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City Council opts to expand pesticide ban



Sheridan Trowell, Isabelle Manning, Taya Velikajne, Kurtis Trowell and Anthony Velikajne hung out at City Park on Tuesday afternoon. The three girls, all 12, spoke to City Council on Monday, May 14 to urge them to broaden a cosmetic pesticide ban bylaw to include City-owned lands as well as private property. The City no longer uses cosmetic pesticides in parks or on playing fields but spraying still occurs along streets, sidewalks and boulevards.

By **Brenda Anderson - Langley Times**

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When Taya Velikajne goes outside to play, the 12-year-old Langley City girl sometimes worries about what might be lurking in the weeds.

It's not insects or animals that cause her concern on sunny spring and summer days, but potentially toxic chemicals.

On Monday night Taya, supported by her friends, Isabelle Manning and Sheridan Trowell, both 12, told City council that her doctor strongly suspects that the cosmetic pesticides used to control weeds along the City's streets, sidewalks and boulevards are responsible for the rashes that periodically appear on her body.

"We can't say for sure, because of course my parents wouldn't purposely expose me to pesticides," said Taya, who told council she must remain indoors whenever spraying happens in her neighbourhood.

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Stating that they had come to speak on behalf of all the children of Langley, Taya, Sheridan and Isabelle urged council to impose a total ban on cosmetic pesticide use in the City.

One day, the use of chemicals to kill dandelions where children play will seem as crazy as smoking inside a car carrying children, in restaurants and on airplanes seems to us today, said Isabelle.

And while alternative weed control methods might come with a bigger price tag, what about the price Taya pays, being stuck inside her house, Sheridan asked.

The girls were among six people who spoke before council's regular May 14 meeting, asking that a proposed bylaw to ban cosmetic pesticides on private property be expanded to include public land as well.

And the pressure appeared to do the trick.

Later that evening, on a motion from Councillor Ted Schaffer, council voted 5-2 (with Councillors Teri James and Gayle Martin opposed) to expand the new cosmetic pesticide bylaw to include City-owned lands.

"I hate to see any pesticides going into creeks and streams. I'd like to see us be stewards of our city and take care of it, one bit at a time," said Schaffer.

Sheridan's mother, Shawna Trowell — a volunteer on the City's parks and environment committee — also addressed council, saying that cosmetic pesticide use has been a topic near to her heart for the past 11 years.

While playing with a then one-year-old Sheridan, Trowell, who was pregnant at the time, rolled across her lawn onto a sidewalk where pesticides had recently been sprayed.

After talking to then-mayor Marlene Grinnell, Trowell ended up 'adopting' the stretch of sidewalk in front of her house, taking on responsibility for controlling weed growth.

"It appeased me for a while, but the more I read, the more concerned I became," she said.

While she applauded the City's progress in terms of its weed management — cosmetic pesticides are no longer used in parks or on playing fields — there is always more that can be done, said Trowell.

Environmentalist Rhys Griffiths, a member of the Langley Field Naturalists who participated in parks advisory meetings studying the use of pesticides, said he, too, has been pleased with efforts by the City to employ an integrated pest management system (IPM). He suggested, however, that the municipality consider using alternative methods — including hot water/steam and vinegar/salt/soap solutions — to control weeds along sidewalks and boulevards.

Christina Beck of the Canadian Cancer Society's B.C. and Yukon Division reiterated many of the concerns she expressed on March 5, when the bylaw was first brought before council.

More than 100 studies have linked synthetic pesticides to such serious health issues as liver, kidney and pancreatic cancers as well leukemia and lymphoma and neurological and reproductive problems, Beck told council.

And all of these concerns are multiplied in the case of children, she said, because of their developing immune systems and propensity for putting things in their mouths.

"Why would we expose our community to unnecessary risk?"

Asked following the March 5 meeting to look into ways the bylaw could be strengthened, staff returned with an estimate that the additional cost to have two staff members working at non-chemical weed removal for five months of the year would be in the range of \$60,000 per year.

Chemical spraying along streets, sidewalks and boulevards typically takes place once or twice each year, said Gary Vlieg, the City's chief engineer, adding it is already too late for a non-pesticide management plan to be implemented this year.

"I'd like to have a better feeling of what it would cost," said Martin, who cast the lone 'no' vote at third reading of the amended bylaw.

She pointed to communities such as **Hamilton, Ont. which pays an additional \$250,000 per year** for non-chemical pest control and to Surrey, which she said spends \$1 million.

"It could be more (than \$60,000 per year) it could be less," said City CAO Francis Cheung.

"This is a best estimate. There's no way to quantify it," said Mayor Peter Fassbender.

"Why don't we phone other places of our size who have done this and to find out what it cost," suggested Councillor Jack Arnold.

"To put a price on public health is a tough thing to do," said Councillor Dave Hall.

"I think the health of the community is worth an investment."

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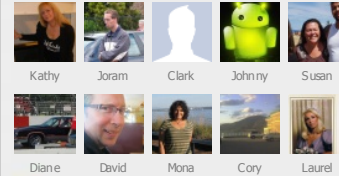
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Anti-Pesticide PROHIBITION has also led To STUNNINGLY EXORBITANT COSTS of maintenance for municipalities.

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