
Pesticide use OK'd for Canandaigua's Lagoon Park months after moratorium



Photo: Messenger Post.

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Just four months after Canandaigua City Council passed a moratorium on the use of pesticides within city parks, an exception has been granted to use glyphosate, commonly known as Roundup, to kill an invasive species of shrub at Lagoon Park.

A request before the city's Environmental and Parks Committee Tuesday got the nod, following extended debate, for an exemption to the moratorium passed on June 2 by City Council members. It is expected to be approved in November.

Participants in a five-year collaborative effort to restore Lagoon Park on Lakeshore Drive presented their case Tuesday to committee members, city staff and assorted City Council members.

Kevin Olvany of the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Council, White Oak Nursery manager and project leader Jim Engel, a team from Finger Lakes Community College and representatives from the Botanical Society explained their five-year restoration project and why the herbicide Roundup is essential to their goal of removing invasives — most notably European Buckthorn — and restoring native growth.

Over the last year, an estimated 500 to 1,000 mature buckthorns have been cut down, Olvany told committee members. In addition, more than 1,000 native herbaceous plants have been added, in an attempt to “outcompete the buckthorn,” he said. Various methods have been employed as part of an “integrated pest management” strategy, he said.

Committee member Anita Twitchell said she'd like to see a little more effort put into Roundup alternatives — like recruiting more volunteers or bagging invasive growth to contain it.

Engel described what it would take to remove “thousands” of one-quarter-inch to one-half-inch seedlings and saplings that have sprouted up, many intermixed with native plants to be conserved. Additional manpower would not be practical, nor would bagging new growth, he said.

This is a wise use of Roundup, because it's a low-toxicity product that breaks down quickly, Engel said.

“We just passed the moratorium in June, and now everybody’s hair is on fire about (the urgent need for Roundup),” Twitchell told committee members, urging them to carefully word the possible moratorium exemption so “we’re not backsliding.”

The moratorium permits the use of pesticides in emergency situations “that if not addressed would cause a public safety hazard.” However, the invasive species, although harmful to the park and its ecosystem, are not specifically a public safety hazard.

Councilman and committee member Dave Whitcomb reminded colleagues that the purpose of the park is as a wildlife preserve, which is also enjoyed by humans. Combating invasive species benefits the entire ecosystem, including the birds and animals living there.

“What you’re seeing is the effect of years of work,” said City Tree Advisory Board member Laura Ouimette. “They’ve come so far, and it’s a wonderful progression of restoration.”

“If this is the tool they need in their toolbox, let them have it,” said Councilman-at-Large Robert O’Brien. “This is the way the moratorium is supposed to work.”

“Politicians should not be making decisions about the application of pesticides,” said Whitcomb, expressing frustration at the investment of time rehashing the issue. “We passed the moratorium to get a headline. I’d be happy to get rid of the whole thing.”

Olvany will work with city staff members to draft the language of the moratorium exemption, which is expected to be passed by City Council members in November. It is expected to allow the use of Roundup in Lagoon Park, but not in any other of the city’s more than 140 acres of parklands.

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