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Fee or free? – Charlottetown council spars over \$50 lawn fee



Mitch MacDonald mitch.macdonald@theguardian.pe.ca

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Deputy Mayor Mike Duffy speaks about Charlottetown's cosmetic pesticides bylaw during Monday's council meeting. While some councillors raised concerns over a \$50 lawn assessment fee, Duffy defended the process and said it's no different than paying for a building permit or other municipal fees.
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The debate over a \$50 fee to assess lawn infestations is growing among city councillors.

Several councillors raised residents' concerns over the city's surcharge for lawn assessments during Monday's council meeting, while deputy mayor Mike Duffy said the fee is no different than paying for a demolition or building permit.

Although Duffy, who chairs the city's environment and sustainability committee, said the committee will discuss the concerns he also questioned residents' unwillingness to pay the fee.

"It's not uncommon (for government to charge fees)," Duffy said during council's meeting Monday. "Why all of the sudden, when it comes to pesticides, people aren't willing to pay a \$50 fee?"

Coun. Bob Doiron challenged the notion.

"If you're getting a water meter installed, one of our workers goes out and does the inspection with a professional, we don't charge a fee for that," said Doiron. "Leave it in the hands of the professionals, let them do their job."

Charlottetown's pesticide bylaw now prevents pesticide companies from spraying without first getting permission from the city.

If you're getting a water meter installed, one of our workers goes out and does the inspection with a professional, we don't charge a fee for that. Leave it in the hands of the professionals, let them do their job.

Coun. Bob Doiron

The process first requires a professional applicator to check the property for infestation.

If infested, the resident then has to pay a \$50 fee and apply for the city to inspect their property.

Once a city staffer has checked the lawn, the OK is given to the applicator, who then has to inform the surrounding neighbourhood before spraying.

However, the process is recommended as a "last resort" with Duffy encouraging residents to first try spraying one of the city's 41 approved chemicals.

He has also suggested residents water their lawn, with chinch bugs thriving in hot and dry weather.

It was clear the battle has become a personal one for Doiron, who noted he had previously lost one lawn to chinch bugs and is now battling them again.

Doiron said he has also been receiving calls and emails and has even had residents visiting his house over the issue.

“Their lawns are being eaten by these bugs,” said Doiron, adding that suggested measures have not worked. “I want to put a resolution on the floor asking council to look at the possibility of stopping the \$50 fee.”

Doiron was informed his resolution was out of order.

Mayor Clifford Lee explained a resolution cannot amend a bylaw and that Doiron would first have to serve a notice of motion and go through the respective standing committee.

Doiron pledged to bring the issue back.

In July, the city received 125 applications with 97 being determined as having chinch bug infestations.

A summary of the committee’s last meeting also noted members will be consulting with Cornwall and Stratford to see how those municipality’s handle complaints over their fee.

The exchange also saw Coun. Mitch Tweel and Coun. Terry MacLeod raise residents’ concerns over the fee and process.

“They think its unfair... they feel because they’re paying taxes this service should be provided,” said Tweel. Mitchell.macdonald@theguardian.pe.ca
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