

## Hamilton

# Hamilton looks at updating laws to include burlesque

2 burlesque dancers were fined last year under the hazy definitions of the city bylaw

[Samantha Craggs](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jan 18, 2017 12:15 PM EST | Last Updated: January 18, 2017



A burlesque dancer named Ashley Keefer is fighting back after being charged with performing "activities that were categorized as adult entertainment" by a City of Hamilton bylaw officer. The city is reviewing its bylaw to see if it can refine the definitions to incorporate burlesque. (Ruth Gillson)

They're racy, but they're not lewd. They're artistic, but they're a little edgier than, say, *Disney on Ice*.

“I don't believe they should be punished for creative expression because of a loosely worded bylaw.”

- Lydia Greenly, burlesque supporter

Right now, burlesque shows fall between the cracks of Hamilton's licensing bylaw, resulting in the city laying fines on two dancers last year. Now officials are looking at how to update the city bylaw to fix that.

Burlesque is an art form where dancers perform strip teases — but with an emphasis on the tease. Pasties or tassels to cover their nipples. They wear g-strings and use feathers and glitter.

At Ten Decades — the club where two dancers were fined last August — it had a New Orleans speakeasy-prohibition vibe.

- [Will city extend burlesque-busting enforcement to Rocky Horror?](#)
- [Too racy for Hamilton? Burlesque dancers fight bylaw bust](#)

Burlesque is theatrical and promotes positive body image, said Lydia Greenly, a Hamilton resident who encouraged the review at Tuesday's city council planning committee meeting.



A burlesque dancer named Kayla Kunkel was charged by city bylaw after performing a routine at Ten Decades club in Hess Village. (Ruth Gillson)

"Burlesque helped me through some dark times with self confidence and body image," said Greenly, who used to be a burlesque dancer. "I'm very grateful for the art form."

**“I don't view it as adult entertainment. I view it as theatre.”**

*- Matthew Green, city councillor*

The dancers fighting the fines in court "are being persecuted," she said.

"I don't believe they should be punished for creative expression because of a loosely worded bylaw."

Right now, Hamilton's bylaw only references "adult entertainment." It prohibits "adult services appealing to or designed to appeal to erotic or sexual appetites or inclinations."

That includes entertainment advertised as "sexy," and services featuring "nudity or partial nudity." That led to the two women being ticketed last summer.

“There's no doubt our bylaws are antiquated.”

- Ken Leendertse, director of licensing

Matthew Green, Ward 3 councillor, pushed for the review on Tuesday.

"I don't view it as adult entertainment," he said of burlesque. "I view it as theatre."

Ken Leendertse, the city's director of licensing, expects to report back this year. "We'll look at proper definitions and see what other municipalities have done."

It's always helpful to update a bylaw, he said.

"There's no doubt our bylaws are antiquated. They were written many, many years ago."

City council will vote on Jan. 25 whether to ratify the review.

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*With files from Kelly Bennett*

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