

5.11 (e)

June 7, 2024



To Mayor Horwath & Hamilton City Councillors,

I thank you for taking the time to read letters from myself and various members of the board; I do wish it was under different circumstances.

It has come to our attention that a motion is being put forward to block event organizers from putting up perimeter fences around their event spaces that blocks the path. If you have read my colleague's letter, the statistics from the Hate Crime Report are briefly shared. I ask that you read that and digest the issues at hand.

I am writing this to you all with the hopes that you would see that this motion is illogical. I also ask that you look at the *gross abuse of power* to push this motion without consulting the people it would directly impact if the changes are approved. We were not consulted by the Ward 2 Office, not even contacted to discuss any issues that may have arisen.

From my perspective, Pier 4 is not the only park in the area. Pier 8 and Bayfront are both within very close walking, transit, driving, biking and even assistive device proximity. Pier 4 also does not have access to swimmable water. I could understand great push back *if* this park was the *only* park for multiple kilometers and/or this park had water folks could access; neither point is a reality.

In lightly touching on the past, 2019 was a bad year for the Hamilton 2SLGBTQ+ Community and the reputation of this city on an international level. What happened, should not have happened. It was a failure at the hands of HPS, the City and Pride Hamilton. Our event in 2023 was a stark contrast. I am not asking you to create special permissions for this organization but I am asking that you look from a lens that allows you to see a larger image. Where is the logic in moving this progress backwards? Where is the logic in having an event for a targeted group that has no perimeter and is accessible by all without any security screening to ensure there are no concealed weapons or illegal substances that could be sold to children or used to harm others? We saw the lack of due diligence and the repercussions it had. Our event had a single point of entry and exit, this allowed security guards to check bags and loose clothing to ensure the safety of those inside the perimeter. Why should that be taken away? We are not looking to block the path for countless days, weeks or months. We are also not blocking the community splash pad or the tugboat, both of which were still accessible as they are not a part of our event.

We should not be interested in reliving that event and the harm it caused. The suggested money should be used to better things in Ward 2. By approving this motion what will that show the local community and the ones abroad? Approving it will show the local community, communities abroad, businesses and investors that this current Mayor and City Council does not support the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The ironic part, there are community members on the Council, the greater irony is the person behind the motion is the one who was a member of the Pride Hamilton board during the ordeal.

The layout of last year's event was not an instant approval, it was checked multiple times by the SEAT committee and was discussed multiple times both amongst them and with us before approval was given. Those at SEAT expressed that they, too, did not want a repeat of the past.

For those of you who did attend, our event had no acts of violence, no protests and no incidents. This was in part due to the perimeter. Part of the protection that it offers is trespassing by agitators would be handled by police. Without a perimeter, how does one determine where that boundary would start? What powers would police have at that moment if it were to occur?

Previously, folks were asked to be a “human wall” and plans were made to have community members defend others rather than have paid-duty officers do their job. The current Pride Hamilton board will never ask the community to do so on our behalf. Should we do otherwise, I understand the possible consequences of those actions, which includes legal ones. The Criminal Code of Canada discusses what counts as “self defense” in the eyes of the law. However, systemic oppression is prevalent in the judicial system and the decolonization of that is going to be a generational task. In saying that, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, racialized folks and other equity-deserving groups face harsher punishments and injustices when compared to cisgender, white folks. Our reactions are looked at and taken into account before the actions we are reacting to. Why would we fail to do our part to ensure a safe event where folks feel they need to defend themselves? The last time we saw that happen, folks were arrested and incarcerated.

Please allow me to be frank. Respectfully, are security guards really a deterrent? This is not the United States where security guards often carry arms. If you will, look at it from the perspective of, if there is a perimeter with police presence, what is the likelihood of an incident? If there is no perimeter and just security guards, how likely is there to be an incident. Based on the outcome of 2019, the latter is very high. There was no perimeter, no police presence, just security guards and community members and look what transpired. Trauma, assault, arrests and scandal. People will think twice doing illegal things in front of law enforcement in comparison to a security guard in Canada.

We have been warned by CSIS via Hamilton Police regarding possible threats and the need to up security measures. Taking away one of the most important safety measures is ludicrous. *This motion seems targeted and I question the integrity of it.*

As Michael stated in his letter, trying to have a perimeter inside the path is not realistic when it has to house staging, vendors, food trucks, equipment and people. We plan to continue the growth of Pride Hamilton both as an organization and events as well as increase the impact on the local economy. This means occupying space in Pier 4 is temporary.

We ask that you look at the implications of leaving a targeted group open to hate in a city that has the highest national reported hate crimes per capita. Members of the community reside in every one of your respective wards, show your residents you care about their well-being. Help us to continue to change the negative perception that people have of this city.

I am grateful to live with intersectional identities that allow me to look at this world from an intersectional lens. It allows me to see the harm that this change will create. In no way is my letter stating that I am, “pro-police” in any way. It states that I am, “pro-safety”. I respect that HPS has a job to do, I am cognizant of the damage the institution has caused for QTBIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ folks. Because of systemic oppression, I am also very much aware that our reactions are questioned, judged and even punished before the actions we are reacting to are taken into account; as previously stated. Community members and supporters felt safer attending our 2023 event. Don’t take that away from them. Don’t allow our progress to regress. Events of 2019 should be looked at as a lesson on what not to do, and that is to not forgo a perimeter and expect security guards to prevent violence.

Respectfully,

Kiel Hughes

Pride Hamilton

Chair | Director of Events

