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Terry O'Neill

After a career in journalism and communications, I have now focused my work on the community in which my family and I have lived for the past three decades, Coquitlam. I have brought insight, common sense, commitment, and a sense of collegiality to all my activities, and pledge to do the same now that I have been elected to City Council.

MONDAY, APRIL 23, 2012

Pesticide ban is law, but not without a fight

After three years of study and discussion, City Council finally passed a bylaw banning the use of cosmetic pesticides in Coquitlam. I knew passage was inevitable, but it didn't stop me from making one last attempt to dissuade my colleagues from taking the action. Here is the text of that speech.

In my earlier dissertation against this bylaw, I essentially spoke about how it represented the "precautionary principle run amok." Tonight, I want to focus on other aspects of its shortcomings.

Specifically, let's look at Page 2 in the report to council: the boilerplate about how the initiatives described in this bylaw are said to reflect the corporate strategic goals of:

1. Achieving excellence in City governance;
2. Strengthening Neighbourhoods.
3. And Enhancing Sustainability of City Services and Infrastructure.

Let's go through these one by one.

Achieving "excellence in city governance". Is this what you call it when a city council commissions a costly expert study, then ignores its principal recommendation, to establish a permitting process? And then attempts to implement a near-complete ban? Excellence? And exactly how is "Excellence achieved" by implementing a bylaw of such magnitude without coming to grips with the massive financial implications it carries: According to page seven of the report, it could cost the city up to ONE MILLION DOLLARS over 10 years in extra labour costs to manually tend to "weed-impacted planting beds." One million dollars? That's not "Excellence" in city governance. That's "extravagance", pure and simple.

Strengthening neighbourhoods. If one believes the conjecture, that the ban will make our residents healthier, then you might be able to say that this is the case. But, of course, when viewing the hard evidence from Health Canada, which suggests that

ABOUT ME



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properly used pesticides aren't dangerous in the first place, it's hard to see how banning them can improve residents' health. On the other hand, as I previously noted, neighbourhoods might actually be weakened, because –insofar as a ban would lead to more weeds growing in the city, adverse health risks associated with respiratory afflictions will increase, as per evidence I provided previously, associated with the City of Toronto. Moreover, as I also noted previously, feelings of general wellbeing may decrease, as per Dr. James Lu, medical health officer for Vancouver Coastal Health Unit, who wrote in a Feb. 19 2009 letter to Richmond council. "The aesthetics of urban landscapes has public health value." Flowers, not weeds, make people happy, and this has a beneficial health effect. Because of this, he said, "a comprehensive integrated pest management approach offers a better alternative to cosmetic pesticide ban bylaws. An I.P.M. strikes a balance between prudence, public policy and private choice." And, then, there's the POSSIBLE \$1 million price tag. What services will be lost/ or how much will taxes be raised to pay for this? Either way, it's hard to see how neighbourhoods will be strengthened by overtaxing property owners or slashing services to cover the costs.

Enhancing sustainability of city services and infrastructure. Well, insofar as the bylaw essentially exempts the city from having to stop using weed killers on the city's playing fields and medians – and now includes an exemption on the Pacific Rose Garden, too-- one wonders how this is to be interpreted.

Let's take a closer look. Taken at face value, we are led to believe that a bylaw that allows the use of cosmetic pesticides on city property somehow enhances the sustainability of city services and infrastructure. Logically, though, if this is so, it must also be true that the bylaw (which has an opposite effect on private property), must also have an opposite outcome on private property when measuring sustainability. Bizarrely, this would lead us to conclude that the ban would have an UNSUSTAINABLE impact on that private property.

You can't have it both ways! Allowing usage on city property and disallowing use on private property can't both be sustainable at the same time. Oh the irony!

Reviewing the impact of the bylaw on the corporate strategic goals, then, it's highly questionable whether "excellence in city governance" has been achieved, it's doubtful that "neighbourhoods have been strengthened," and it's impossible to determine whether city services and infrastructure will enjoy "enhanced sustainability".

In conclusion and sticking with the subject of irony I mentioned a moment ago, I must also draw attention to a letter dated Feb. 24, 2012 and signed by Verne Kucy, acting manager of environmental services, in which he responds to questions from the BC Cancer Society about the aforementioned city-fields exemption.

In defense of the exemption, Mr. Kucy declared, and I quote, "You should be aware that our Parks Department only uses products [that] have been authorized by the relevant Federal health agencies responsible for researching and approving their use and only as permitted under Provincial regulations."

Ironic? Of course it is, because, absent any city-bylaw banning the use of cosmetic pesticides on private lawns, every citizen of Coquitlam could make exactly the same statement – that they use only "products [that] have been authorized by the relevant Federal health agencies responsible for researching and approving their use and only as permitted under Provincial regulations." So it seems that the city deems itself responsible enough to make this argument, but has concluded that average citizens and property owners are, as a whole, completely IR-responsible.

Actually, this is beyond ironic. It's insulting. And it's discriminatory too, because it prejudices citizens, and finds them all guilty of reckless and unhealthy pesticide use.

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"I'd rather be faithful to what I see as the truth than grovel before the grubby altar of misinformed public opinion."

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It should come as no surprise, then, that I will vote against this bylaw on the grounds that it is expensive, illogical, unscientific, and unfair.

Posted by [Terry O'Neill](#) at 10:51 PM



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