

City report leans away from possible cosmetic spray pesticide program



By: [Joyanne Pursaga](#) Posted: 6:42 PM CDT Wednesday, April 5, 2023

The pitfalls of using pesticides outweigh the cosmetic benefits of killing weeds, so Winnipeg shouldn't resume using them on public lands, according to a new city staff report.

The city began reducing its cosmetic pesticide use at boulevards and parks in "the early 2000s," and had "essentially no cosmetic spray program" by the time the Manitoba government banned cosmetic pesticides in many spaces in 2014.

City staff do not recommend creating a new pesticide program now that the ban has been lifted, noting it would require more staff and equipment and also harm the environment, the report says.



Coun. Jeff Browaty called last year for the city to report on potentially phasing in cosmetic pesticide use to rid green spaces of “noxious weeds,” such as dandelions, as the province prepared to remove its ban.

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By November 2022, the use of pesticides was allowed on many more private lawns and green spaces but not within 15 metres of a playground, picnic area or within a dog park.

Browaty believes council should use some pesticides to eliminate weeds in the most prominent parks and boulevards.

“There’s certain types of complaints that are typical from residents ... In the early summer, it’s dandelions,” he said Wednesday. “I do believe we have image routes in our city and I do believe there are places where some level of dandelion and invasive weed control is appropriate.”

Browaty said he will ask council to consider funding a targeted pesticide program in the 2024-27 multiyear budget process. He said eliminating the weeds would help protect allergy sufferers and ensure the city maintains a certain aesthetic.

“(When weeds spread) it just seems the city is not doing their part. A lot of people take a lot of pride and care in their own yard and then it just looks like the city is not taking care of things (on its land),” he said.

The councillor said he’s not against efforts to “naturalize” some city land with indigenous plants but believes some grass-covered sites should have a more manicured look.

The city report says most cities have largely backed away from pesticide use. It also warns pesticides don't only damage dandelions and other weeds, but can kill off broadleaf plants such as clover, which the city is exploring as an alternative to grass.

An advocate who lobbied against the decision to end Manitoba's pesticide ban agreed with city staff a cosmetic pesticide program shouldn't be added.

"When you look overall at the impacts of pesticides on human health, on biodiversity, on the health of our ecosystems, it doesn't make sense to be spending money on potentially dangerous chemicals," said Josh Brandon, a member of Cosmetic Pesticide Ban Manitoba.

When the provincial ban was introduced in 2014, the NDP government of the time said it was needed to reduce public exposure to synthetic chemicals and better prevent them from entering Manitoba's land, air and water.

The government argued a review of 140 Ontario medical studies in 2012 offered plenty of evidence a ban was needed, linking pesticides to several health risks, including asthma and lung disease.

Brandon said those findings indicate using pesticides to eliminate weeds causes more harm than good.

"There's no scientific basis for saying that dandelions on a boulevard are a problem. This is a cultural preference that's been created in our society," he said.

Coun. John Orlikow, head of council's community services committee, also opposes a cosmetic pesticide program.

"For the city to take on a large-scale program, where would we find the money for it? ... (And) it's counter to most of our policies in trying to be more environmentally friendly," said Orlikow.

The City of Winnipeg still uses pesticides for a few non-cosmetic purposes, such as spraying weeds in hard-surface areas (such as sidewalk cracks), managing invasive species to protect habitats and removing poisonous plants, spokesman Ken Allen said in an emailed statement.

In addition, golf courses have always been exempt from pesticide bans.

The city has also turned to additional techniques to combat weeds over the years, which can include increased mowing, aeration or fertilization, Allen added.

“These changes began in response to greater health concerns within society and stricter label requirements related to pesticides,” he wrote.

The community services committee is set to discuss the report April 13.