

City considers pesticide-free parks

BY JOE COUTURE, THE LEADER-POST APRIL 22, 2010

A proposal for three parks in Regina to be designated pesticide-free is going to city council without the support of the executive committee after a vote Wednesday.

Neil Vandendort, City of Regina parks and open space director, confirmed the proposal is to designate three parks -- City Hall grounds, Gordon Park and Al Pickard Park -- pesticide-free so people with sensitivities know they are safe to visit. The city could still use pesticides in extreme circumstances, but would notify the public when pesticides were required.

The designation would be a pilot project.

Costs and benefits would be analyzed to see if other parks could be likewise designated.

Pesticides are not used at many parks and the city is developing a pesticide-use reduction plan, which will come before the committee later.

The proposal for the three-park pilot project came forward Wednesday because of a council motion made last year by Coun. Fred Clipsham, who requested a report addressing the options around biocide-free spaces.

On Wednesday, the executive committee -- council sitting as a committee -- voted against recommending the designations. John Findura, Terry Hincks and Louis Browne voted in favour, but Mike O'Donnell, Michael Fougere and Sharron Bryce voted against it, defeating the motion for concurrence. Wade Murray left the room before the vote, and the other committee members were absent.

"It's not really a disappointment. It's just a matter of continuing the discussion, tailoring it to gain more support," Browne said following the meeting. "I'm in favour of a small-scale, short-term pilot so we can have the information. It's not going to cost us much to do (a pilot)."

But Fougere said "we just need to have some more information," noting issues around pesticides were considered extensively early last decade, at which time it was determined the city would incorporate best practices, but would not regulate pesticides, instead leaving that to Health Canada.

"We have a lot of knowledge that came from a previous policy that is not injected into the debate here," Fougere said. "I agree with the designation of pesticide-free parks, but I want to make sure we're doing it for the right reasons with the full knowledge behind us. We have a lot of policy we need to decide first."

Bryce said her concern was that the city already strives to limit pesticide use in all parks and she would not want it to look like the city is not making such efforts elsewhere.

The final decision rests with city council, which will vote Monday. Clipsham said he hopes it will pass and expects a good debate.

"It's something that I think is pretty important," he said.

Donna Ziegler of the Canadian Cancer Society said Wednesday she was disappointed with the executive committee's vote, but hopes council will vote differently.

"We know there is a growing connection between pesticides and cancers," she said, noting the society wants to address council before it makes its decision.

"Using potentially carcinogenic substances for making ... green spaces look pretty is not a good enough reason to put your health at risk when there are alternatives. We should be using those alternatives."

Executive committee also voted Wednesday in concurrence with a report recommending council transfer money from the general fund reserve to four dedicated capital reserves. Fougere confirmed council will consider that in its budget deliberations, in which it also will consider whether a projected surplus that is projected to increase the GFR could be used to lower the proposed mill rate. Council finalizes the budget for this year at a special meeting on Tuesday.

© Copyright (c) The Regina Leader-Post