

**Chair's Report**  
**2SLGBTQ+ Advisory Committee**  
**June 22, 2021**  
**Submitted by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam**

**Happy Pride Month 2021**

This year marks several anniversaries for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Forty years ago, in 1981, the Toronto Police raided four gay bathhouses and arrested 286 innocent men. This represented the largest mass arrest in Toronto's history up to that date. That same year on the last Sunday in June, over 1500 brave people gathered at Grange Park to celebrate Pride and we have continued to celebrate it ever since.

Ten years following the bathhouse raids, in 1991, Toronto elected its first openly gay City Councillor, Kyle Rae, and that same year the City of Toronto issued its first proclamation for Pride Day.

This year, on June 1, as we moved all Pride activities online again due to the pandemic, representing the 2SLGBTQ+ Committee and as only out queer, non-binary member of City Council I virtually raised the Pride and Trans Flags at City Hall with Mayor Tory and helped proclaimed June, Pride Month.

**Response to COVID-19 - June 2021 Update**

On June 14, 2021, the Board of Health received a presentation from the Medical Officer of Health about the City of Toronto's ongoing response to COVID-19 providing an update on the COVID-19 pandemic locally and the status of the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations in Toronto.

Among the recommendations, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to clarify with the Government of Ontario when strip clubs, swinger clubs, and bathhouses will be permitted to reopen under the COVID-19 Roadmap to Reopen and to urgently consult and work with industry stakeholders and community organizations that carry out public health promotion in these facilities to develop detailed guidelines for their safe reopening.

**Toronto Overdose Action Plan: Status Report 2021**

The Board of Health recognized the drug poisoning crisis as a public health crisis in the City of Toronto and committed to supporting the actions that are urgently needed to respond to the crisis and stem the tide of overdose deaths.

The Board requested the Federal Government to decriminalize drug possession and urged both the Federal and Provincial Governments to provide a long-term financial commitment to assist the City of Toronto in creating and operating more affordable and supportive homes for people in need, including people who use drugs.

## **TORR Report**

Last year, City Council established the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild (TORR) to coordinate a city-wide approach for recovering and rebuilding from COVID-19 informed by public health advice and best practices.

Mayor Tory and I brought together a diverse table of stakeholders from the 2SLGBTQ+ community including community members, faith leaders, business owners/operators, 2S People's of 1st Nations, AIDS Service Organizations, The 519, LGBTQ Youth Line, Pride Toronto, the Inside Out Festival, the ArQuives, and others to share their experiences throughout the pandemic and provide advice to inform the recommendations that came out of the TORR report presented to Council back in November.

## **Supporting Main Street Recovery Through Tax Reform and the Introduction of a Small Business Property Subclass**

In February of this year, as part of the budget process, [City Council adopted my motion](#) directing the Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer to implement a new small business property subclass for the 2021 tax year in order to support small businesses through the pandemic and to stimulate economic growth and job creation post-pandemic, once the Provincial Regulations are released. This new property subclass will provide financial relief to many of the business located on Toronto's main streets including those owned by 2SLGBTQ+ operators in the Church Wellesley Village.

The Province's 2020 Budget introduced property tax and assessment initiatives to support business competitiveness as the Province recovers from the pandemic. This included providing municipalities with the flexibility to target tax relief to small businesses by creating a new optional property subclass for small businesses in 2021 and subsequent tax years. The Province also committed to considering matching any municipal property reductions with a corresponding reduction in the Province's Business Education Tax in order to further support small businesses.

The Province is currently finalizing the regulations for the small business subclass and I look forward to seeing these implemented in the City of Toronto shortly.

## **Protecting LGBTQ2S+ Small Businesses and Cultural Space**

Safe, culturally significant LGBTQ2S+ independent and small businesses are in danger of closing in the gay village in Toronto and other major cities around the world. These small businesses - gathering spaces such as local cafés, eateries, pubs, bookshops and non-traditional cultural spaces such as dance clubs and the like - are vital to breaking social isolation.

To support the retention and growth of independently owned, non-franchise LGBTQ2S+ businesses and cultural space, the City of Toronto needs a proactive and integrated strategy. San Francisco has already successfully implemented a small business economic retention strategy while Seattle and Vancouver are currently undertaking similar studies.

In January 2020, [City Council adopted my motion](#) directing staff to develop immediate and long-term recommendations to support the retention and growth of independently

owned and operated LGBTQ2S+ small businesses and cultural space. The motion also requested the Province of Ontario to introduce rent control legislation for commercial units to protect small to medium-sized businesses from unfair and drastic increases to their rent.

### **Protecting and Preserving Independent Live Performance Venues and Drag Bars**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Toronto's independent live performance venues, including independent theatre spaces as well as drag bars, have been long-suffering. Now through the uncertainty of the pandemic, it is impossible to financially plan for the future. With exorbitant commercial rents, and the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, and the pressures of development in the downtown core it is impossible for small performance venues to survive.

These live performances venues include drag bars, community cultural hubs, and safe performance spaces for the LGBTQ2S+ community. Drag performers are a critical component of queer culture, and their performance venues often double as bars, cafes, restaurants, and even book stores.

As the City of Toronto looks to recover from the global pandemic, we would be remiss to neglect these important cultural spaces. In order to protect our cultural identity and purposes, [City Council adopted my motion](#) directing staff to:

- explore the feasibility of expanding the Creative Co-Location Facilities Property Tax Subclass to include independent live performance venues, such as drag bars and small independent theatre;
- consult with local stakeholders and community leaders on how the City of Toronto can further support independent live performance venues including drag bars;
- explore expanding granting opportunities and granting reform to emerging artists, including the experience required to apply for operational funding;
- develop an appropriate pilot strategy for the purpose of providing support and referrals to relevant services, and informing and educating artists and cultural workers on opportunities for financial literacy and grants; and
- requested the Provincial or Federal Governments to urgently consider creating new or expanding existing programs to support live performance venues, including drag bars through grants and other COVID-emergency relief funding to preserve the arts.

### **Missing & Missed Epstein Report**

In April of this year, the Honourable Gloria Epstein released a comprehensive four-volume report containing 151 recommendations including 13 recommendations outlining an implementation plan which outlines key dates and deliverables.

The Toronto Police Service is currently putting together a Missing and Missed Implementation Team who will meet at least once each month to consult on the development of the implementation plan and monitor progress. They are seeking

community representatives and the deadline to apply is Friday, June 25, 2021. Visit [www.surveymonkey.com/r/MMIT\\_Application\\_Questionnaire](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MMIT_Application_Questionnaire) to apply.

### **New Director for the Equity and Human Rights Section**

I would like to welcome Debbie Burke-Benn, the new Director for the Equity and Human Rights Section, who joined the team in April. Debbie brings over 20 years' experience working and driving equity outcomes in organizations in Canada and Internationally. I would also like to share that Janice Alvares, who you are familiar with as the program support lead of the Committee, has now taken on the role of Acting manager for the Equity Unit. She will continue to work with her team to support the committee in this new capacity.

### **Committee Member Feedback Survey**

Given this is a new Committee we would also like to bring to your attention that after this meeting you will be receiving an email with a link to a brief survey. This survey will contain two sets of questions: 1) to establish a baseline of where we started as a committee so we are able to measure our progress at key milestones and 2) to obtain feedback after each meeting in an effort to drive continuous improvement and ensure ongoing meaningful engagement of our members.