

City Council

Notice of Motion

MM11.14	ACTION			Ward: All
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Reviewing City of Toronto Policies Governing the Use of Libraries and City Facilities by Individuals and Groups Promoting Intolerance or Discrimination - by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Mike Layton

** Notice of this Motion has been given.*

** This Motion is subject to referral to the Executive Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

Recommendations

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Mike Layton, recommends that:

1. City Council direct the City Manager, the City Solicitor, the Chief People Officer and appropriate staff to report to the January 23, 2020 meeting of the Executive Committee with recommendations to strengthen the policies governing the use of community spaces in Toronto Public Library and other City facilities by third parties in order to proactively ensure that groups contravening the City of Toronto's commitment to the Vision Statement on Access, Equity and Diversity and its Human Rights and Anti-Harassment/Discrimination policy are identified sooner and that permits are denied or revoked in a timely manner.
2. City Council request the City Manager, the City Solicitor, the Chief People Officer and appropriate staff to consult with Toronto Public Library staff and report to the January 23, 2020 meeting of the Executive Committee with actions the Toronto Public Library can take in order to:
 - a. strengthen its policies governing the use of Toronto Public Library community spaces to better reflect the City of Toronto's commitment to the Vision Statement on Access, Equity and Diversity and its Human Rights and Anti-Harassment/Discrimination policy; and
 - b. ensure that activities enabling discrimination and intolerance, including transphobia and transphobic activity, are given all due consideration as a human rights violation under the Human Rights Code.

Summary

On October 10, 2019, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff cancelled the permit for the regular

use of meeting space at the Pam McConnell Aquatics Centre to a group running church services. Registered as "Christ's Forgiveness Ministries", the City's Aquatics Centre was listed on the group's website as the official location of their church. The cancelling of their permit took place after the group held a rally in downtown Toronto on September 28, 2019.

The group's coordinator was arrested on charges of disturbing the peace in the Church-Wellesley Village earlier this year. In response, Christ's Forgiveness Ministries planned to march, en masse, up the street and through The Village on September 28, 2019. While advertised as having no relationship to the LGBTQ2S neighbourhood on Church Street, many community members recognized this provocation as an act of intimidation targeting the best known neighbourhood in Canada for LGBTQ2S rights and inclusion. Subsequent organizing resulted in the closure of streets in the St. Lawrence Market area, counter-protests, and a significant mobilization of resources by the Toronto Police Service to prevent altercations and maintain the peace.

Concerned residents realized this group was advertising that it was running their church services out of a City-owned facility and complained to City staff. After reviewing and investigating the complaint, City staff canceled the group's permit. Though it required a complaint and investigation after the space had been used for some time by this group, staff were able to determine that the group was in contravention of City policies and acted. In other cases, action has been lacking. City libraries, for example, have provided space for groups and events that are blatantly engaged in, and promote, intolerant and discriminatory activities.

On July 12, 2017, leading neo-Nazi figures in Canada held a memorial event at the Richview Public Library in Etobicoke. Though Jewish organizations, human rights advocates, and residents complained about the event, it was allowed to proceed. The policies in place were insufficient to restrict the rental, even to individuals and groups involved in Holocaust denial and other racist, discriminatory actions. In response, Mayor Tory asked the Toronto Public Library board and staff to review its rental policies.

Again, this very month, the City of Toronto is once again being criticized for the use of its libraries. On October 29, 2019, a third-party group is planning to hold a "gender identity talk and Q&A" with a controversial speaker at the Toronto Public Library's Palmerston branch. The featured speaker has publicly stated that trans rights are a danger to cis-gendered women, which appears to violate the Library's community and event space policy. Permitting an individual or group to promote harmful transphobic views in publically funded facilities, such as public libraries, is egregious and unacceptable considering the disproportionate violence and prejudice faced by Toronto's trans community.

Trans individuals face significant prejudice and are regularly the target of violence and harassment in Canada. A 2011 report by Egale Canada found that 37 percent of trans students reported physical harassment or assault because of their gender expression. A 2017 report by Statistics Canada found that among hate crimes targeting transgender or asexual people 74 percent involved violence. A 2013 Trans Pulse survey of 433 trans people in Ontario found that 98 percent reported at least one experience of transphobia. These are disturbing numbers that must be considered when developing inclusive policies to protect the human rights of all Toronto residents.

In sharp contrast to the ongoing rental and use of its libraries and facilities by groups like these, the City of Toronto has a long-standing commitment to preventing discrimination and the

promotion of equity. In April, 2003, City Council passed a Vision Statement on Access, Equity and Diversity that includes the following principles:

The City recognizes the barriers of discrimination and disadvantage faced by human rights protected groups.

To address this, the City will create an environment of equality in the government and in the community for all people regardless of their race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, disability, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, same sex partnership, age, marital status, family status, immigrant status, receipt of public assistance, political affiliation, religious affiliation, level of literacy, language and/or socio-economic status.

The City of Toronto will implement positive changes in its workforce and communities to achieve access and equality of outcomes for all residents and to create a harmonious environment free from discrimination, harassment and hate.

Given the ongoing use of City facilities and library spaces by groups promoting division, racism, and prejudice and their ability to gain notoriety through the ensuing conflict and media coverage, it is incumbent upon the City of Toronto to review its policies to deliver upon its Vision Statement on Access, Equity and Diversity. Equity-seeking groups should not feel unsafe or unwelcome in these spaces and the City should be proactive in upholding its commitments to access, equity, and diversity.

Background Information (City Council)

Revised Member Motion MM11.14