

London City Hall
300 Dufferin Ave
London ON
c/o City Clerk Cathy Saunders

January 11, 2018

Dear Members of London City Council,

I am writing to express my thanks to Mayor Matt Brown for extending his apology to the community for the actions of a previous council and mayor in discriminating against LGBTQ2 Londoners.

While I do not claim to speak on behalf of the entire LGBTQ2 community, I can say as a gay Londoner, the actions of that previous council has haunted those of us who remember that time. For many, those actions were a message that gay and lesbian Londoners weren't really welcome here and that we should either "stay in the closet" and not be true to ourselves, or to move along.

It also sent a message to those who would stand along the Pride Parade route, or outside of Pride Festival functions, that it was perfectly acceptable to hurl insults, bully, and sadly in some cases physically assault LGBT Londoners.

London has come a long way since then. I remember how validated I felt as a Londoner when I had the privilege to accompany then Pride President Chris D'Aguilar to City Hall to present to the City Clerk and to the late Controller Gina Barber, the first Pride Flag to be officially flown by the City.

I've watched as Pride London has grown bigger and more diverse each year, as the LGBT community has welcomed new allies, new friends, and new family to join us. We've gone from a time when only the political leaders who would attend a Pride parade or festival were Cheryl Miller and Irene Mathysen, to a time when most MPs, MPPs, and members of council are there beside us. We've gone from having to say "we're here, we're queer, get use to it" to being able to say "We're all in this together," and that is wonderful thing.

But young members of our LGBT community still experience bullying, violence, and mental health challenges at a significantly higher rate than their peers. We've seen as recently as this term of council, negative comments from the community in regard to the rainbow crosswalks, and the tearing down of a Pride flag in front of Aeolian Hall. We still have work to do.

Some Londoners have expressed feelings that this apology is only being offered because 2018 is an election year. Considering we have yet to have an openly identified member of the LGBT community elected to City Council, in my view an election year is the ideal time to apologize. It sends the message to those in the LGBT community who might consider running for council that we are welcome at the council table too.

That is the reason I am therefore calling on council to bring forward and pass a motion affirming the mayor's apology, and extending that apology for all members of council at its earliest opportunity.

I would respectfully suggest the following motion:

Whereas on January 12, 2018 the Mayor of London publicly extended his apology for the actions of a previous Mayor and Council for discrimination, as ruled on by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, against the LGBTQ2 community over 1995 proclamation of Gay Pride,

- a) London City Council hereby affirms the Mayor's apology, and extends an official apology on behalf of Council
- b) Expresses to all Londoners that City Hall is open, for employment, for volunteer service on committees and boards, and to seeking positions on council, to all Londoners regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity

In closing, I want to applaud the Mayor for taking the first step and encourage council to take the next step in helping heal the wounds of the past.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shawn Lewis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Shawn Lewis
67 Trapper St, London ON