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Fort Worth will pay \$400,000 in gay bar raid case

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FORT WORTH, Texas—The city of Fort Worth agreed Tuesday to pay \$400,000 to a patron at a gay bar who was severely injured in a police raid two years ago, a settlement that avoided a federal civil rights lawsuit.

Chad Gibson claimed his head injury was caused by excessive force used by Fort Worth police officers and Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission agents during the Rainbow Lounge raid, which sparked numerous protests and rallies in the gay community.

The City Council voted unanimously without discussing the settlement. Mayor Mike Moncrief told reporters afterward that it was not an admission of city liability or wrongdoing by officers, but "an attempt to put this behind us and move forward."

"Our diversity in this city is our strength," he said. "It is not a weakness, and we can't afford to let it become one, nor will we."

Three Fort Worth police officers were suspended after the raid, and two agents and a supervisor with the state's liquor board were fired.

The city went into mediation earlier this month after Gibson's attorney said he would file a federal civil rights lawsuit - which would have no monetary limit - against the city and the liquor board, said Gerald Pruitt, the deputy city attorney.

Fort Worth already reached a \$40,000 settlement with the other plaintiff, George Armstrong, who said he suffered a torn rotator cuff during the raid. That deal did not require the council's approval because it was less than \$50,000, Pruitt said.

"George is going to need surgery on his shoulder, and now he's going to be able to do that," **Don Tittle**, the Dallas attorney representing Gibson and Armstrong, told The Associated Press. "Chad continues to get treatment and he has improved."

The June 2009 raid came on the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, the unrest that followed a police raid on a New York gay bar and fueled the U.S. gay rights movement. Fort Worth police said they knew nothing about the anniversary when planning what they said was a routine liquor license inspection for a new business. Authorities also denied that the bar was targeted because it caters to a gay clientele.

Two state liquor commission agents accompanied six Fort Worth police officers to the bar that night. But some police officers ran inside, responding to an officer's calls seeking help with a customer resisting arrest. The two agents were wearing improper attire - shirts that said "state police" - and didn't tell the owner they were doing an inspection. Six people, including Gibson and Armstrong, were arrested. The charges have since been dropped.

Gibson fell face-down on the pavement after being arrested, and some witness accounts of the circumstances differed from what authorities reported. He suffered from a blood clot behind his right eye and was hospitalized for a week.

Fort Worth police and the state liquor board conducted their own investigations, and both determined no excessive force was used. However, both agencies started diversity training for employees and began revising various policies and procedures.

Tittle said the parties worked in mediation as if the lawsuit had been filed, but there was a better "spirit of cooperation" since it was not in litigation. He said the state liquor board also was involved in the mediation but declined to comment further.

Carolyn Beck, a spokeswoman for the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, said Tuesday that she could not comment until an agreement was finalized.