

Joel Freedman: 'Educate, not legislate' won't work with pesticides



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By Joel Freedman

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Canandaigua, N.Y.

Canandaigua Mayor Ellen Polimeni's most recent proposal — that City Council “educate, not legislate” in regards to lawn chemical hazards — is no solution.

How can Polimeni expect that distributing a pamphlet will change people's behavior when Council itself is unwilling to change its behavior? For the City of Canandaigua, which continues to occasionally use toxic lawn chemicals in city parks, playgrounds and public right of way areas, to distribute pamphlets asking citizens to voluntarily seek alternatives

to lawn chemical usage would be comparable to having a quit smoking clinic conducted by a teacher who smokes a cigarette while lecturing about tobacco's hazards.

Several years ago, when the city distributed an “educate, not legislate” pamphlet that cautioned against lawn herbicides, the city's Public Works Department sprayed herbicides on all the grass in Canandaigua's downtown area, endangering everyone who happened to go downtown that day.

Lawn chemical users recently pressured Polimeni and some councilmembers to reverse their support for Councilmember Maria Bucci's proposal that would prohibit toxic lawn chemical usage on privately maintained public right of way areas.

The mayor and a majority of councilmembers have resisted other attempts to challenge lawn chemical practices. The public works departments in 12 Monroe County municipalities use no herbicides on municipal property, including parks and playgrounds. I urged Council to adopt similar policies for Canandaigua's Public Works Department. The response: We already have a



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turf management policy in place, and we don't want to change it.

At the August ordinance committee meeting, Polimeni announced her support for Bucci's proposed ordinance. She also acknowledged the ordinance would only be "a baby step" toward resolving environmental protection issues.

At the September ordinance committee, when the mayor and Councilmembers David Whitcomb and Bill Taylor withdrew their support for this "baby step," they sent a message to the community that Council is unwilling to even take "baby steps" to address important environmental issues.

Council's alternative face-saving proposal to once again "educate, not legislate" won't protect people, animals, our drinking water and the air we breathe from the hazards of lawn chemical usage. And when any other environmental and public health hazards are brought to Council's attention in the future, it seems unlikely that Council will be able or willing to respond in a meaningful and effective manner.

Joel Freedman of Canandaigua is a frequent Messenger Post contributor.

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