This is a Hamilton hidden gem and should be cherished not banished.

"Hamilton is home for the birds"

Regards,
Marissa Casale
Board Director
The Hamilton Aviary