

Pride flag flies again in Herbert!

by Rhonda J. Ens

A motion passed by the Herbert Town Council at their regular meeting on Monday, June 12 saw the members of the Council facing backlash from many in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and their allies.

At the June 12 meeting, Councillor Sharon Nickel brought to the Council's attention that she had been approached by some ratepayers asking that the Pride flag that was flying at the Memorial Wall area be taken down and not allowed to be flown.

A vote took place and by a 3 to 2 margin the vote was passed that the flag would no longer be flown.

At this time - Nickel and Councillors Pat Gammel and Mike Fox voted in favour of taking it down and Mayor Mathies and Councillor Tom Newburgh voted to have it remain flying.

It was reported in The Herald and upon release of the article - unfavourable responses were launched at the Town of Herbert.

At this point, it was decided to hold a special emergency meeting to revisit their decision and the situation. Council all agreed to hold this meeting on the evening of June 21.

Mayor Ron Mathies was joined by Councillors Fox, Gammel, Newburgh, Nickel and Dawn Wanner.

The sixth councillor Doug Osmond recently passed away.

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Michelle Mackow documented the events from the meeting.

There was a delegation - Devin Harlick.

There were many observers attending using ZOOM and there were two members of the media in the Council Chambers.

The Mayor introduced Mr. Harlick. Harlick is a former council member and held the position from 2019 - 2020.

He stated, "I am Devin Harlick, a former town councillor and a resident of the local community. I'm from the Queer community and identify as gay. Shortly after meeting my partner Tavis, who is from this area, I moved here. I have lived in this area, off and on, for seven years now.

The reason for the Pride flag is to increase visibility and show community support. Though Pride has become a celebration of diversity, in many communities, it remains a protest for our right to simply exist. Straight people raise their flag everyday, when they can walk down the street holding hands without the feeling of fear of discrimination. Just like straight people, the people of the LGBTQ community were born that way.

The reasons why it is important to have Pride month and fly the Pride flag:

- The second leading cause of death among young people aged 10 to 24 is suicide.
- LGBTQ youth are more than four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers
- 52% of LGBTQ youth who were enrolled in middle or high school reported being bullied
- 36% of LGBTQ youth reported that they have been physically threatened or harmed, and those who have been treated this way attempted suicide at nearly triple the rate of those who have not in the past year.
- Having at least one accepting adult can reduce the risk of a suicide attempt among LGBTQ young people by 40%.

He listed his Sources:

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

The media rhetoric in these last years has sensationalized certain aspects of the LGBTQ community. The fact

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is that the people in my community just want to live a normal life with the same rights and freedoms as their straight counterparts. We are not looking to infringe on the rights of others and simply want to maintain our rights as equals.

What I'm asking from the council is to reconsider your decision to remove the Pride Flag from the Memorial Wall."

The Mayor told Harlick, we (Council and others among the community) have been very concerned about suicide and mental illness.

Mathies continued that every place in the nation and worldwide should also be concerned.

"It is becoming a huge, huge issue," Mathies stated.

"We just have to do what we can to try to help the people - especially the young people."

The Mayor then gave a recap of the decision and what took part leading up to it.

He said - since the decision was made - he had received phone calls, heard from news media and saw

posts on social media.

"I guess I thought probably we hadn't given it enough consideration. First of all - we were missing two councillors - Dawn is here tonight. Doug won't be back. But anyway we were definitely depleted in that area. I don't know whether we got the full scope of what this means, not only to our community to the community around - the people," the Mayor said.

Mathies said that he felt that they should re-look at this.

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