

P'town selectmen hear protests in wake of police confrontations

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PROVINCETOWN — At a three-hour public meeting last night, the Provincetown selectmen heard demands for an independent probe into police actions during recent confrontations at Spiritus Pizza, and pleas that charges be dropped against nine people arrested in the incidents on Aug. 16, 17 and 18.

Speakers at last night's session blamed everyone from the police chief and gay tourists to the local media and the board of selectmen for the clashes. The session, part of the selectmen's regular meeting, was attended by some 200 to 300 people, and was still going on late last night.

Some residents have charged that the police were antagonistic in their attempts to clear Commercial Street sidewalks of bystanders — many of whom were gay — early on the morning of Aug. 16. That police action led a demonstration by an estimated 70 to 2,000 people the following

night.

Selectman Mary-Jo Avellar said she would urge the board to form a study committee to devise a plan for dealing with large, late-night crowds at Spiritus.

The confrontations came a month after members of the gay community asked for more police protection amid a rash of anti-gay beatings.

Selectman and Provincetown Business Guild president Paul Christo received a standing ovation when he called the demonstration against police action a resurgence of gay pride as the gay community continues to cope with the problem of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

The gay community "has lost so much that the loss of a sidewalk is too much," he said. The Aug. 16 demonstration was an attempt "to recapture some gay pride that has been lost to AIDS. To say the issue is not a gay issue is naive."

Many people last night — including visitors — said Provincetown must examine its role as a gay resort town,

and decide how it wishes to respond to its visitors. Many visitors go to Spiritus after bars close at night.

"I'm one of those gay tourists," said John Krajovic of Boston, who said he spends \$5,000 to \$7,000 each summer in Provincetown. He said he was among those urging people to march in protest after the police confrontations, and said he wondered whether he would sign a lease to live in Provincetown again next summer.

Human Rights Coalition president Paul Wychules called the conflicts a "hidden agenda."

The selectmen should "look at the professed goals and what we really got last week" when reviewing their Aug. 11 decision to have police patrols at Spiritus to cut down on noise, said Wychules.

All sides had the chance to speak last night.

"I live three doors from Spiritus," said Mary Silvia. "I asked if (Spiritus) could be closed at one (o'clock). Come to my home, sit in my bedroom, pretend you're asleep.

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